

# The Game Changers

Are states implementing  
the best reforms to get more  
college graduates?



**COMPLETE COLLEGE** AMERICA

## 33 STATES + DC, ONE MISSION

With a dynamic alliance, our country is poised to significantly boost college completion and close attainment gaps.

Four years ago, Complete College America reached out to governors throughout the country and asked them to join our Alliance of States — a network that would make challenging commitments to substantially boost college completion and increase student success. Seventeen governors immediately accepted this call to action, and since that time, the Complete College America Alliance of States has doubled in size.

Over the course of our work, we have conducted detailed research, compiled and evaluated extensive volumes of data, and sought out best practices from around the nation. Overall, public awareness has expanded dramatically around the straightforward and staggering fact that America faces a college completion crisis.

In our groundbreaking reports *Time is the Enemy* and *Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere*, we have outlined some of the most pressing challenges facing today's students and pointed to the structural deficiencies that perpetuate abysmal graduation rates and persistent attainment gaps. Our joint statement on the principles for transforming remediation with the Charles A. Dana Center, Education Commission of the States, and Jobs for the Future has inspired transformative state policy and legislation at scale, making clear that these are solvable problems.

Taken together, this important work has shed light on the consequences of inaction and spurred movement from many states and higher education leaders who are getting serious about college completion. But to maintain our economic recovery and ensure the future financial strength of our states and country, we must tighten our focus and add more clarity to our advocacy, pushing harder to quicken the pace and broaden the scale of reform.

Admittedly, our mission is difficult — requiring an analysis of every facet of higher education structure and delivery. More important, success demands the sober recognition that, at the most basic level, what we are intending to accomplish is a reinvention of centuries-old institutions that now must change to help ensure the success of students who have rarely succeeded in the past.

While immense challenges lie before us, proven strategies that lead to real and lasting results are available — methods that not only create the conditions for success but also provide a pathway for how we get there.

When it comes to college completion, our nation can't afford to wait any longer. Now is the time for Game Changers.

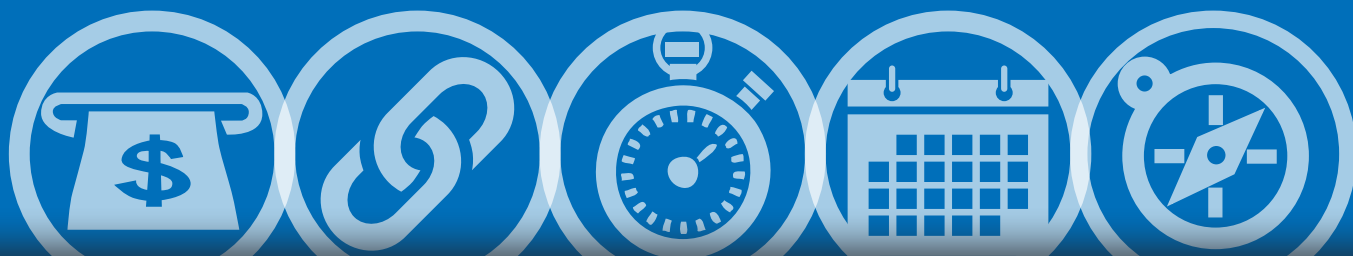
**October 2013**

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## GOVERNORS WHO GET IT

The progress we have made thus far, as well as our future success, is possible because of the dynamic and growing Alliance of States, the governors who get it, the higher education leaders who recognize the urgency of this work, and the impatient reformers who know this is about the future of this country.

- Governor Mike Beebe (Arkansas)
- Governor John Hickenlooper (Colorado)
- Governor Dan Malloy (Connecticut)
- Governor Rick Scott (Florida)
- Governor Nathan Deal (Georgia)
- Governor Neil Abercrombie (Hawaii)
- Governor Butch Otter (Idaho)
- Governor Pat Quinn (Illinois)
- Governor Mike Pence (Indiana)
- Governor Steve Beshear (Kentucky)
- Governor Bobby Jindal (Louisiana)
- Governor Paul LePage (Maine)
- Governor Martin O'Malley (Maryland)
- Governor Deval Patrick (Massachusetts)
- Governor Mark Dayton (Minnesota)
- Governor Phil Bryant (Mississippi)
- Governor Jay Nixon (Missouri)
- Governor Steve Bullock (Montana)
- Governor Brian Sandoval (Nevada)
- Governor Susana Martinez (New Mexico)
- Governor John Kasich (Ohio)
- Governor Mary Fallin (Oklahoma)
- Governor John Kitzhaber (Oregon)
- Governor Tom Corbett (Pennsylvania)
- Governor Lincoln Chafee (Rhode Island)
- Governor Dennis Daugaard (South Dakota)
- Governor Bill Haslam (Tennessee)
- Governor Rick Perry (Texas)
- Governor Gary Herbert (Utah)
- Governor Peter Shumlin (Vermont)
- Governor Earl Ray Tomblin (West Virginia)
- Governor Scott Walker (Wisconsin)
- Governor Matt Mead (Wyoming)



