Pathway to Progress:
Re-conceptualizing Postsecondary Education
Outreach & Engagement to Oregon’s Underserved Students

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Executive Summary

In 2011, Governor John Kitzhaber, along with the Oregon Legislature, affirmed a clear and ambitious goal for the State. Governor Kitzhaber called this “our North Star and our compass: “The 40-40-20 goal, states by 2025 all adult (over 18) Oregonians will hold a high school diploma or equivalent, 40% of them will have an Associates degree or a meaningful postsecondary certificate, and 40% will hold a Bachelors degree or advance degree.” Embedded in this visionary focus on expansion of postsecondary attainment is the need for inclusion of underserved students—low income, rural, students of color, and first-generation—whom the educational system has not served well in the past and whose “college-going” and completion rates fall below the average. Although there is agreement that policies need to be created to conduct effective outreach to underserved students, the engagement methods to reach underserved students in higher education policy are less clear.

In service to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), this study researches community perceptions in Oregon and analyzes national best practices to engage underserved communities and identifies strategies with greatest potential for Oregon implementation. The primary purpose of this research is to describe the barriers to postsecondary education for underserved students (young adults between the ages of 18-25) and capture how they perceive access to higher education in Oregon using qualitative methods. The research culminates with this report detailing possible recommendations on engagement policies for the HECC to consider adopting.

Aims:

- To gain a better understanding of underserved students’ perceptions of higher education leading to the possibility of more effective relationships within and across higher education institutions.
- To provide recommendations to the HECC and equip them with additional understanding of how to engage and outreach to underserved students.
- To developed a better understanding of how perceptions vary across student groups and regional settings.

Specifically, the research focused on the following questions:

- What current organizations around the state have established informal/formal networks with underserved students?
- Who are the community leaders who connect with underserved students?
- How do other organizations engage underserved students in higher education?
- What are barriers perceived by underserved students in Oregon?
- What are the barriers perceived from an organizational standpoint?

1 The 40-40-20 goal was established by the legislature in 2011 with the passage of SB 253
Ultimately, the research questions may provide answers on how to engage underserved students in the policy process, and statewide program and policy recommendations, and should allow for a rich narrative that describes the needs of underserved students in Oregon. Also, the qualitative portion of this research helps explain patterns produced by previous quantitative analysis. This is important to understand as the interviews conducted for this research will personalize the data and provide new answers that quantitative analysis may not offer.

Much of the research available on the topic of effective outreach and engagement programs that served to increase access and persistence of underserved students is informal, anecdotal or qualitative in nature, rather than quantitative analysis. Data on underserved students is oftentimes not easily accessible, thus the qualitative portion of this research allowed for a rich discussion to emerge. Indeed, data on underserved students is not easily found since different agencies or public universities do not publicly publish this type of information. Based on the research and interviews, outreach and engagement policies need to be tailored to each specific community. Best practices demonstrate clear patterns on effective outreach strategies. The problem lies in whether or not agencies or organizations invest in those strategies. While many models exist, students and their families continue to face barriers to being prepared for and succeeding in postsecondary programs or institutions of their choosing due to persistent gaps in service availability and delivery. In order to eliminate these gaps, it is recommended that specifically underserved students and their families need the following:

1. **Accessible information about postsecondary education across all geographic regions of the state.** This includes panels or informational sessions about the admission process, financial aid and financial literacy sessions, as well as information about scholarships, writing compelling admission applications, or access to organizations providing such information. This could be done by adding informational tools to either the HECC or OSAC website. For underserved students, reliable information is difficult to find on their own. Another possible solution is to build new relationships with organizations around the state and strengthen the relationships we already have. This would address some of the barriers found when it comes to information.

2. **Intentional and targeted support to build capacity among underserved students and their families.** Community leaders expressed that both underserved students and their families lack knowledge of how postsecondary institutions function. For example, first-generation students interviewed expressed fears, doubts, and hesitation about pursuing a postsecondary education and described tensions between their families. Even after enrolling in a postsecondary institution, feelings of not belonging, environmental factors and financial pressure, persisted. Parent engagement and education about what it means for their children to pursue a postsecondary education and how to be a “college student,” is critical.

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2 Spradlin, T., Rutkowski, Burroughs, & Lang (2010).
3. **A culture that not only perceives but expects that underserved students will enroll in a postsecondary institution or training program.** There are several programs in Oregon that are geared towards creating a “college going culture.” Raising the profile of these programs should be part of any outreach and engagement efforts. Additionally, underserved students and their families need to understand how pursuing a postsecondary education is attached to their own prosperity. Concurrently, educators at all levels of the education continuum need to have the expectation that all students will be prepared and enroll in a postsecondary institution.

4. **Well-trained and high-quality support providers.** Both community leaders and underserved students agreed that if any outreach and engagement efforts were to be undertaken by the HECC, properly trained local staff should be hired. This would allow the HECC to build relationships with community organizations and increase the efforts to support underserved students. Alternatively, community leaders should also be trained to provide relevant mentorship and advice in regards to the postsecondary system in Oregon—this would allow underserved students to receive applicable information.

These **target issue** areas have led to **recommendations on how to engage underserved students** in the policy process:

- Provide an avenue for student voice on HECC policy matters by creating either a student taskforce or subcommittee.

- Use qualitative methods to engage both underserved students and community leaders on policy matters affecting higher education.

- Continue to actively recruit underserved students in postsecondary institutions to intern with the HECC or the subcommittees.

- Engage community organizations that have established relationships with underserved students and communities.

Based on the target issues and interviews, the research identified the following **policy and programmatic recommendations**:

- Continuing study of minority participation in higher education.

- Exploring a “one application” system for Oregon’s residents to all public universities.
• Explore other innovations to increase and improve communications to underserved students, such as texting as a strategy to alert students and their families about deadlines for financial aid, registration, and student orientation.

• Reporting by all public postsecondary institutions on their recruitment and retention programs for economically disadvantaged, minority and underrepresented student populations.

A more in-depth explanation of the aforementioned recommendations can be found in the conclusion of this research.

**Operation Definitions/ Descriptions of Outreach and Engagement, & Underserved**

Outreach and engagement could range from a very limited operational application to a vast system-level approach. This research developed a description of what outreach and engagement entails and defines outreach and engagement in the following manner:

Outreach is the act of engaging specific students groups to facilitate awareness and knowledge of resources and services. It is provided in educational and community settings and focuses on helping all students successfully access, transition, and persist in postsecondary education and training opportunities. Effective outreach methods include services that are mobile, actively deliver messaging through multiple modes, and are targeted to the individual students, including underrepresented populations and those who do not tend to access mainstream education resources. Outreach and engagement is defined as meaningful and mutually beneficial collaborations with partners in education, business, and public and social service. “It is: That aspect of research that makes what we discover useful beyond the academic community.”

This research adopted the HECC’s definitions of an underserved student as a student between the ages of 18-25 and is low-income, first-generation, rural or minority. Henceforth referred to as underserved student.

**Background**

Improving the success of underserved students in postsecondary education has become a key goal in Oregon and nationally. In 2011, Oregon staked its education and economic future on a goal called the 40-40-20 that declared that by 2025, Oregon will ensure that 40% of its adults will have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher; 40% of adults will have earned an associate degree or post-secondary credential; and 20% of adults will have earned a high school diploma, modified high school diploma or the equivalent of a high school diploma. In light of these

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5 Please see Equity Lens Letter
6 The HECC Strategic Plan, 2014
ambitious goals, there is more interest on how to engage underserved students in higher education. However, in order to understand what type of outreach efforts are needed to engage underserved students, one must consider the current population landscape.

In 2011, when Oregon was exploring the 40-40-20 goals, Oregonians as whole, were not sufficiently educated for the challenges at hand. According to a report by the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), 7 30% held a bachelor’s degree or higher while only 18% had completed an associate degree; 42% only had a high school diploma; and approximately 10% of working-age adults had not completed high school. High school graduation rates were at the U.S. average, 75%, yet, less than half of Oregon’s high school graduates enrolled in a college. And of those who did enroll, too few earned a degree. In a more recent report by ODE, 8 in the 2011-2012 public high school graduating class, 26% of those graduates were students of color; 17% were Hispanic. By 2015-2016, 31% of Oregon’s public high school graduates are projected to be students of color, with 23% of all Oregon high school graduates projected to be Hispanic. Additionally, 51.3% of those Oregon high school graduates come from low-income families and have a graduation rate that are 15% lower than their non-low-income counterparts. The HECC Strategic Plan understands this demographic challenge:

“Demographic trends reveal that an increasing number of students will come from racial and ethnic groups who have had less success in our K-12 system and have been underrepresented in our postsecondary institutions. Not only will these students require more targeted and effective teaching support in K-12, they are less likely to come from families with college-going experience and less likely to pursue their educations beyond high school.” 9

This raises the question of what solutions institutions are undertaking to prepare a much more ethnically diverse student body—in light of the 40-40-20 goals. This is an important question to explore and this research attempts to answer. Another question that arises: what does outreach to underserved students mean—from the HECC’s perspective—and what does the HECC want to hear from students? These questions are explored in the qualitative portion of this report.

Note: Some of the background data presented in the sections that follow in this report is not updated for recent years, but appears to be the best available. Some will be updated in the future as the author’s graduate research continues. The lack of accessible longitudinal data, particular on students of color, also points to a data-collection gap in the educational system and one that the HECC should address. A possible solution would be to have all public postsecondary institutions track and publicly report enrollment, retention, and graduation rates specifically for students of color. This could be reported back to the HECC, from which a report

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7 ODE, 2011
8 Data taken from published Oregon Department of Education datasets available at: http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=2644
9 The HECC Strategic Plan, pg. 12.
could be produced. The data would be extremely helpful in pinpointing issues and would allow the HECC and other agencies to strategize on rectifying identified gaps.

Profiles of Underserved Students

The diversity of Oregonians is multifaceted, including racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, cultural, gender geographic (urban and rural), gender identity and sexual orientation, disability, and age/generational diversity. In the Breaking Barriers\(^1\) report by the Oregon State Board of Higher Education, the focus on underserved students was extensively researched. As such, a definition of who was underserved was provided: first-generation students, low-income, rural students, students of color, and students with disability. Figure 1 was recreated from a similar chart produced in the Breaking Barriers report and it describes many of the obstacles faced by underserved students who pursue a postsecondary education.

Figure 1: Barriers Faced by Underserved Students in Postsecondary Institutions

Figure 1 summarizes the key components that suppress underserved students from entering, succeeding in, and completing college in Oregon. As one can see, there are many societal factors influencing underserved students. Not only are there financial concerns, but also cultural and environmental factors are at play. Many underserved student are first generation students— that is, they are the first in their families to attend a college, and usually face the

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\(^1\) Breaking Barriers, 2008.
barriers describe in Figure 1. According to the same report, here are the common characteristics of underserved students:

- Be African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino or American Indian (Students of Color)
- Come from a low-income family
- Be female, older with dependent children
- Delay entry into postsecondary education
- Begin college at a 2-year institution
- Need remedial coursework
- Take classes part-time while working full-time
- Do not have consecutive enrollment

This list is not exhaustive; there are many other students that would identify as an underserved student such students that identify as LGBTQ or students with disabilities. Because the term underserved is comprised of many complex components, the following section explores low-income, first generation, students of color, and rural students more in depth and relies on both academic research and studies conducted by the Oregon University System (OUS) and ODE.

**Low-Income Students**

One of the most pressing social justice issues of the 21st century is providing the opportunity for every American to pursue an education that could potentially unlock a life of reward and fulfillment. However, achieving this goal remains a formidable challenge, especially given the wide disparities in postsecondary access among African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, and low-income students.