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# THE GAME CHANGERS



## Performance Funding

Pay for performance, not just enrollment. Use the Complete College America and National Governors Association metrics to tie state funding to student progression through programs and completion of degrees and certificates. Include financial incentives to encourage the success of low-income students and the production of graduates in high-demand fields.



## Corequisite Remediation

Default many more unprepared students into college-level gateway courses with mandatory, just-in-time instructional support. Combine reading and writing instruction. Align mathematics to programs of study, matching the curriculum to real-world career needs. For many more unprepared students, provide remedial help parallel to highly structured coursework.



## Full-Time is 15

Incentivize students to attend full-time and ensure that full-time means 15 credits per semester. Use banded tuition so 15 credits per semester cost students no more than 12 credits. Cap degree credit requirements (120 for bachelor's and 60 for associate) to ensure degrees can be completed on time. Ensure college credits can be transferred.



## Structured Schedules

Help working students balance jobs and school by using structured scheduling of classes to add predictability to their busy lives — doing so enables many more students to attend college full-time, shortening their time to completion.



## Guided Pathways to Success

Enabled by technology, default all students into highly structured degree plans, not individual courses. Start students in a limited number of “meta majors,” which narrow into majors. Map out every semester of study for the entire program, and guarantee that milestone courses will be available when needed. Use built-in early warning systems to alert advisers when students fall behind to ensure efficient intervention.

**COMPLETE  
COLLEGE  
AMERICA**

# For more graduates, it's time for Game Changers.

Double the number of remedial students successfully completing gateway courses. Triple the graduation rates for students transferring to four-year institutions with associate degrees. Quadruple the successful completion of career certificate programs. In a time when only about half of today's college students graduate and when our nation faces a skills gap that holds us back and threatens our future — we need results like these more than ever.

Devastating realities about our current higher education system have been uncovered. Despite much progress in increasing access to colleges and universities, the system has failed to increase student success. The result: American higher education costs too much, takes too long, and graduates too few.

Thanks to extensive research, we know the obstacles to student success: poorly designed and delivered remedial courses, a culture that rewards enrollment rather than completion, broken credit transfer policies, overwhelming and unclear choices, and a system out of touch with the needs of students who must often balance work and family with their coursework.

**It's clear: We need a breakthrough in higher education.** The times demand Game Changer strategies that will permanently bend college completion rates upward and finally close the gaps — strategies that will produce positive results far above the status quo.

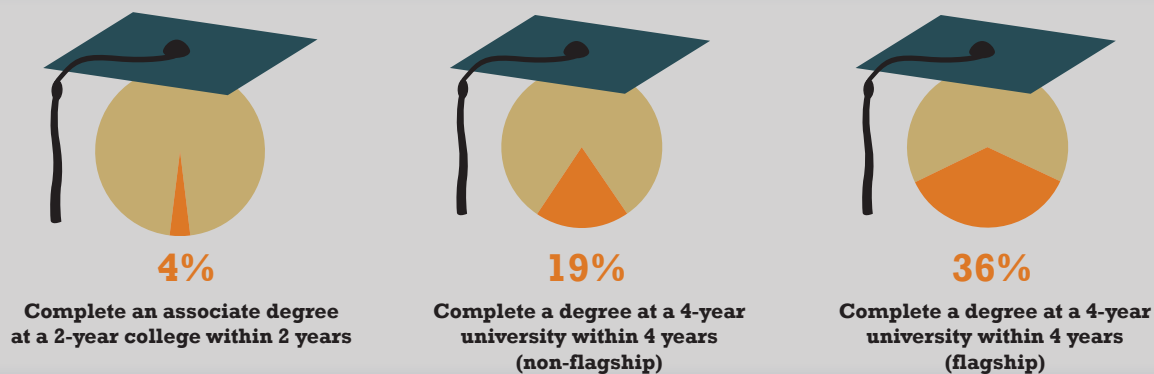
There's much reason for optimism: Evidence can be found in the many governors around the country who have committed to making college completion a priority, in state capitols where legislation is focusing in on the challenges facing today's students, and on campuses where best practices are taking hold and yielding big results.