In a survey of Oregon high school graduates, the most commonly cited reasons for not attending college in Oregon are money-related issues, which was cited by 34% of survey respondents. 21% reported that the inability to afford a postsecondary education as a reason not to attend. The national report *Measure Up* produced in 2008, also shown in the Breaking Barriers report indicates that for 40% of the Oregon population with the lowest income, a student’s family would have to pay an average of 54% of the family income toward that student’s college expenses at a public four-year university. The report states, “As one can see, college affordability is a challenge not only for the lowest income but also for the moderate income Oregonian.” Though this report maybe somewhat outdated, the logic still stands today, particularly in light of the rising cost of overall postsecondary attendance since this report was issued.

Indeed, Figure 2 was extracted from the HECC’s strategic plan:

“The poverty rate among families with children has been increasing... But poverty is not the only economic challenge. As working-family incomes grow more slowly, the

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12 Ibid, Breaking Barriers
shift of the costs of higher education to tuition payers has created barriers to entry and obstacles to persistence for both poor families and for increasing numbers of low-income and middle class families as well. During the past decade, as state support for postsecondary education declined, tuition payments per FTE at our community colleges and public universities have increased by more than 4.5 percent per year, while median family incomes have declined by 0.9 percent.”  

Figure 2: Median annual earnings by educational attainment level, U.S., 2012  

Furthermore, the Taskforce on Higher Education Student and Institutional Success identified that the high cost is a significant barrier to student enrollment into a postsecondary institution. This high cost limits underserved students and may cause them to attend part time and accumulate more debt possibly resulting in long-term financial difficulties. States exploring free two-years at community colleges are targeting the students that need more than four years to finish a postsecondary degree while alleviating potential long-term debt.

Finally, ODE produces annual public high school graduation cohort profiles. For the cohort that began in the academic year of 2009-2010 and graduated in 2014, of the 31,440 high school graduates, 14,783 were deemed economically disadvantage. That is 47% of those who graduated in 2014 were deemed economically disadvantage. Research shows that only 40% of low-income students enroll in a postsecondary institution immediately upon high school graduation versus 85% of those students with family incomes over $100,000. This has led to talent loss, which can be translated to into social and economic losses at both the individual

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13 HECC Strategic Plan, page 13  
14 Measuring Up 2006; State of Oregon report; The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education  
15 Taskforce on Higher Education & Institution Success, pg. 7  
16 To see the profile, please see http://www.ode.state.or.us/wma/data/schoolanddistrict/students/docs/summarycohortgrad1213.pdf  
17 Economically Disadvantage Student (ECD) is defined by the ODE as students who have been reported by the district to be eligible for free or reduced lunch. Please the policy manual http://www.ode.state.or.us/wma/data/schoolanddistrict/students/docs/cohort-graduation-rate-policy-manual_20122013_draft.pdf  
18 Ibid, Breaking Barriers  
19 Bozick & Lauff, 2007
and societal level. For low-income students in particular, the recent recession and faltering economy have exacerbated these shortages in two and four-year postsecondary enrollment. In 2009, the percentage of Americans living in poverty reached its highest level in 15 years, with four million additional citizens at or below the poverty line. This led to an increase in both poverty and unemployment levels found among young people lacking a postsecondary education. Consequently, there are a disproportionate number of low-income students that are lacking the requisite skills to compete for employment in this challenging economy. This continues the cycle of social inequality in which individuals with a bachelor’s degree earn $22,000 more, on average, than those holding only a high school diploma. In summary, there is value to attaining a postsecondary education and we can see the monetary worth in the following Figure 3 taken from the HECC Strategic Plan.

Figure 3: Median annual earnings by educational attainment level, U.S., 2012

- Doctoral degree: $84,448
- Professional degree: $90,220
- Master’s degree: $67,600
- Bachelor’s degree: $55,432
- Associate’s degree: $40,820
- Some college, no degree: $37,804
- High School diploma: $33,904
- Less than a high school diploma: $24,492

First Generation Students

According to studies by OUS, 35% of the class of 2005 were “first generation students” or first in their immediate family to earn a bachelor’s degree, an increase from 31% from the class of 2003. First generation students are more likely to enroll in higher education institutions than their non-first generation counterparts. First generation students are more likely to be low-income, African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, or American Indian; female; older than traditional college students; and/or have dependent children. They are more likely to begin their postsecondary education career at a two-year institution, require remedial coursework, and enroll part-time while working full-time. Postsecondary institutions are facing pressure to

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20 Engberg & Wolnaik, 2010; Perna & Titus 2005
21 Eckholm, 2010
22 Carnevale, 2010
23 Baum et al, 2010
expand enrollment and provide access to diverse students, however, many are finding it difficult to recruit and retain first generation students.24

Research shows that first generation students are significantly less likely to graduate due to the lack of family support, financial constraints, poor academic preparation, and other barriers.25 These barriers make it difficult for first generation students to transition into higher education and graduate.

Even though institutions deploy support programs to improve first generation student academic success, many of these programs isolate these students, creating a protective group that does not fully integrate students into the campus, which oftentimes lead first generation to find that institutions do not meet their needs.26 Programs aiding first generation students are often unpublicized or largely inaccessible to students. According to Wilson (2000), many students argue that it is difficult to “fit in” because the programs create a separation between first generation students and non-first-generation students, which results in the student’s incapacity for positive relationships with the college and for peer-to-peer friendships.

**Students of Color**

Calculating ethnic differences in high school graduation and enrollment for postsecondary institutions have been somewhat troubling, as such rates have been notoriously difficult to determine. Yet, rigorous analyses that account for biases in such data suggest that 65% of African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics leave with a diploma.27 This national research indicates that the gap has largely remained constant over the past 35 years. In 2011, 39% of white 25 to 29 year-olds completed a bachelor’s degree or higher, as compared to 20% of African Americans/Blacks and 13% of Hispanic/Latinos. In 1975, those figures were 15%, 6% and 6%, respectively.28 In addition to these marked differences in completion between African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics/Latinos compared to White students, African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino students also required more time to complete an undergraduate degree than their White peers.29

The national disparities in postsecondary education similarly persist in Oregon. Of critical concern for Oregon is the growing Hispanic/Latino population. Due to the high number of Hispanic/Latino high school graduates who do not enter a postsecondary institution, there are concerns that this population may not be integrated into 40-40-20 goals. Additionally, the stagnant enrollment rates of both African American/Black and American Indian populations may hinder us from achieving the 40-40-20 goals. According to OUS reports, the public enrollment rates for African Americans/Blacks have hovered around 2.3% in the last few years. Moreover, Hispanics/Latinos currently have the lowest freshman participation rates among

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24 Ishler, 2005.
27 Hecman & LaFontaine, 2007
28 Aud et al, 2011
29 U.S Department of Education, 2010
ethnic groups, and American Indian and the African American/Black populations have the lowest 6-year graduation rates. These populations are entering and completing their postsecondary education at lower rates than their White or Asian peers. OUS analysis indicates academic preparedness for public postsecondary education accounts for these disparities. These at-risk ethnic students are the very ones whose high school age population will be increasing in the next decade and beyond.

Current education estimates indicate by the academic year of 2017-2018, 20% of Oregon 12th-graders and 24% of Oregon public high school graduates will be Hispanic/Latino graduates. Indeed, by scrutinizing the same high school graduation cohort profile, one can argue that we are pretty close to reaching that threshold. Table 1 identifies the student profile of the 2014 high school graduation class by race and ethnicity. This profile is a strong indicator of our current student body diversity and how ethnically diverse potential “college-going” or postsecondary students are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minority Students</th>
<th># Of Students</th>
<th>% Of total student population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>2.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>1.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>5083</td>
<td>16.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1,645</td>
<td>5.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Ethnic</td>
<td>1352</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Minority</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,080</strong></td>
<td><strong>25.70%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>22,171</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL STUDENTS</td>
<td>31,440</td>
<td><strong>68.66%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 1 illustrates that Hispanic/Latino students comprised the majority of students of color in the 2014 graduating class, however Hispanic/Latino students currently have low college-going rates. Only 11% of Latino adults possess a bachelor’s degree, compared to Oregonians as a whole. This leads to a serious challenge for the fastest growing minority group in Oregon and could pose significant obstacles to reach the 40-40-20 educational attainment goals. For fall 2013, 21% of the total post-secondary population was from a minority group. According to Graph 2 the number should increase about 1-2 percentage points annually.

Graph 2 also shows how student diversity at Oregon’s public universities has progressively increased since 2003. In the updated Fact Sheet for Fall 2013, there were a total of 87,031 undergraduate students enrolled in an Oregon public university during the fall of 2013.

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30 Looking Back Along the Long and Winding Road, OUS, 2003.
31 Calculation and data were taken from the following ODE high school graduation profile: http://www.ode.state.or.us/wma/data/schoolanddistrict/students/docs/summarycohortgrad1213.pdf
32 The 2014 graduating class began in 2009 with a total of 45,791. There can be various reasons why a student drops out. According to these calculations, there was 68.66% of those students graduated in 2014.
33 Oregon University Fact Book 2013, pg. 16.
34 Enrollment Fact Sheet for Fall 2013 OUS, November 14, 2013
Of those, 24.7% of U.S students in the OUS reported their race/ethnicity as other than white, up from 23.3% the previous school year. The Hispanic/Latino enrollment rate into a postsecondary institution increased 10.7% from fall 2012 to fall 2013; African Americans/Black student enrollment increased by 2.8% over the prior year; and Asian/Pacific Islander student enrollment was steady. Of concern is the enrollment decrease of those who identify as American Indian/Alaska Native—7.9%. Enrollment rates, retention, and graduation rates vary among students of color, and data that explicitly explains retention rates and graduations rates among different students of color is sparse.

In a recent presentation to the HECC Funding and Achievement Subcommittee the following 2006 cohort graduation rates were cited:
Public universities’ graduation (BA) rate: 60.5%\(^{35}\)

- African American/Black: 48.4%
- Native American: 50.4%
- Asian/Pacific Islander: 60.3%
- Hispanic/Latino: 52.9%
- White: 61.9%

The education attainment varies from subpopulation, but more rigorous and up-to-date data is needed to paint a clearer picture of the educational attainment among students of color. Graph 3 presents the current educational attainment among different subpopulations\(^{36}\). Graph 3 shows that among African American/Black communities, there is an educational attainment of 34%; for the Hispanic/Latino community its 19%; for American Indian/Alaska Native it is 18%; while for the Asian/Pacific Islander community, it is 54%. What is not mentioned, but is underlying this conversation, is information on multicultural students, and this should be of interest for future research.

Additional notes: HECC is aware of the gap between the demographics of the state’s educator workforce and that of the K-12-students.\(^{37}\) Yet, this gap is not as well understood when looking at postsecondary education. The same logic that applies to the hiring of teachers of color in the K-12 system can also be applied in postsecondary education. According to the recent Minority Teacher Report, the following statement was made:

“Educators of color serve as cultural brokers, not only helping students navigate their school environment and culture but also increasing involvement of families and communities of color which in turn impacts attendance, achievement, graduating rates and postsecondary aspirations.”\(^{38}\)

Professors of color and administrators at the postsecondary level also offer the same support system that teachers of color provide in the K-12 system. This is important to understand and speaks to the dynamics that a student of color may face when they enter a postsecondary institution. Having representation is critical.

The experiences of undocumented and multicultural students are not well understood either. For undocumented students, the ability to pay in-state tuition rates was granted with the passage of Tuition Equity. While the possibility to a postsecondary career was opened for those who are undocumented, many are still first generation students without any knowledge of how

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35 See the 2015-17 Budget Process & Priorities presentation to the Funding and Achievement Subcommittee.