But strategies can be Game Changers only if they are deployed at scale. Every college campus and classroom must experience their impact. All of the higher education reforms done to this point have prepared us for this moment, and now it's time to make the big moves.

This analysis addresses a single, vital question: Are states implementing the best reforms to get more college graduates?

The Game Changer strategies necessary for success are proven. The way forward to closing achievement and skills gaps is clear. All that remains is a question of will.

## A NATIONAL PROBLEM: Too few graduate on time.





## GAME CHANGER

# Performance Funding

**25 states are implementing performance funding**

Many states are using taxpayer money to establish **incentives for more student progress and success** — creating the conditions for other vital reforms to take hold.

In the past, taxpayers in most states have supported higher education based on one headcount: the number of students enrolled on campus on or around the 12th day of the semester. To suggest that U.S. colleges and universities didn't care about student attendance on the other 364 days wouldn't be fair. But it's certainly reasonable to charge that there were few financial incentives to do so.

As one higher education leader publicly admitted, "All we really cared about was whether our students showed up on day 12." His state — like more than two dozen others — is implementing performance-based funding for higher education. And so must all states.

Paying for desired outcomes isn't a new concept. But taxpayers have only paid for one result: enrollment. To achieve the highly educated population the United States needs to ensure a strong economy, more is needed than student posteriors in seats. It has been said that doing so means focusing on the wrong end of the student!

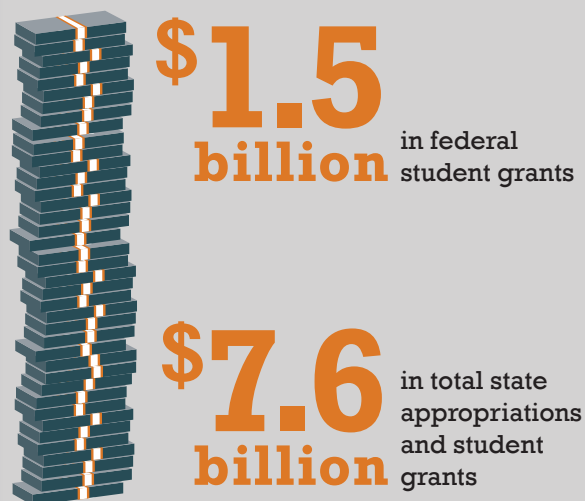
U.S. students must make steady progress through college and must graduate in a reasonable amount of time. And these additional desired results must be tied to higher education funding.

As soon as practicable, institutions should receive state funding — built into their base budgets — based on factors such as credit accumulation and degree completion. But colleges and universities must also be rewarded

for maintaining a commitment to student enrollment — ensuring that the mutually important objectives of access, progress, and success are equally valued.

Performance-based funding on its own will not guarantee more college graduates. But it is an essential Game Changer strategy to ensure the necessary conditions exist for other reforms to succeed. Simply put, money focuses minds.

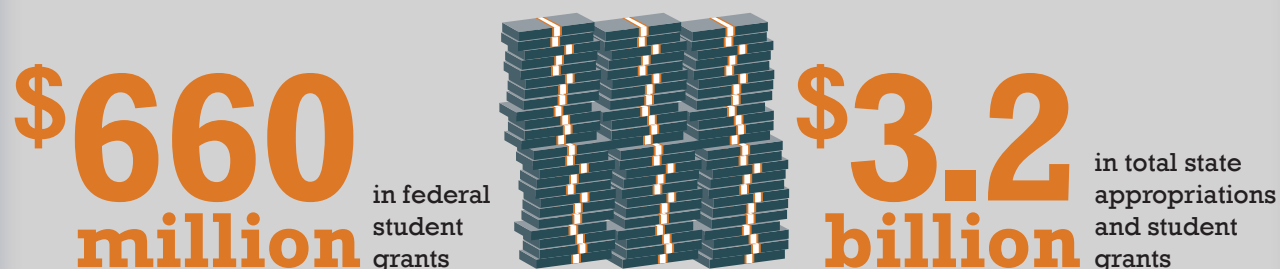
### THE COST OF DROPOUTS: Taxpayers lose more than \$9 billion at 4-year universities.