36 Pathway to Progress, March 11, 2014 please see

37 Please see the Minority Teacher Report at

38 Ibid, Minority Teacher Report
the higher education system functions, and unlikely to access an array of need-based financial aid options.

**Graph 3. Educational Attainment Across Subpopulation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subpopulation</th>
<th>Less than HS</th>
<th>High school completer</th>
<th>Some college</th>
<th>Associate's</th>
<th>Bachelor's or better</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Support systems become even more critical and it is not well understood how postsecondary institutions are providing for the needs of these students. On the other hand, there is an increase in students who identify as multicultural. Their experiences are vastly different than students who identify with a single race.

**Rural Students**

For Oregon, interest in rural students has increased, as the exodus from rural to urban areas elevated. Specifically, technology enhancements impacted rural Oregonians opportunities as industries such as agriculture, timber, recreation, and tourism dramatically changed in the last few decades.

These changes resulted in these industries in employing workers with higher levels of education than they did in 2000. In 2005, over 20% of Oregonians in metropolitan areas or near-metropolitan areas held a bachelor’s degree or greater, compared to only 16% of Oregonians in rural communities. This slightly increased in 2011 to 19.5%. There are many barriers that rural Oregonians face, such as limited geographical access to Oregon’s public universities, cultural, or social barriers, as well as insufficient assistance to pursue higher education, including financial aid and academic preparation. It should be noted that the increasing Hispanic/Latino population in rural Oregon might be contributing to these factors.

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40 Ibid Breaking Barriers, 2008

Also, many rural students are first generation students and do not have the support system to enter or persist in a postsecondary institution. Rural students are also less likely to attend a private or highly selective four-year institution. This is problematic because “under-matched” students—those whose academic credentials permit them access to a college or a university is more selective than the one they actually choose—are less likely than others to complete their degrees.

One must understand rural Oregon, in order to appreciate the diversity and needs of this community. Oregon is the 27th most populated state in the nation but the ninth largest geographically with over 98,000 square miles. 70% of the population lives in the Portland metropolitan area, with the remaining 30% living in often very remote areas. Oregon’s landscape is diverse with rugged Pacific coastline, a volcanic mountain range, and dense forests. Traditionally, agriculture, timber, and fishing were the primary economic drivers in rural Oregon. However, these industries have dramatically declined and resulted in the highest unemployment and poverty rates in the state. Historically, high school graduates could get a family-wage job at the local mill, possibly contributing to a culture that undervalues a postsecondary education. The following map produced by OUS denotes participation rates by county.

To conclude the background portion of this research, the effects of poverty, limited social capital resources, and low parental educational attainment can severely thwart the education trajectory of most if not all underserved students. For those underserved students that manage to successfully graduate from high school and enroll in a postsecondary institution, they are often unprepared for the rigors of postsecondary-level coursework, which increases the dropout risk at the postsecondary level. Successfully connecting

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42 Koricich, 2013
43 Avery & Hosby, 2013
44 2012 Census data
45 Feliciano & Ashnian, 2012; Mcloyd, 1998; Perry & McConney, 2010; Gordon, 1999
46 Davis-Kean, Mendoza & Susperreguy, 2012
underserved students into postsecondary education requires a deep understanding of the culture and complex ecologies that intersect their lives. It is due to these reasons that outreach and engagement to underserved students and communities is in high demand at almost every level of government in Oregon. Though the data presented can be seen from a grim perspective, it sheds light on the positive work that can be done to outreach and engage underserved students in all facets of higher education.

**Methodology**

The primary area of interest for this study was derived from perceptions and expectations of underserved students and associated community leaders throughout Oregon. The studies’ approach for obtaining data from underserved postsecondary students and community leaders primarily consisted of either in-person or phone interviews. A list of community leaders was obtained from the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), introductory emails were sent to community leaders inviting participation in a confidential 30-minute interview either in person or via phone, developing a sample with roughly proportional representation of the cultural and geographical diversity of community leaders and organizations throughout Oregon. For example, input was sought from community leaders in Eastern, Southern, Central and Western Oregon. Additionally, input was solicited from those working in foundations, agencies, and higher education institutions, among others. The same approach was used when inviting underserved students to participate in the research. However, once a community leader committed to participation, they utilized a flyer to invite students and other community leaders to participate, especially if their networks consisted of underserved students that fit the profile. This was done to allow both students and other community leaders to self-select into the study.

The interviews were voluntary and extensive notes were maintained. There are strategies to enhance the quality in qualitative research during data collection and during analysis. For purposes of this research, there were many external checks of the research process as well as member checking. One check was soliciting participant’s views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations during analysis. In other words, community leaders were contacted post-interviews to clarify answers as well to lend further insight of an interview if necessary. The questions were open-ended and an interview guide was used to encourage greater dialogue. By analyzing the narratives, researchers can better understand the participants “lived reality.” Based on interview reviews, decisions were made about specific questions to ask, what to observe, which methods to use, and types of people to interview.

There were 35 interview participants in total. Table 2 shows a high participation rate among community leaders but this was not seen with underserved students. There could be many factors contributing to the low response rate for underserved students.

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47 Creswell, 2007
48 Feldman, 1995
Table 2: Characteristics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Leaders</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agencies¹</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Underserved Students</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>API</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>African American/Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>FGS/Min/LI/R⁴⁹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRAND TOTAL</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research was done during the summer months, and the summer break may have contributed to the low participation rate of underserved students. It is strongly advised that future research should focus on underserved students, especially during the school year when students are more active on campuses and are more in tune to these types of endeavors. Including more students in this research will add student value and is part of the outreach and engagement that this research seeks to understand.

Findings Based on Interviews with Community Leaders

Three main themes emerged from interviews and can be found in Table 3. These themes are composed of sub-themes but those will be discussed within the context of questions asked and connections will be made to their corresponding theme. Table 4 describes the meanings of each sub-theme.

The sub-themes described in Table 4 are fluid and emerged within the context of each of the main themes. In the closing paragraph of this section, an explanation of how these themes relate to each other will be provided.

Outreach & Engagement

First, on outreach and engagement: this theme envelops all the outreach activities that community leaders engage in or with which they expressed concerns. Here, their perceptions of

⁴⁹ “FGS/Min/LI/R” means “First Generation Student/Minority/ Low-Income / Rural” respectively
what outreach is composed of were made visible, as well as their expectations of how others should conduct outreach and engagement to underserved students.

One of the first questions asked was, “what type of outreach does your organization use to engage underserved students?” Before answering this question, 20 out of 25 community leaders said that they focus on relationship building first, not only within each respective community that they work with, but also with underserved students. Once the relationship aspect is established, the process of what type outreach and engagement policies need to be implemented to outreach and engage underserved students can begin. Building authentic relationships with other community organizations was part of this equation as well. Establishing relationships with community leaders leads not only to collaboration among different organizations but it also leads to the availability of more shared resources. It became apparent that without building authentic relationships with various underserved populations, any type of outreach and engagement plan would falter. Therefore, building relationships happens between students and organizations, and among organizations. One respondent commented:

“Building relationships with folks that understand what these students are going through is critical. We can’t be everything for everyone...so building relationships with others that are also doing the work, helps spread the load and provides multiple avenues to attacking the issues faced by [underserved] students.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Referenced</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Outreach &amp; Engagement</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>All activities and practices community leaders used to assist underserved students in their postsecondary career: from mentoring, advising, financial literacy to family support &amp; parent education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Communication</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>How the development and implementation of communications strategies (websites, stakeholder outreach, or visual identity) fail when attempting to outreach and engage underserved students/populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Not only academic support but also the entire array of student support programs providing guidance to students, i.e., educating the family on postsecondary institutions. This is how students are informed about postsecondary institutions and the type of information needed for underserved student success in postsecondary institutions. Accurate information leads to an increase of knowledge for underserved students about the higher educational system.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Sub-themes under Outreach & Engagement, Communication & Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Taking time to build trust, consistency, and partnerships with either underserved student, community leaders, or community organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Those who do outreach and engage underserved students, community leaders, or community organizations, should be culturally aware/trained or should be direct representatives of the underserved community that they are engaging with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Systems</td>
<td>These are all the wrap around services that underserved students need to succeed in higher education such as mentorship, advising, assistance in the transitioning from high school to a postsecondary institution, financial aid education, parent education, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relationship leads to cultivating trust and provides opportunities for consistency. The second step, which is recommended as the first step prior to establishing a relationship, is representation. That is, those organizations or community leaders who outreach and engage underserved students should be reflective of the community they are serving. In other words, organizations should hire people that are culturally aware, represent, and can relate to the diversity found within underserved students. Both community leaders and students expressed this sentiment and it was also reflected in the hiring of postsecondary faculty. One participant explained, “...you have to hire minority organizers [faculty or administrators] because many of our students tell us, ‘there are no people of color that share my experience.’” This leads to students to feel isolated and unable to talk to those who would otherwise provide guidance during their postsecondary career. 50 Another respondent agreed by saying, “Hiring folks [of color] that can build authentic relationships with the community they serve...is critical.” Other participants explained that if they were going to do outreach to the Russian community, for example, that they would first contact the organizations working with this tight-knit community to cultivate a relationship first. Cultivating relationships is a lengthy process but participants indicated that it is a rewarding one when it is done properly, authentically and you have the people that “…are bridge-makers—those who can communicate with both communities.”

The question now becomes, how does this relate to the experience of underserved students. In the first part of this research, a picture was provided of the barriers facing first generation, low-income, students of color and rural students. Time spent on relationship building and hiring people that are representative of the community leads to building support systems for underserved students during their postsecondary education. Support systems are networks of people that provide practical or emotional support. 51 Participants were asked, “What services would be beneficial to underserved students?” Many described how their organizations provide this support and their answers can be found in Appendix A.

One respondent’s answer summarizes how community leaders see support systems. This organization provided advising, mentorship and check-in with students. Many of the students

50 Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011
51 Definition of support system taken from Mariam-Webster dictionary.
they work with, however, joined the organization while in elementary school. They are mentored through high school graduation and those who go on to a postsecondary education are provided with support from two full-time staffers until they graduate from a postsecondary institution. The staffers advise and mentor students with any life or educational problems that may arise:

“One of the challenges... and is key, is the support system. If the support system for underserved students is not there, students do not excel.”

As one can see, the support system can include mentorship, advising on transitioning from high school to a postsecondary institution, required check-ins with mentors, obtaining student input and making information accessible and central. Underlying this support system was creating a “college-going culture” and guiding behavior changes not only in students but also training teachers and faculty to be more positive— “...that college is a reality. There is this unconscious messaging [by teachers, agencies, counselors] where there is this expectation that underserved student will not go to college...and that needs to change.”

Oregon is moving in the right direction. Last year, it was the first time that Oregon celebrated and instituted a “college-going culture” by introducing College-Application Week: a week dedicated to providing students with information on the application process, financial aid, mentoring and such. The Oregon GEAR-UP program sponsors this initiative.\(^{52}\) Many other cities such as Austin, Texas\(^{53}\) have successfully used this practice to increase postsecondary enrollment among Latino students and can be viewed as an emerging national best practice. First-Lady Michelle Obama recently visited San Antonio, Texas for their college week and unveiled her “Reach Higher Initiative.” This initiative is to expose all students to college or career opportunities, to help students understand financial aid eligibility, encourage academic planning, and to support high schools counselors who can make a difference by providing support to underserved students’ plans for their postsecondary education.\(^{54}\)

These developments are promising, but there is much work to be done. One sub-theme that arose under outreach and engagement is parent involvement. You cannot create a support system without having parent involvement. One of the community leaders explained that their organization heavily invests in parent education because “that’s where students spend most of their time. If the parents are not educated or informed about higher education, their efforts do not work.” Eight different community leaders cited parent education and involvement. Another participant explained that outreach and engagement was about creating the support system that “provides space for parent voice.”

The sub-theme of accessible information is where information about applying to postsecondary institutions, the financial aid process, supports during transitions and during their postsecondary career, and is made available in a central location. Accessible information

\(^{52}\) Please see oregongoestocollge.org & gearup.ous.edu
\(^{53}\) Please see gentx.org
\(^{54}\) Please see www.whitehouse.gov/reach-higher
empowers students with the knowledge to make the best educational decision for themselves and their families. Fourteen out of the 25 community leaders spoke about Oregon Student Access and Completion (OSAC) and the Access to Student Assistance Programs In Reach of Everyone (ASPIRE) when they referenced accessible information. There was a perceived notion with most community leaders that many of the underserved students they worked with were not provided information about OSAC or the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG), or ASPIRE. This signals that the expectations of community leaders is for underserved to know about OSAC, OOG and ASPIRE. Additionally, most of the students interviewed acknowledged that they were not familiar with OSAC, ASPIRE, and OOG or they did not fully comprehend how these programs were going to help them:

“...an important issue with OSAC is that it does not outreach through the entire state. Students let alone parents don’t know about what OSAC does or its function. There is great opportunity to put together community forums around the state in different languages and with different community leaders to inform not only us but also the entire community about the HECC and OSAC... and how they help underserved students.”

With only 145 sites, there are not enough locations to adequately provide full statewide support—an OSAC and OOG expansion may be a viable consideration to reach underserved students. This research supports HECC’s budget recommendation to expand these programs. Community leaders are communicating that students do not know about OSAC, OOG, and ASPIRE signaling that there is ample space for opportunity.

It is clear that outreach and engagement to underserved students in Oregon, from a community leader’s perspective, requires more thoughtfulness and time. Outreach and engagement takes intentional planning and strategic thinking. Nonetheless, technology also plays a part. Eight community leaders cited the use of emails, listserv, flyers, text messages, websites, virtual mentorship, Facebook, and Twitter as outreach and engagement tools. Technology has dramatically changed how we interact and live with each other. Yet, while technology seems to play a part, it was the least cited sub-theme under outreach and by community leaders. If anything, these applications were used once relationships and trust were cultivated with underserved students and their families. The use of technology is predicated by establishing relationships with underserved students. However, using innovative technology to engage underserved students should not be dismissed.

Another important sub-theme under outreach and engagement was mentorship. When asked what type of outreach works or what type of services students need the most, community leaders cited mentorship ten times. Mentorship includes advising students on what it will take be a “college student” if they identify as an underserved student, guidance on transitioning from high school to a postsecondary institution, and “figuring out how to stay in school and not letting the cultural pressure break them down.” Mentorship is critical piece of outreach and engagement practices, so much so that one community leader stated, “Every university needs
to be aggressive in how to do mentorship and advising...if they are unable to, then they need to explain why so that we can understand how to help these students.”

There are a few additional outreach and engagement tools that emerged during conversations. Among them was using online mentors in rural schools or text messaging to remind high school students of important postsecondary deadlines. Oregon GEAR UP recently launched a text-messaging program to remind students of application or FASFA deadlines. Only one organization explained that they have a Facebook and Twitter account but usually word of mouth was used by many organizations. However, we must keep in mind that “if the family does not have anyone who has previously attended a postsecondary institution, students will need help with the most basic technological advances such as email.” This particular comment makes it apparent that building mentorship relationships with underserved students will require a more in depth approach. This will take time, patience, and resources.

**Outreach & Engagement, conclusion**

There is no “one-size fits all plan” to outreach and engagement practices for underserved students. What has emerged from these conversations is that there are multiple tools to use. Accordingly, there are three takeaways from the outreach and engagement theme:

1. **Build relationships** with both underserved students and their families, community leaders, and organizations. Moreover, hire staff that can establish relationships and maintain open communication lines.

2. Outreach and engagement includes a comprehensive **support system** that understands the unique dynamics that Oregon’s underserved students face in higher education.

3. **Provide accessible information** that creates a “college-going culture.” Furthermore, increasing the profile of the HECC, OSAC, OOG, and ASPIRE as well as other programs could significantly assist Oregon in reaching the 40-40-20 goals.

All things considered, the foundation for outreach and engagement tools to be successful will require time to establish collaboration among different organizations on the ground, build trust and consistency, and engaging staff who can reignite cooperation among various stakeholders. Community leaders have clear expectations of what outreach and engagement looks like from their perspective. The question to ponder is: what does outreach and engagement to underserved students look like from the HECC’s perspective and what role will the HECC play? According to the HECC Strategic Plan, 55 promoting a “college-going culture” is certainly part of the equation. However, promoting only federal programs can possibly lead to more distrust among community leaders and organizations. There should be consideration to establishing a grant for non-profits in Oregon that mentor, encourage and promote access to a postsecondary

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55 See page 49
education for underserved students. Finally, any outreach and engagement plan that focuses on underserved students, must re-conceptualize which outreach and engagement practices to use.

**Communication**

All community leaders expected that either agencies or organizations properly communicate information to underserved students and community leaders. Communication was referenced 12 different times and it is perceived to be how we convey the outreach and engagement plan, how information is provided, who is engaged, whether information is accessible, and how both underserved students and community leaders receive non-verbal communication. 

**Communication emerges as a major theme** when the following question was asked: “What are the barriers faced by organizations that attempt to outreach or engage underserved students?” The answers can be found in Appendix A.

Many community leaders noted that communication is a barrier for most organizations because they do not hire the staff that can communicate to the population that they are attempting to serve. This not only includes the organizers who are on the ground but also those making executive decisions and strategies. This is why representation is a sub-theme under communication as well. **Representation** is not having the proper staff that is culturally aware or is unable to build relationships with underserved students. This can leads to a communication break down and may hinder any future prospect of building an authentic line of communication between underserved populations and an organization or agency. Even among organizations that work with low-income non-minority students, having staffers that can relate to the students was extremely important. Many of the community leaders perceived the hiring of people of color as step in the right direction. Thus, there is an expectation that if organizations or agencies will outreach and engage underserved students, the hiring of properly and culturally trained local staff is a must in order to communicate and bridge relationships among underserved students:

“A lot of organizations don’t have the proper bi-lingua or bi-cultural staff to communicate and outreach to those students. Organizations have to make a conscious effort in hiring staff that can relate to students, can communicate and maintain relationship and who do not give up on them.”

Many community leaders also understood the importance of engaging students about their needs. As one community leader described:

“We also need to talk and communicate to underserved students about their needs because if we are going to reach our 40-40-20 goals, we need to know what they need and figure out a way to meet those needs.”

**Engaging students** will require a continuation of this research as this was referenced ten times under communication. This will require creative ways to provide information to students. A
possible solution can be found with OSAC and their capacity for outreaching directly to underserved students. This necessitates a new way of marketing OSAC, ASPIRE and the OOG, possibly updating their website to make it more appealing to underserved students or students in general—even providing an online view book of all the postsecondary institutions with information that underserved students need. Additionally, there are other great programs such as “Oregon Goes to College”, Oregon GEAR-UP, College Possible, College Goal Sunday, or CAN and many community organizations all championing a “college going culture” in Oregon. Promoting these programs on the OSAC website or publicize them on the HECC website in general, could raise the visibility of these programs to underserved students. A potential model to look at can be the Washington Student Achievement Council, which has posted web links to various organizations that promote student access and success. If OSAC is not the place to promote these, then HECC could be the catalyst and become a central hub of information for all students. Granted that not all students will have access to the Internet but there are many that will research information about scholarships, universities, financial literacy tools, financial aid or use YouTube videos that explain the application process to postsecondary institutions.

To summarize, there are three main takeaways from the communication theme:

1. **We need to bridge the communication gap** between underserved students, organization, and agencies.

2. **Properly train local staff** to communicate and engage underserved students. Additionally, we need to train community leaders on how to provide guidance on Oregon’s postsecondary system and its’ process.

3. There is also a need for HECC to undertake a **statewide campaign** to raise the visibility of the HECC and put at ease any hesitance shown by underserved students and community leaders.

Partnerships with different organizations around the state could facilitate and expedite a statewide campaign and as one respondent stated, “...begin the healing process that many underserved students have faced in regards higher to education in Oregon.”

**Education**

In this context, **education** is how students are informed about postsecondary institutions. The sub-themes in this section all pointed to how postsecondary institutions and organizations either provided support systems to underserved students or funding for their respective organizations. Community leaders had high expectation of postsecondary institutions to provide **support systems** for underserved students and to provide access to funding streams, hire faculty of color or faculty that can relate to underserved students, provide mentorship, improve retention of underserved students, and assist with the transition process from high

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56 House Bill 4019
school to a postsecondary institution. The expectations and the stories that underserved students are sharing with community leaders, however, do not match. Even though education was reference eight times as a main theme, there were many sub-themes that emerge that are related to the education umbrella. For instance, the lack funding for community organizations providing educational programs geared for underserved students was referenced 17 times. Funding was not only seen as a barrier but also a way to alleviate obstacles for underserved students and programs who are assisting underserved students in their postsecondary career.

Furthermore, funding allows organizations to continue educating underserved students about the higher education system in Oregon and allows organizations to continue their outreach and engagement efforts. For instance, many community leaders expressed that whenever government agencies show interest in outreaching to underserved communities, they are among the first to be approached to learn about that population. Yet, once the information is gathered, they are left out of any engagement plan. One community leader noted, “HECC needs to find a way to fund organizations that are already doing the work and who have proven their strategy works versus trying to reinvent the wheel.” In this sense, it is expected that the HECC should find ways to provide funding to organizations that are proven to work when it comes to outreaching and engaging underserved students. Comments about barriers and how to alleviate them can be found in Appendix A.

Similarly, retention was identified as a sub-theme under education due to many community leaders expressing concerns that information on postsecondary retentions rates are not easily found—this hinders the process of information gathering and community leaders inability to educate policy makers or the community about what policies need to be implemented. Retention was referenced six times. Here are a few notable community leader comments:

“We need to look at the retention rates and how to hold campuses accountable for those retention rates. We need to put the spotlight on this. We are good at getting kids into college, especially kids of color, but we don’t know how to keep them in school...figuring out best practices among campuses first maybe best before looking at national best practices.”

“...and one of the difficulties of underserved students is that once they walk through the door, is how to keep them enrolled and make them feel like they belong.”

“Recruitment is good, retention is bad because [institutions] think they can use people of color on their pamphlets to make it seem diverse...which leads to a perception problem and that’s an issue.”

A possible solution to the retention issue was provided by this community leader, “Yes, we need faculty that can relate to underserved students. And yes we need the multicultural clubs and programs but we also need to incorporate diversity into the curriculum that speaks to the

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57 Thayer, 2000
diversity and experiences of underserved students so that they can relate to...this keeps them engaged.”

Community leaders were also asked about what services underserved students need the most. Many community leaders said that underserved students need help figuring how to make a postsecondary career more affordable, “but what I really think they need but don’t ask for, is advising. How to be a college student or how to navigate college, is something that underserved students need but don’t really ask for.” Another participant responded with, “the school is there for students to go to college...it is a lack of how to go to college and how to get access to that money” that can be a barrier.