Source: American Institutes of Research, *Finishing the First Lap: The Cost of First Year Attrition in America's Four-Year Colleges and Universities*, October 2010. Numbers are cumulative cost of first-year dropouts over five years.

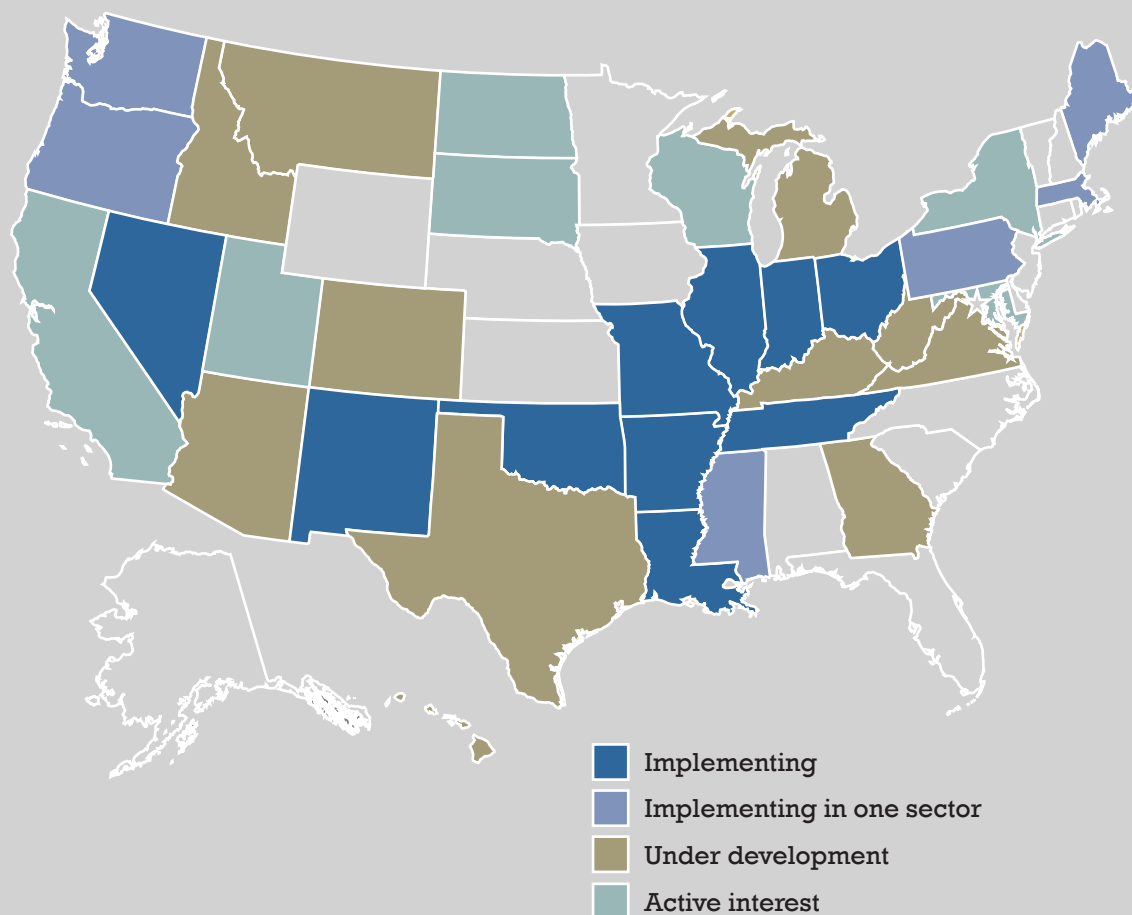


## Dropouts cost taxpayers almost \$4 billion at 2-year colleges.



Source: American Institutes of Research, *The Hidden Costs of Community Colleges*, October 2011. Numbers are cumulative cost of first-year dropouts over five years.

## Performance funding is sweeping America.



Source: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, *Outcomes-Based Funding: The Wave of Implementation*, prepared by Dennis P. Jones for Complete College America, Sept. 9, 2013.





## DO THIS: Pay for Performance



### STATUS Twenty-five states have either implemented performance

funding or are in the process of doing so. This Game Changer strategy is sweeping the nation, signaling the high priority many states are placing on achieving increased student progress and success. Performance funding creates the conditions for reform and incentivizes statewide deployment of other strategies that boost college completion.