One of the final questions asked was, “What are the factors that higher education policy should take into account when attempting to engage or outreach to underserved students?” This question was asked as a way for community leaders to reflect on their own work, personal experiences and have the opportunity to make recommendations. One of the biggest factors was “realizing that there are different cultural needs for every single one of the students and proactively seek to understand those needs” and working with community organizations when it comes to outreach and engagement. Among other factors to consider is that “these kids are working, they are helping their siblings, they are paying bills, their cell phones are not working, their parents don’t really understand and there’s just so many factors that should be taken into account.” Most comments centered on outreach and engagement policy to consider most if not all factors affecting underserved students when it comes to all three main themes or finding “low-hanging fruit” that could alleviate barriers that could help Oregon reach the 40-40-20 goals. Only two community leader mentioned community college as a way to improve admission and retention rates among underserved students while other community leaders highlighted that the transition period from a community college to a public university system is still problematic and that once underserved students find themselves in a university system, they get lost in translation. Note that research\textsuperscript{58} shows that some if not most underserved students begin their postsecondary education at a community college, increasing the likelihood that they will need more than four years to complete their postsecondary degree—a possible solution is to consider pursing proposals that provide “free two-years” at either a community college or a technical school to alleviate financial constraints. There is also an information problem with community colleges. Community leaders expressed that student do not fully understand whether or not they should only complete an associates degree, technical degree or go on to a university. However, one of the most notable quotes to this last question was the following:

“Wow...the equity lens...that’s a great lens and we can apply it...but how do we embrace it? Just creating a policy is not enough...where is the website, the resources, the staff?”

\textsuperscript{58} Breaking Barriers
This community leader alluded to dangers of implementing symbolic policies. Underserved students and communities come from marginalized backgrounds. Passing policies to signal a change but have no implementation plan cannot only frustrate community leaders or organizations that passed a policy but it can also build distrust among underserved students or populations. In Appendix A, you can find additional answers to this question.

There are two important points under the education theme:

1. We need to educate others about the HECC, OSAC, OOG & any other programs that create a "college-going culture."

2. Facilitate information and educate underserved students on all aspects of pursuing a postsecondary career. A possible solution could be for either OSAC or the HECC to be a central hub of information for all students pursuing a postsecondary career.

**Conclusion to Community Leader Interviews**

The interviews conducted among community leaders have provided insight to their expectations as well as how they perceive outreach and engagement policies directed at underserved students. Many community leaders have exposed systematic and institutional barriers that are keeping underserved students from succeeding in their postsecondary careers. Assembling their answers into an explanation is akin to assembling a jigsaw puzzle piece. Puzzle pieces are constantly rearranged many times before the reassembled pieces emerge into a coherent pattern. If successful, a whole structure will emerge and will be held tight by interconnected pieces. The relationships that surfaced from these interviews are part of a bigger jigsaw puzzle that as a state and nation, we are trying to put together. This research provided some insights to some of the key pieces we need to solve our chunk of the puzzle.

Figure 4 shows how the themes produced by community leader interviews are interconnected. All outreach and engagement practices, including any communications plan and how students are educated on postsecondary institutions are related to each other and help strengthen any outreach efforts to underserved students. It is clear from the interviews that most if not all themes must be used if any organization will undertake efforts to engage underserved students in the higher education policy process. Any outreach and engagement efforts by the HECC or similar institutions must make an effort **engage community leaders and organizations, establish rapport, and authentically show empathy to the struggles that underserved students face.** Leadership and professional development should also be part of engaging students in the policy process. There is also need to expedite the process in a way that welcomes active participation by both underserved students and community leaders. To answer the question of **how to engage underserved students in the policy process**, here a few solutions:
• **Provide an avenue for student voice on HECC policy matters by creating either a student taskforce or subcommittee.** By targeting underserved students and allowing space to provide input on higher education policies, students will have the ability to invite their peers in the policy process as well as build avenues to get student commentary on such issues. This builds not only inclusiveness but it also falls within the HECCs’ equity lens. This would promote leadership development and provides opportunities for students who would not be involved in the policy process, to participate. These students could also be willing to testify on other committees on higher education policies and matters.

• **Continue to use qualitative methods to engage both underserved students and community leaders on policy matters affecting higher education.** Combining qualitative methods to any quantitative research allows data to either corroborate or highlight gaps in data-driven policy ideas. Both community leaders and students that participated in this research expressed gratitude that time was being taken to ask about important issues related to higher education policy. Allowing time and space for interviews, surveys or focus groups provides another avenue to engage underserved students and community leaders in the policy process.

• **Continue to actively recruit underserved students in postsecondary institutions to intern with the HECC or the subcommittees.** Many community leaders expressed a need for underserved students to have professional development opportunities. The HECC could provide avenues for students, particularly those students in either a community college or a four-year institution, to intern for credits. HECC staff would be encouraged to allow students to take on policy issues that matter to them personally or provide policy research assignments.

• **Engage community organizations that have established relationships with underserved students and communities.** During the passage of Tuition Equity or Cultural Competency, we saw a surge of student engagement. This was due to an organized collaboration among several community organizations that mobilized students on these issues. It took teamwork and education on a policy issue to get students to testify and spend hours lobbying. Many of the students involved in this political process were engaged by well establish community organizations. Thus building relationship with community leaders or organizations is an effective option to get underserved students involve in the policy process.

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59 Senate Bill 97, 2013
Findings Based on Interviews with Underserved Students

Underserved students were asked a series of questions that were tailored so that they could reflect on their personal experiences in higher education. The questions allowed students to specify how information was provided to them and whether or not they are outreached or engaged by community organizations, government agencies, and postsecondary institutions. From those experiences, many exposed their perceptions and expectations of higher education, which corroborated with many of the community leaders experiences. Eleven students were emailed and invited to participate in this research study. Their names and information were provided by various community leaders as well as by the students themselves. Ten out of 11 students completed an interview either over the phone, in-person or via email. Most students
were happy to share their experiences and were thankful that their opinions were being sought after and were excited about the possibility of their input possibly shaping policies that may assist other underserved students. The themes identified during student interviews are found in Table 5.

Figure 5 shows a cyclical relationship among the themes identified during underserved student interviews. Understanding the environment that underserved students face in their postsecondary experience is critical. Here we see that mentorship allows practitioners to pinpoint what type of financial aid education is needed and what type of outreach and engagement practices should be used for other underserved students. The following section provides more details on each of the themes.

**Mentorship**

Students were asked if they were familiar with organizations or agencies that provided assistance to underserved students and what sort of assistance they needed the most. Three out of the 10 students cited that programs such as the federally funded TRIO helped in providing “...resources that are needed for students...whether it is tutors, scholarship help, transferring schools or just somebody to talk to...they’re there.” This student identified that mentorship is something that was sought after. Another student said they received help from TRIO on how to prepare for a postsecondary career but expressed that once they arrived in “college,” it was different...” The scholarship they received provided support on many fronts but their friends who also identified as underserved students struggled because they did not receive the diversity scholarship as the student had. This student described their friends flocking to them to get advice and guidance on postsecondary issues.

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60 Please note that most students may not be aware that “college” or “university” means two different educational institutions. These two are interchangeable and are perceived to mean the same to underserved students. To those working in higher education, however, “college” means community colleges and universities are your four-year institutions. As a whole, they are known as either higher education or postsecondary institutions.
The information this student received from the scholarship support, equip them to mentor their friends; here, peer-to-peer mentorship is a way to assist others. For those that identify as first generation students, mentorship and guidance is extremely important.

“To be honest I’m not all too familiar with any community organizations that provided student assistance. When being mentored for college I just got the basic go around. I got the ‘what will you need get into this college’ and ‘how will you pay’ for said college. The application process was new to me. I felt like I was thrown into it with no guidelines and that’s what I thought the mentoring was for. The same goes for funding and academic resources. Filling out scholarships was hard because I had no clue where to look or which ones I could qualify for. It was terrifying not knowing if I could pay for my tuition, especially because I wanted to attend for the full four years.”

This same first generation student commented:

“When high school started coming to an end, I was happy to think of college, but I had no one to talk to about it. I am the first to go to college officially in my family and I had no clue of anything and neither did my parents.”

Table 5: Themes Identified During Student Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th># Of References</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mentorship</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>This includes advising, integrating into a postsecondary institution, transitions, building confidence and preparing how to be a “college student.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Environment</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>The surrounding conditions that influence student postsecondary experience such as culture, campus organizations, or diversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Support Systems</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>This includes not only academic support but also the whole array of student support programs that provide guidance to students such as educating the family on postsecondary institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Financial Aid/Literacy</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>This involves the student’s ability to get access to information that leads to an understanding of how postsecondary education can be finance and an understanding on how postsecondary education impacts their own personal finances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Outreach &amp; Engagement</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>This describes student’s expectations of how they should be outreach or engage, which includes building relationships and using technology as means to get information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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61 Hsiao, 1992  
62 Engle & Borneo, 2006
Underserved students expressed a need for in-depth mentorship. Nevertheless, mentorship is a complex process depending which student group is targeted. Another first-generation student who also identified as student of color and low-income, commented that the public school system does not prepare students on “how to be a college student let alone explain all the steps involved with getting to be a college student.” They also expressed concerns about not having “culturally-sensitive advisors, professors of color or counselors that could identify with the struggles of underserved students.”

Eight out of 10 students are still in a postsecondary institution. Two of them recently graduated this year but all 10 students expressed “having a hard time navigating through all the ‘systems’ such as how to get the right information for financial aid or just getting help on which classes to take.” All students showed a need for advising, guidance on integrating into the “college-culture” and getting rid of any “impostor syndrome”, as well as preparation on what it means to pursue a postsecondary education—that is that students understood that there would be academic challenges but did not fully comprehend how all the other barriers such as family or financial factors would impact them. Tailored mentorship that focuses on the unique struggles of underserved students is a viable solution.

Environment

Environment conditions such as exposure to diversity, perceived discrimination or stereotyping, satisfaction with support, financial responsibilities, off-campus family responsibility or support can impact the students overall postsecondary education experience. Indeed, the students expressed that culture, diversity, perceived stereotyping or lack of faculty that are relatable, impacts how they perceive their higher education experience. In regards to diversity of faculty or the student body, student’s expectations are not being met:

“...I feel like colleges provide many clubs for underserved students, which can also send the wrong idea. For example, the schools I go to promote diversity on their flyers to get more diverse students to go. But once they get there, they notice that there actually is not that much diversity, at least when it comes to race. Students are being misled about HOW much diversity is on campus. The same goes for those who provide the counseling. They don’t see people that look like them and can be more hesitant to ask for help.”

Another student perceived that the recruitment of international students was a way to increase diversity of campuses:

“School should not import their diversity by the recruitment of international students...the schools are also blatant about the fact that international students bankroll our tuition. The struggles are different and underserved students in the States are different than internationals students.”

Another student expressed the difficulties of being the lone student of color:
“The lack of a critical mass of Latino students at my school means that I often have to be the one to speak up when people behave and use language in ways that offend my status as a minority. People will say the most appalling things regarding particular ethnicities and sexualities that are not my own, and I feel like I am responsible for standing up for all of these groups, because I would want people to do the same thing on my behalf.”