### THE ESSENTIALS

Instead of paying colleges for how many students they enroll, use performance funding to reward student progress and degree completion. Implement new funding models that tie funding to outcomes, thereby providing incentives for advancing and graduating students, not just enrolling them.

State appropriations now typically are driven by enrollment with funding based on the number of students enrolled near the beginning of the academic term (also known as the census or count date). As a result, colleges have a financial incentive to boost enrollment at the start of the term, rather than make sure students successfully complete classes and earn degrees. That's backward.



### PROOF POINT

**Ten states have performance funding programs in place. Six states have implemented performance funding in one sector. Ten states are currently developing their plans to adopt performance funding.**

Start with the end in mind, and reward success. Specific implementation steps include:

- **Begin with a small number of explicit, easy-to-understand metrics** that are laser focused on completion and specific priorities for improvement.
- **Ensure performance funding metrics represent the most critical data points** to improve certificate and degree completion, such as improvement in the *number* of annual certificates and degrees produced (not graduation rates), improvement in the number of “on-time” completions, and improvement in the number of students successfully transferring from community colleges to four-year universities.
- **Provide funding based on the number of courses completed** rather than attempted (or simply change the count date on the current enrollment formulas from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester).
- **Level the playing field to include incentives for completion gains among hard-to-reach groups,** especially low-income and under-represented populations. Also include incentives for college certificates and degrees that not only provide trained workers for current industry needs in the state, but also assist in attracting new employers (e.g., science, technology, engineering, and math [STEM] fields).
- **To help sustain support, start with a modest percentage of performance funding** of 5 percent or more — built into base budgets — then compound it over time.





### PERFORMANCE FUNDING AT WORK

Ten states currently incorporate performance-based funding in their higher education systems. These are some of the best approaches:



**Tennessee** has implemented the most aggressive performance-based funding model — with 100 percent of state higher education funding allocation. The state introduced performance funding with the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010. Performance measures include student retention, degree attainment, and completion of remedial courses. Tennessee weights adults older than 25 and low-income students more heavily, and funding formulas are adjusted to address differences between community colleges and universities.



**Ohio** has used performance funding since 2008, and this year the state implemented changes to strengthen it. Governor John Kasich and the Ohio Higher Education Funding Commission have tied 100 percent of state appropriations to student progress and success, thus ending all allocations based on enrollment. Under the new legislation, funding is equally portioned between course and degree completions with special weighting for the progress and success of at-risk and STEM students. Starting in 2015, community colleges will no longer receive state support based on student headcounts and will shift all funding to a mixture of course completions, degree and certificate attainment, and identified success points, one of them being the successful transfer of students to universities. Community colleges will also be studying at-risk student factors, which will also receive additional weighting in the formula as an incentive for their success. So-called stop-loss protections against funding cuts for inadequate institutional performance will be removed for universities and branch campuses in 2015 and for community colleges the same year, thereby ensuring that high-performing universities and community colleges reap the full financial benefits of their successful reforms.



**Indiana's** performance funding formula has evolved since 2003 to prioritize overall degree completion, on-time completion, the success of at-risk students, and the production of credentials that support Indiana's economy. The current performance metrics fall into three main categories: completion, progress, and productivity. (1) The completion metrics include overall degree completion, degrees earned by low-income students, and high-impact degrees in STEM-related fields that are aligned to state needs. (2) The progress metrics include remediation success and persistence incentives as students successfully pass key gateway college-level courses and reach set credit completion milestones. (3) The productivity metrics reward increases in on-time graduation rates and improvements on a metric defined by each college. Indiana allocated 5 percent (about \$61 million annually) of overall state support for institutions to performance funding in the 2011–13 biennial budget. It is anticipated that Indiana will increase the percentage of performance dollars to 6 percent and 7 percent in 2014 and 2015.

*Sources: Center for American Progress, Performance-Based Funding of Higher Education: A Detailed Look at Best Practices in Six States, 2012; National Conference of State Legislatures, "Performance-Based Funding for Higher Education," State Activity Details, [www.ncsl.org/issues-research/educ/performance-funding.aspx](http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/educ/performance-funding.aspx).*



## GAME CHANGER

# Corequisite Remediation

**1.7 million  
students need  
remediation**

For far too many U.S. college students,  
college begins — and often ends — in **remediation**.

These dismal results have been the norm for decades. The 1.7 million students entering college each year condemned to this broken system aren't the only ones harmed: In 2012 alone, **states and students spent more than \$3 billion on remedial courses**.

If ever there was a need for a Game Changer strategy in higher education, transforming remediation is surely it. Defenses of the status quo should be dismissed out of hand.

Coordinated statewide action is required now. Too many students are being lost each year in traditional remediation approaches that simply do not work.

But, to be crystal clear, improving remediation outcomes cannot come at the expense of access to higher education. To attain the numbers of college graduates the United States needs to compete, the doors of its colleges and universities must remain open to all. Universal access to the opportunity to

build a better life is not only a societal value but also an economic imperative.

Fundamental to the success of any remediation reform is this: Just as colleges and universities accept tuition from students — and the taxpayer support that subsidizes them — they must equally accept an obligation to help students succeed in college. For too many years, higher education has considered its job finished when new students are enrolled. After all, it professed, college students are adults who should be capable of finding their way to graduation day.

That has allowed failure rates to persist for remedial students — and a failure to recognize the indisputable fact that most students who start in remediation never graduate. Thankfully, not all adopted this mindset, and as a result, a Game Changer strategy has emerged that has produced remarkable, proven benefits. We call it **corequisite remediation**.

**Remedial students graduate at about half the rate of their college-ready peers — rates that are already far too low.**

### Associate degree completion (2-year colleges)

**In 3 years**



**20%**

College ready



**9%**

Requiring remediation

**In 4 years**



**26%**

College ready



**14%**

Requiring remediation



## Too few remedial students make it through college-level gateway courses at 2-year colleges.

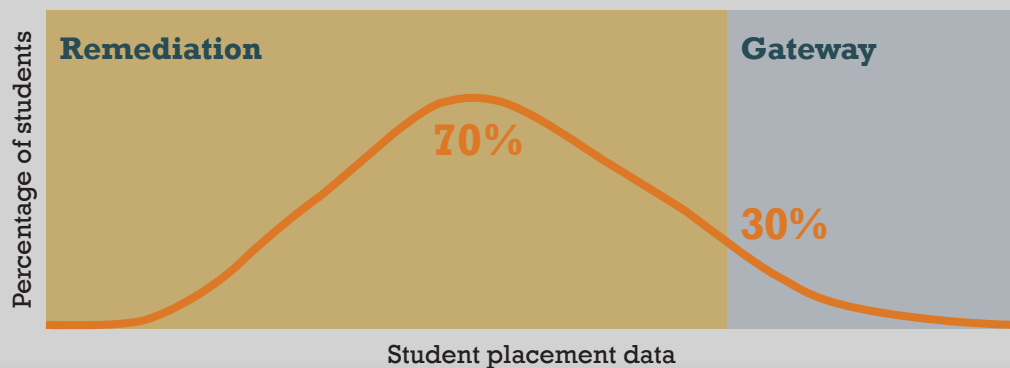


**68%** DON'T complete their gateway English course (2-year colleges)

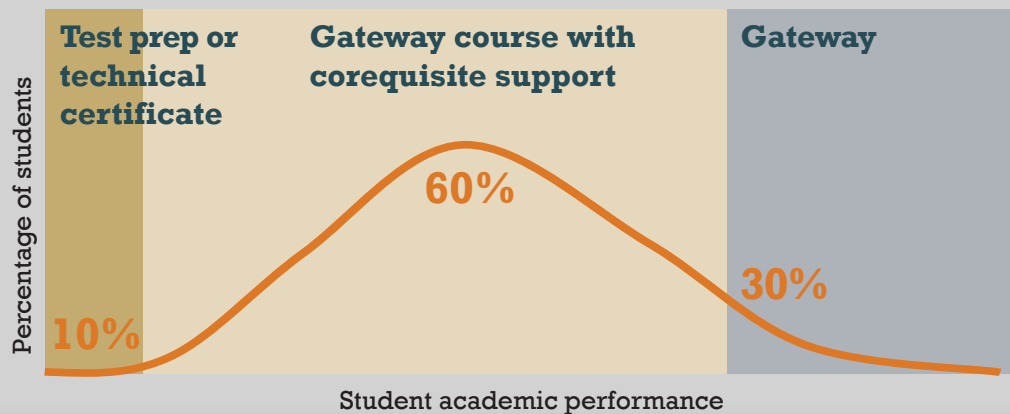


**75%** DON'T complete their gateway math course (2-year colleges)

## A single cut score condemns too many students to traditional remediation.



## A placement range, rather than a single cut score, would allow many, many more students to enter college-level courses with support.