Most importantly, this particular student expressed all the sentiments that all the students had in common:

“As a first-gen student, I was completely scared of college. I wanted to take a year off and relax. I’m glad I didn’t because I would not be attending college like I am now. The pressure of being the first to attend college in my family is really hard. I have to be the smart one because my sibling dropped out of high school before graduating. I’m the first child to graduate high school and attend college; it’s an honor and a burden. Going to college means lots of money and books and housing. As a first-gen I don’t know what dorms are like so I chose to stay at home. If I had the funds to stay in the dorms I think I would have so I could focus on studying and not focus on other issues such as do ‘I have the money to pay for bus fare’, ‘will my parents provide transportation’, ‘how many hours of sleep will I get if I have to wake up to catch an early bus to get to my 8 o’clock class?’ These are some of the burdens…and my family doesn’t understand that being a college student is a full time job. I don’t get paid to wake up at the crack of dawn, so I don’t miss a lecture. Some classes last three hours and some days have multiple classes that take me from 8 in the morning to 6 at night. Then on top of that my parents think ‘oh you’re an adult now you should start paying for your stays at home.’ I could get a job and help pay rent to my parents but I honestly don’t think my body could handle the stress or demands that would be put on me. So being a first generation student is a very hard task when no one knows what I’m going through.”

The student above recently shared that they are now working a 30-hour job while registering for a 12-hour credit load. All these environmental factors led to many students feeling isolated and without any support systems. The following explains how students face contentious cultural backlash while pursuing a postsecondary education. It is critical that any outreach and engagement efforts, understand these unique environmental factors. By simply providing a safe space for students to speak of these and find other peers, could alleviate the pressures underserved students face.

Support Systems

Students were asked about obstacles that they face while making the decision to attend a postsecondary institution and what could alleviate those barriers. All students described monetary concerns but above all, not having a support system to fall on emanated. In the previous quote, the student described that their family is not supportive and lack an
understanding of their postsecondary experience. Most students expressed this sentiment. Many described guilt for pursuing a postsecondary education instead of being present to help their siblings or their parents. For those who stayed at home, pressure from their families increased the more the students focused on classes and spent more time in the classroom as oppose to spending time searching for a job. The tension between the family, culture and the students, has led 9 out of the 10 students interviewed to express feelings of stress, anger, depression, anxiety and isolation. These emotions are summarized in the following comments made by this first generation student:

“I guess more emotional support as opposed to tutoring and other various things is needed. I feel like if I were to have more support in the things that I do or the choices I make, I’d be more confident with how I interact at school...thinking whether or not I can amount to being a college student with little help from most of my family is just so...overwhelming, distracting, and...just sad.”

The two students who received and felt supported by their families were able to work through those fears:

“Money made me hesitant...there were points when I didn’t want to go but after getting help from my cousin and advice from her on how to apply financial aid, it calmed me down and then I started to realize that maybe I can do it. It’s still a struggle now but at least I’m trying.”

As we can see, mentorship, environment and support systems all influence each other. Specifically, support systems allow the mentorship to occur and in turn, allow a safe space for students to analyze the environmental factors affecting their postsecondary career. Combining all these themes and understanding how they work as team could provide effective ways to assisting underserved students in Oregon.

Financial Support

In addition to being the first to attend a postsecondary institution, the students struggle with financial decisions. After several community leaders alluded to students having no knowledge of OSAC, ASPIRE, or OOG, the students were contacted a second time to ask if they were familiar with these programs. Only two out of the ten students knew about OSAC, ASPIRE, or OOG but were more familiar with TRIO. However, more research is needed to find out how informed students are about these financial support programs. Taking this into consideration, students still struggle understanding the financial aid process and options that they may have. This student said:

“Probably one of the main reasons why I hesitated on registering my first year at Mt. Hood was about the money until I found out about FAFSA two weeks prior to the start of classes...I had no clue. Then I found out I qualified to get help from TRIO. Now I go to them for any type of help.”
One out of the two students who knew about OOG recommended:

“I believe that expanding funding for the Oregon Opportunity Grant is essential if we want to improve our service to financially ‘underserved students,’ because many of their problems stem from the inadequate funding levels of Oregon’s only need-based aid program. When you think about it, even though I would not receive the OOG I would certainly benefit from an expansion of it. More minority students within financial reach of my institution means that I would have more fellow students to help nurture a diverse perspective for non-minority students on my campus, which would make us all more comfortable.”

Most students who were interviewed cited financial aid education and financial literacy as need. They expected mentorship to provide this information. Additionally, students want tools to empower them speak to their families about the financial cost and the meaning of student debt. Taking all these factors in consideration, students were then asked how they wanted to be outreached and engage by either organizations or institutions and their answers are explored in the following section.

**Outreach & Engagement**

There were a few students who explained that they did their own research on financial aid either through websites or got assistance from their peers. Most students perceived a communication problem when it came to outreach and engagement. Most felt that either advisors or organizations did not do much outreach to underserved students. One student suggested that to “get the message out...hold informational sessions or events with students about what your goals are...or use social media since it seems to be a big tool used by many organizations.” Yet, students shared community leaders expectations of building relationships:

“If I were to say one thing it'd probably be having people who are doing the outreach feel like they can connect with those underserved students on a personal level, being able to understand their needs and struggle with what they are going through as a student.”

In order to build relationships, students expressed a need to be intentional about it:

“Without intentionality of actually wanting to build relationship with underserved students...they get lost. If HECC wants to do outreach to us...then they need to be intentional about being in student space and asking permission to be there. You need to allow folks to be heard and sometimes that is all they need...the space to build relationships and be heard.”

Community leaders stated that relationship building predicates any outreach and engagement efforts. On the other hands, students identified intentionality as predicking outreach and engagement. Both students and community leaders agreed about an important step but describe that step in different terms. **Intentionality** is being deliberate and purposive. For
example, one of the last community leaders interviewed explained that their organization provided a summer intensive program. A couple of years ago, it came to light that underserved students were not being outreached and engaged in their program. This community leader cited that intentionality is as a way to re-conceptualize outreach and engagement to underserved students. This has led to creating new partnerships and has allowed more students to get leadership development either through their summer program or through other internship opportunities that create leadership and professional development. Being intentional means going to where the students are, talking to them, and using multiple tools to engage them. Most community leaders and students acknowledge that this takes time and patience.

**Conclusion to Student Interviews**

The ten student interviews shed some light into the experiences of underserved students, an corroborate with many of the experiences and concerns expressed by community leaders. There are three similarities that the interviews between the community leaders and students share:

1. Both community leaders and students value relationships, intentionality, and authenticity.
2. Both community leaders and students expressed that support systems are a critical component of student success.
3. Both community leaders and students want to partner with folks that are relatable and understand the unique struggles of underserved students.

In addition to asking community leaders about factors that higher education policy should consider when it comes to outreaching and engaging underserved students, students themselves were asked if they had recommendations on how should government agencies engage students in the policy process. Two students responded the following:

“...it's like trying to get student more involved in voting and I think for many, the reason why they may not vote and may not be involved in the policy process is because they believe they won't make a difference.”

“ALL students need to be made aware of the relevance of the policy process. Policy is often clouded in legal jargon that loses ANY audience. The messaging needs to be tailored to convey the relevance, importance, and outcomes in a language and voice that is familiar to the audience. The presenter of the message must come from the impacted community as a well-respected member of the segmented demographic. A church leader who has a strong presence in community is a mute voice to a group of college students. The process and methods of previous generations...and the old guard of community stakeholders and gatekeepers are NOT always the best go to and in this present generational shift they are viewed as disconnected relics who do not represent the mindset, goals, or community.”
The question was reframed as “The HECC wants to know how to engage students in higher education policy, how should they do that?” Students describe that providing internship credits to work with the HECC board and possibly provide travel stipends for those who live far away could be a way to get underserved students involved in higher education policy. One student who identified as a low-income, student of color, and a first-generation student made the following statement:

“Create positions where students communicate the policy to other students. Be intentional about hiring in diverse communities. Hire student leaders as the face and voice of the policy! SHARE THE INFORMATION & POWER and stop fearing students. Our voice and power is enormous, we are a force to be reckoned with. Why not collaborate with transparency and not with veiled messaging to irrelevant outdated spokespersons.”

Another two students commented:

“...most students believe that they won’t make a difference, and in some cases that’s true. I feel like people go into politics because they have a cause to do so. Our generation isn’t just going to participate in policy making off a whim. I don’t know...I dislike politics and that’s my response as to why I don’t engage in it as often. The only time I would personally do it is if A) It was important to me or B) my sister recommends that I do, which is often why I get involve.”

“I don’t engage in politics unless it’s something that’s important to me. As I see it, when it comes to engaging with politics you need to have a lot of passion and if I don’t have that I feel like I’m wasting my time and the time of those who are probably a lot more passionate than I am. So to engage me, make it something I can relate to and help me understand how I can make a difference.”

Students make it apparent that they do want to engage in the policy process, however, we need creativity on how to engage this new generation of students. Both community leaders and students have described the many barriers they face in higher education. Thus providing space that allows students to explore why engaging in higher education policy and how these policies impact their daily lives, will be critical. Engaging the family, providing leadership development opportunities, or going to postsecondary institutions to introduce students to the HECC, are all viable solutions.

**Conclusion**

As economic, social and political equity are linked to postsecondary achievement, access to a postsecondary education becomes one of the most pressing issues facing higher education today. Oregon is at a crossroads. Even in a time where public support for higher education is eroding, there is a silver lining. Though the HECC’s capacity to enforce a full outreach and
engagement agenda is limited, the principles and values expressed by both community leaders and underserved students, should still be taken into consideration when making decisions on engaging underserved students, community leaders, or underserved populations. Even in this limited capacity, it is imperative to consider the following:

- **Provide an avenue for student voice on HECC policy matters by creating either a student taskforce or subcommittee.**

- **Use qualitative methods to engage both underserved students and community leaders on policy matters affecting higher education.**

- **Continue to actively recruit underserved students in postsecondary institutions to intern with the HECC or the subcommittees.**

- **Engage community organizations that have established relationships with underserved students and communities.**

These target issues may seem intuitive, however, highlighting their importance signals a willingness to cooperate moving forward. In addition to considering these target issue areas, gaps emerged from conversation with both community leaders and underserved students. Some described data reporting issues on underserved students in higher education while others spoke about finding innovative solutions to engaging underserved students. Not all are applicable to the HECC. However, the following are promising statewide policy and program recommendations that other higher education coordinating boards or commissions have undertaken in attempt to do outreach and engagement within their capacity to underserved students and should be consider as legislative concepts or program recommendations:

**Continuing study of minority participation in higher education.** The Texas Higher Education Board collects data and maintains a database relating to the participation of members or racial and ethnic minority groups in any Texas public postsecondary institution, including data relating to minority applications, recruitment, admissions, retention, graduation, and professional licensing at both the undergraduate and graduate level.63

**Explore a “one application” for Oregon’s residents to all public universities.** Postsecondary hopefuls have many decisions to make, including which postsecondary institution to apply to. According to a 2010 New York Times article, 64 “advances in digital technology have created competition for the Common Application, the pioneer of the one app-fits-all concept...” A similar application is Universal College Application. The State of Texas has implemented a related model called “Apply Texas: Many Schools. One Application.” It is a free services created by efforts between the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and the colleges and universities represented on their web site.65 According to their mission statement, “The

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64 Please see http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/07/education/edlife/07zipkin-t.html?pagewanted=all
65 see applytexas.org
goal of the project is to offer a centralized means for both Texas and non-Texas students to apply to many outstanding postsecondary institutions available in Texas.” This allows students the ability to apply to multiple institutions while saving time and money. Additionally, it assists postsecondary institutions in casting a wider net of a diverse pool of applicants. This may help Oregon reach the 40-40-20 goals and falls within the HECC’s equity lens. However, the structure of the THECB is different than that of the HECC’s structure. Yet, there is opportunity to work with the public universities to provide a similar program in Oregon. This will require innovation and active participation between all stakeholders.

**Support college and university recruitment and retention programs for economically disadvantaged, minority and underrepresented student populations.** The Arizona Postsecondary Education Board pursued legislation that requires all public universities under jurisdiction of the board to establish a comprehensive plan to initiate new programs and expand existing student recruitment and retention programs directed at economically disadvantaged, minority, and underrepresented students population.

**Explore innovative technologies to reach underserved students, such as text messages as a strategy to alert students and their families about deadlines for financial aid, registration, and student orientation.** Texting initiatives target students from low-income families—especially those set to become the first to attend a postsecondary institution. The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and the State of Minnesota are running texting pilot programs for students who might not get much academic guidance at home. Non-profits organizations as iMentor in New York sends weekly, customized text to about 500 recent high school graduates and their mentors about steps to complete before enrolling in the fall. In Oregon, the Gear Up program initiated a similar program and uses Facebook as a means to get students to sign-up to get text reminders.

**Ensure that underserve students can access and afford a postsecondary education, through new options such as providing “free two-year” community college or technical education.** The HECC is currently exploring this option. The Lumina foundation as well as the State of Tennessee are proponents of providing free two-years at a community college or a technical institution. Tennessee is the first state to pass legislation on this called the Tennessee Promise program. Students are required to maintain a 2.0 grade average; attend mandatory meetings with a mentor, and do community service. Florida is also considering a similar model. At a time when the tuition cost and financial obligations are increasing for underserved students, this option could be extremely promising for students and aid Oregon in reaching the 40-40-20 goals.

It is highly recommended that the HECC continue to communicate with both community leaders and students. This can be done by using a range of tactics from using qualitative methods, organizing annual statewide public campaigns that both the HECC staff and board

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should attend, having a “submit solutions to fixing higher education” option on the HECC’s website, to promoting innovative solutions to reach the 40-40-20 goals. All these recommendations should be considered in the context of outreaching and engaging community leaders and underserved students and their respective families in Oregon.
Appendix A: Community Leader Questions

Question: What services would be beneficial to underserved students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O &amp; E, Support System</td>
<td>“I feel lucky to work for a university that understands that most of their students are FGS and low-income; and understand the changing demographic. We don’t face barriers outreaching to underserved students like other postsecondary institutions or agencies...they face barriers because they don’t understand the barriers/factors and fail to proactively provide services such as mentorship, advising, accessible information, to the changing demographics.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O &amp; E, Support System</td>
<td>Respondent described that their organization assist underserved students by providing transitioning advice from high school to a postsecondary institution. They provide mentorship &amp; guidance on whether they should attend a technical school or post-secondary education. They make information accessible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support System</td>
<td>“There’s a lack of community or family environment [when underserved students attend a post-secondary institution]. They don’t have the same support system that they had on the reservation. So when they get there, it makes it difficult for them to adjust. What keeps in them school? The ‘I can do it and make an improvement in the broader community’ mentality.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication &amp; Support System Support System</td>
<td>“Talk to the students themselves and talk to them where they are...in their communities or on college campuses but the key to all of this, will be to foster the support system that students need to thrive.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support System</td>
<td>“One of the challenges and is key, is the support system. If the support system for underserved students is not there, student’s do not excel.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: What are the barriers faced by organizations that attempt to outreach or engage underserved students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication &amp; Lack of Representation</td>
<td>“Many times organizations or agencies do not talk to underserved students nor do they talk to community leaders, such as professors or professors of color, who are on the ground working with underserved students. There needs to be a way to support professors of colors and hire more professors of color so that students have their support.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>“Many times, organizations or agencies do not talk to students or communicate with them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication &amp; Representation</td>
<td>&quot;...having not only bi-lingual but also bi-cultural staff that can speak to both students and their families about the root causes that are holding students back from not only staying in school but pursuing a college degree.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>“Students need more help and providing information or outreach to get them the information to get help.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication &amp; Engaging Communities</td>
<td>“As a representative of an agency, I attend many community leaders and make myself visible and available to underserved communities...many do not do this as a form of communication.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication &amp; Engaging Community Leaders</td>
<td>“Organizations or boards don’t communicate with community leaders, such as professors of color or organizers, who are on the ground working with these underserved students.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Themes** | **Answer**
--- | ---
**Education & Funding** | “Funding! We have the plans, the research is behind us, and the energy is there but we just don’t have the funding for programs that have proven to work with underserved students.”
**Education & Funding** | “Developing a diversity outreach plan or recruitment plan is just part of the story. You have to have funding support system established for underserved students.”
**Education & Funding** | “The key to outreach is to spend the money where it shows people care about this.”
**Education & Funding** | “Funding does not go to non-profits or students organizations that are already doing the outreach or have the community partnership. Instead, it goes to more and more research.”
**Education & Funding** | “FUNDING is a big problem for community colleges. We need programs like TRIO.”
**Education & Funding** | “Instead of spending things we don’t need, a little money in programs that work goes a long way.”

**Question:** What can be done to alleviate those barriers?

**Theme** | **Answer**
--- | ---
**Education** | “When they look at the retention rates for PoC’s, it’s extreme. They need a spotlight on this just like there is a spotlight in the K-12 system. They need to accept it because they have good data on it. Publish is it...acknowledge it.”
**Education** | “Some barriers are dual credits. Teachers need to be accredited to provide college credits but at the same trained to work with underserved students.”
**Education** | “...the HECC will probably do a good job...they are focusing on good thing such as Pay It Forward and free community college but we have to deal with the affordability factor.”
**Culture** | “Definitely realizing that different cultures have different needs. With the new 40-40-20 goals, we need to figure out a way to talk to the changing demographics.”
**Education** | “Students don’t do optional...switch to mandatory prep college courses.”
**Education & Change** | “Both the students and postsecondary institutions need to be ready to change. Historically, the academic culture is hard to change but faculty and the curriculum need to incorporate these changes.”
**Representation** | “Have representation at the table when they are drafting these policies.”

**Question:** What are the factors that higher education policy should take into account when attempting to engage/outreach to underserved students?
## Appendix B: Student Questions

Question: Are you familiar with organizations or agencies that provided assistance to underserved students and what sort of assistance did you or currently need the most?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>“Yeah we had consular to help us with the preparation but in my opinion they didn’t know how to prepare us for our futures any more than we did, all they really had to do was make sure we had enough credits to graduate and maybe get into college.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>“…there should be an additional orientation that really helps and assist FGS.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>“Administrative side: They need to be intentional about their mission statement and including language that is affirming and welcoming to underserved students. Faculty: Student expressed the need to have culturally-competent faculty, even if they do multicultural, they need to be trained on how to work with and build relationship with underserved students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>“Peer-to-peer mentorship that focuses on being relational.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship, guidance, &amp; integration</td>
<td>“I see my friends get paralyzed due to the fact that they are not being outreached or engaged in the college setting. For me its not an issue as I focused on integrating myself into the college culture...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>“I wish I had been mentored in high school about college and being the first to attend in the family before entering college. Having a mentor and being able to turn to someone who has also gone through the process of being a first-generation student. Having a little extra help on applying and finding scholarships would have also helped me tons.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>“I always knew that I was going to go to college. My mom told me from a young age that this is something that was going to happen. However, even as minority student, I still had to do a lot of extra work to get the information I needed to make the best decision about how to go to college, when to fill out financial aid stuff and how to get more integrated into the college culture.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>“The public school system does not prepare students how to be college students let alone explain all the process that is involve with getting to be a college student. The cost of tuition was a barrier and not having a mentor nor guidance on how to make the transition form high school to community college then having no guidance to transition from community college to a university.... and now feeling lost on what to do with my future...it’s tough. I’m crying out for help and no one is there.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Practices for Engaging & outreaching to Underserved Students

In this section, an overview of the outreach and engagement practices used by organizations will be provided. All 35 interviews stressed the importance of parent engagement. Each community leader provided approaches to parent and student involvement as well as different practices and strategies that focus on improving communication and relationships between minority parents and students. Overall, many of the community leaders reported using similar practices to successfully engage students and parents, including:

• Valuing parent and student voice and listening to their opinions and helping in various ways to address their concerns about postsecondary institutions;

• Hiring or training staff who are culturally competent and preferably from within the community where they will be working with parents and students;

• Hiring or training faculty who are culturally competent and are able to provide support to students;

• Creating a college-going culture from as early as elementary school by taking students to postsecondary institutional visits, providing four-year plan that allows young students to outline a plan of when they will need to apply to a postsecondary institution, and providing information on how to be a student in an Oregon higher education institution;

• Providing informational sessions in parents’ native language to increase their understanding of the American higher education system, information on the financial aid process, and how to support their “college-going” student while in school (emotionally or financially).

The interviews with community leaders and underserved students had more commonalities than differences in some of the practices used, depending on the population being served. For example, groups working with American Indian and African American/Black communities work to acknowledge the negative experiences with schools in the past, while persuading parents to get more involved in the educational system and encouraging students to continue pursuing a postsecondary career. However, for the Asian and Hispanic/Latino immigrant community, a lot of the work focused familiarizing parents with the American higher educational system. For Hispanic/Latino, African American/Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students, there was emphasis on intensive mentoring on the postsecondary application process, financial aid process, communicating with parents, and providing support while attending a higher education institution. As a result, the following organizations mirror the practices that were highlighted in interviews.
African American/Black Community

In the African American/Black community, both student and parent engagement is about empowering both by building their capacity and knowledge around leadership and advocacy skills and by leveraging partnerships to increase student educational attainment. Common strategies center around building a sense of the community for families, building partnerships with community-based organizations, teaching parents, and youth how to hold elected officials accountable. Efforts are made to educate and help parents understand the importance of parental involvement in their child’s education. For African American/Black students, mentorship, advising, and education on how to tackle oppressive moments in the classroom, are key. Below is an example of two well-established programs that specialize in serving the African American/Black community and their general practices.

*Self Enhancement, Inc.*

This is a community driven led organization whose goal is to equip both parents and students with the knowledge and skills to become proactive and engaging citizens within their community. Students enter SEI in the early stages in their educational career. The practices adopted by this organization are also reflected in other organizations around the state. They take provide a post high school support program and encourage parent involvement in their work. With post high school support, SEI helps students embarking in a higher education career to learn study skills, guidance on the application process for various schools and provide mentorship on the financial aid process. There are also two full time staffers who sole job is to provide guidance to students who are enrolled in a higher education institution. This mentoring and support system is critical to retention of African American/Black students in higher education institutions in Oregon. The support system created by SEI fills the void that many students in interviews alluded to: not having anyone that “looks like me” to talk about oppressive moments in the classroom or to talk about their experience of being African American/Black on campus.

*REAP*

Reaching and Empowering All People (REAP) is dedicated to student success. They believe that students who are given consistent opportunities to demonstrate leadership in relevant, real life experiences that build their skills and confidence by providing leadership development opportunities. They focus on students via two of their programs: 1) Solutions is a program that creates year-round opportunities for student to build upon the strength of their own history and culture. Students learn how to influence and communicate in the broader society through business, civic and educational opportunities; and 2) through their Challenge Academy of Leadership Innovations, which is a five-day leadership experience designed for 7th-12th grade students. The Academy is held on a university campus to create “college-going culture” and to provide students with the vision that “college will happen”.

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Hispanic/Latino Community

Most if not all community leaders echoed the sentiment that parent engagement programs that focus on the Hispanic/Latino community are critical to student’s success in higher education institutions. Most organizations focal point is to build the parent’s capacity to understand their child’s rights and what their responsibilities are as parents in the American higher education system to advocate for their student’s child educational attainment. Many organizations also focus on serving the immigrant families, who often times, live in high poverty areas with multiple social problems, including low performing public schools. Any organization must recognize that Hispanics/Latinos are a very diverse group of people coming from different countries of origin and, therefore, have varying socio-political experiences, and variations in demographics, culture, history, and language. Organizations also acknowledge that having staff that is representative of the community that they are serving is critical to uptake of their services as well.

CAUSA

Causa is an advocacy organization that focuses on uplifting the Hispanic/Latino community through leadership development trainings, advocacy training, and lobbying. While this non-profit does not solely focus on higher education policy, their engagement and outreach strategies for the Hispanic/Latino population are to be admired. For the 2013 legislative session, they were able to tap into the energy of college going students to put pressure on the legislature to pass Tuition Equity and access to driver’s license. This energy and passion surprised many and proved that the Hispanic/Latino community can influence policy making in Oregon. The question then becomes, how do other organizations inspire the same passion in other policy arenas? The answer is simple: Causa has spent numerous hours in the each of the Hispanic/Latino communities around different part of Oregon, listening to their priorities and concerns. They have hired organizers that are themselves Hispanic/Latino to build trust among the community and provide all literature in both English and Spanish. They use social media to convey how they are going to help uplift Hispanic/Latinos around Oregon. Additionally, any information sessions are provided in both English and Spanish. They have also been able to train Hispanic/Latino organizers that are involved with Movimiento Estudiantel Chicano de Atlzan (MEChA) and other multicultural centers to tap into student energy and help push their agenda.

The Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber

The Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber has provided scholarship opportunities to Hispanic/Latino students since 1994. Their focused is on Hispanic/Latino business and economic development. In order to increase the economic vitality of the Hispanic/Latino community, the Chamber sees education as an economic investment and driver. As such, they have provided Hispanic/Latino students all over Oregon with scholarships to pursue their postsecondary aspirations.
Adelante Mujeres

Adelante Mujeres is Hispanic/Latina organization from Washington County. They provide civic engagement training to Latinas and Latino men on how to be civically engaged in the policy process. During the testimonies on the restoration of driver’s license, Adelante Mujeres along with Causa, mobilized, trained, and educated the community on how to provide testimony and how to lobby legislators.

The Asian and Pacific Islander Community

Parent engagement is a new concept to the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) communities. Many API families heavily invest in education but parents are not engaged in their child’s education. Many API parents operate under the notion that they do not have to become involved in their child’s education because they are in a “good school”. Additionally, classroom education is not the norm for many API families in their native country or region. Thus many outreach and engagement practices are geared towards parents of API students and these include education on the American higher educational system.

The IRCO Asian Family Center

The Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization’s (IRCO) Asian Family center provides culturally specific programing for Portland Asian and Pacific Islander communities. The center was established in 1994 and provides multilingual-based services such as parent education and youth services. The center has intentionally hired staff that is able to relate and build relationships with API community. Events, communication, trainings, are all geared towards uplifting the API community in Portland. The focus is on Portland as it houses the largest API community in the state.

APANO

The Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO) is a statewide, grassroots organization that works toward uniting Asian and Pacific Islanders for social justice. They have intentionally increased the profile of the API community, which has led to many successful policy wins, such as Tuition Equity to the establishment of the Jade District in Portland. Many of their organizing tools work towards empowering the API community to make positive policy changes that not only helps the API community, but enriches the larger community as well.

American Native & Alaska Native Communities

Outreach and engagement to the American Indian and Alaska Native populations is grounded in knowing and understanding their unique languages, cultures, and issues related to tribal or Native identity. Family and student engagement is rooted in understanding the educational and historical experiences, and the struggles faced by the American Indian and Alaska Native community. Organizations work to eliminate fear of retaliation, discrimination and stereotypes that the larger society has about the American Indian and Alaska Native community.
NAYA

Parent volunteers founded the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA) in 1974. The organization is a true wraparound services organization providing assistance to low-income families, to providing assistance with housing, education, and health services. Specifically for postsecondary education, NAYA provides college and career services to increase the number of Native American Youth in higher education. They offer services such as how to prepare youth for a postsecondary career, career exploration, school searches, resources for standardized test preparation, admission, and scholarships assistance. Their Early College Academy also promotes “hands-on, culturally, relevant, student-center learning environment”. They provide dual credit opportunities for grades 9 through 12th.

National Indian Education Association

The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) supports traditional Native culture and values, to enable Native learners to become contributing members of their communities, to promote Native control of educational institutions, and to improve educational opportunities and resources for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiians in the U.S. Their general practices include hosting a national education annual convention to link over 3,000 Native educators, parents, and communities to provide resources, best practices and success stories. NIEA also hosts a legislative summit to provide opportunities to receive advocacy training, policy and visits to the nation’s capital.

Appendix D: Effective outreach programs in K-12

Oregon TRIO

TRIO Programs are federally funded outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. Oregon TRIO includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate programs. TRIO also includes a training program for directors and staff of TRIO projects. The grant recipients, depending on the specific program, are institutions of higher education, public and private agencies and organizations including community-based organizations with experience in serving disadvantaged youth in postsecondary institutions and student implementation services. In Oregon, the TRIO programs include the Education Talent Search, Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science, Veteran’s Upward Bound, Educational Opportunity Centers, Student Support Services, the Ronald McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program, and TRIO Training Grants.

67 http://nayapdx.org/services/early-college-academy/
Portland College Possible

College possible strives to make college admission possible for low-income students through an intensive curriculum of coaching and support. They target high school students and coach them on how to prepare for a postsecondary career. They provide after school session, for two hours twice a week. The organization hires AmeriCorps fellows to guide the students through their postsecondary education. AmeriCorps fellows allow underserved students to have young mentors that they can relate to. The AmeriCorps fellows serve for a year. In the academic year of 2013-2014, the Portland site served 985 students in college planning workshops. They served 140 low-income high school juniors whose ACT score increased by 21%. Additionally, they had 85 low-income college students enrolled in 20 colleges across the nation. They estimate that by the end of September of this year, they will have serve 300 low-income high school juniors on how to prepare for a postsecondary career.

Oregon Gear-Up

Gear Up, which stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, is funded by the U.S Department of Education to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education by providing states and local community-education partnerships six-to-seven year grants to offer support services to high-poverty, middle and high schools. OUS launched Oregon GEAR-UP in 2002 and has since worked with 36 schools in rural communities. The program serves rural low-income students and offers college readiness resources to all of Oregon’s low-income middle and high school students. An expansion of this program should be considered.

Eastern Promise

Eastern Promise (EP) is located in Eastern Oregon, where there is a high population of both Hispanic/Latino and rural students. EP creates a “college-going culture” in the high schools by providing students the opportunity to participate in college-level courses and earn credits or certificates while still in high school. This not only translates to financial savings for the family but also provides a support system for students who need extra assistance. Best practices include building relationships with the local schools to be able to offer their program to students. The benefits of this program are that it provides increased access for underserved high school students interested in earning college credits. EP focuses on changing the behavior of the student from negative to positive and provides support to increase the student’s confidence to transition to a higher education institution.

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68 College Possible executive director, Suzanne Geary, provided the data.
Appendix E: National Best Practices

The opportunity arose during community leader interviews to ask about national best practices that they have identified and applied. Many explained that there is no “one size fits all” and national best practices, per say, are not written in stone. However, a few community leaders highlighted models that they use in their outreach and engagement practices. Some spoke of theories while others spoke of national conferences to attend and learn from others. The following, while not a comprehensive list, provides information on national best practices or models highlighted by community leaders.

The National Model of American School of Counselor Association

The American School of Counselor Association (ASCA) is a framework for school counseling programs. Though this specifically targets high school counselors and their development, many community leaders highlighted that they have applied ASCA methods in higher education. The ASCA has a comprehensive school-counseling program driven by data and based on standards in academic, career and personal/social development, promote and enhance the learning process for all students. The ASCA has four components:

1. Ensuring equitable access to rigorous education for all students.
2. Identifying the knowledge and skills all students will acquire.
3. Systematic service delivery to students through data-driven decision making.
4. Services provided by a state-credentialed professional school counselor.

The ASCA recognizes that effective school counseling is a collaborative effort between the counselors, families, and other educations and recommends a counselor to student ration of 1 to 250.

The National Association for College Admission Counseling

The National Association for College Admission Counseling is an organization that provides professional development to counselors serving students as they make choices about pursuing a postsecondary education. In their longitudinal study, Preparing Students for College: What High Schools Are Doing and how their Actions Influence Ninth Graders College Attitude, Aspirations, and Plans, they examined counselors time, attitudes, and actions and student’s interactions with counselors. They found that 50% of the 944 public and private high school surveyed for the study reported a counselor ratio of more than 1 to 25; 50% meet or exceed the national standard. The analysis concluded that schools with high “college-going” rates were significantly more likely than other schools to have counseling staff that spent more than 50% of their time on postsecondary counseling. About half of all high school counselors spent 21% or more of their time on assisting students with college readiness, selection and applications. Only 18% of ninth-grade students had spoken with counselor about college—a lower proportion than had spoken with a friend or family. 69

69 Radford (2013)
American Association of Colleges and Universities

The American Association of college and Universities (AAC&U) is a leading association focusing on improving undergraduate education and advancing liberal education. AAC&U developed diversity and inclusion initiatives to steer postsecondary institutions. These include advancing diversity and equity in higher education, and the best educational practices for an increasingly diverse population. For example, both Eastern Oregon University and Oregon State University are members of AAC&U and have applied many of the initiatives developed by AAC&U. AAC&U promotes diversity as a fundamental goal of higher education. They see diversity as vital to democracy, democratic workforce and to the global position. AAC&U has been very vocal about the college completion movement's seemingly inattention to or lack of understanding about academic quality: “The real message seems to be ‘more degrees, cheaper and faster’ with no questions about what the degree represents.”

To ensure that quality metrics are centralized along with the productivity metrics commonly referred to among higher education leaders, AAC&U has begun to: 1) Bring clarity to learning outcomes; 2) ensure that all students experience high-impact educational practices; and 3) develop and require the use of meaningful and authentic assessments. Similarly, the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) – created by leaders from AAC&U, IHEP, Kent State University, and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems in partnership with Lumina Foundation– is designed to help institutional leaders and faculty define learning outcomes and the associated competencies. From an institutional perspective, gaining clarity on student outcomes and learning levels will be of tremendous value to enhancing quality. From a student perspective, the DQP can facilitate student access and progression within and across institutions with greater ease. The DQP also responds to employer’s pleas to increase the workforce readiness of its college graduates, as it focuses on the subject matter and applied learning competencies that employers desperately need.

National Conference on Race & Ethnicity

The National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE) is an annual conference launched by the Southwest Center for Human Relations Studies to address racism in higher education. The conference is a resource for postsecondary institutions, providing an annual multicultural forum, that speaks on the most comprehensive issues of race and ethnicity in higher education. A series of workshops are provided to professionals in higher education on how to tackle complex racial and ethnic relations.

Council of Education

The Council for Opportunity in Education is dedicated to expanding postsecondary opportunities for low income, first-generation, veterans, and students with disabilities

79 Schneider 2012
71 Lumina Foundation for Education 2011
throughout the U.S. The council specifically works with colleges, universities, and agencies that host TRIO programs to help low-income students enter a postsecondary institution and graduate.

*College Board*

The College Board is not-for-profit organization that was established in 1900. Their outreach and engagement practices include three national conferences centered on diversity. This allows practitioners to share best practices on outreaching and engaging underserved students. They heavily rely on technology to communicate the postsecondary process to students and use student stories about their struggles and how they overcame them.
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