## **DO THIS: Provide Remediation as a Corequisite**

**! STATUS** In 2012, Complete College America, Jobs for the Future, the Education Commission of the States, and the Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin issued a joint statement, *Core Principles for Transforming Remedial Education*, calling for the immediate adoption of proven strategies.

### **✓ THE ESSENTIALS**

It's time these approaches become required practices on every campus in the United States.

**■ Make enrollment in college-level courses the default for many more students.** Research has shown that many more students can succeed in college-level gateway courses with additional support than are currently placed into them. By making these courses the default placement for more students, colleges are left to determine why students shouldn't start in college-level courses instead of why they should be blocked from them.

**■ Use a placement range, not a single cut score.** High-stakes placement exams have been proven to be poor predictors of college readiness, unnecessarily sending thousands of students into remediation each year.

Instead, use a placement range to start most underprepared students in college-level courses with corequisite academic support, within which 75 percent or more of those students can succeed. In essence, establish two cut scores: one that provides direct entry into standard college courses and another that signals very low level of readiness for college work, even with corequisite assistance.

Multiple measures should be used to provide a complete understanding of student ability. Students should also be given the opportunity to prepare for placement exams with practice tests and prep sessions.

**■ Align mathematics to programs of study.** Leading mathematicians are clear on the issue — college algebra has one purpose: calculus. Therefore, placement in algebra should not be the required mathematics for all when statistics or quantitative literacy would be more appropriate for many programs of study.

**■ Integrate needed support in college-level gateway courses.** Start college students in college courses, not more high school. Deliver any needed remediation as a corequisite alongside full-credit, college-level courses, not as a prerequisite to them. Depending on the needs of students, three methods are most effective:

**■ Single-semester corequisite** approaches deliver remediation to students enrolled in traditional single-semester, college-level gateway courses. Needed academic help can be provided by **mandatory** attendance in tutoring sessions or computer labs — or by simply adding more time on task by extending ordinary three-hour gateway classes to four or five hours instead.

**■ One-course pathways** stretch common single-semester gateway courses over two semesters instead, benefitting students in need of more academic help while ensuring full credit that counts toward degrees. Remedial help is delivered in a just-in-time manner throughout the year.

**■ Parallel remediation** is effective for students enrolled in career technical or applied degree programs. Any academic shortcomings are addressed in connection to the program of study, so needed English and math remediation do not become obstacles to beginning coursework. This approach is proven to work for those with the greatest remedial needs.



### TRANSFORMING REMEDIATION



The **Texas State University-San Marcos FOCUS Program** allows students with math placement test scores in a range below but near the “cut score” to enroll simultaneously in remedial math and one of two options — college algebra or college algebra with statistics — depending on their academic and career needs. The students also receive two hours of tutoring each week on the day the class meets. Students who successfully complete the courses receive three credit hours for remedial math and three semester hours for either College Algebra or Elementary Statistics. Students may also receive one additional lab or course credit for completing the tutoring requirement. Among the FOCUS pilot participants, 88 percent in summer 2008 and 74 percent in summer 2012 completed college algebra with a grade of A, B, or C during their first semester of enrollment.

The **New Mathways Project**, a joint initiative of the **Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin** and the **Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC)**, is a statewide approach to improving student success and completion by reforming developmental education. The initiative includes the development and implementation of a set of accelerated mathematics courses — matching the appropriate kind of math to modern programs of study. Built-in support systems help students more quickly earn college-level credits in rigorous mathematics in comparison to traditional remediation approaches.

The 10-year partnership between the Dana Center and TACC offers the opportunity to work directly with the state’s 50 community colleges, which have agreed to provide seed money to develop the initiative, and it enables collaboration on articulation, placement, and accreditation policies.



The very successful **Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology** — which regularly produce graduation rates of 75 percent or more — use ACT WorkKeys to pinpoint students’ academic shortcomings. Mandatory computer labs run parallel with the highly structured curriculum to remediate students to meet the foundational skills needs of their programs of study. In this way, even unprepared students graduate on time.

At **Austin Peay State University**, students who previously required completion of non-university level developmental courses now enroll in Structured Assistance, enhanced sections of gateway courses in which students receive additional support through classroom instruction and workshops. The program is achieving powerful results with 78 percent of students successfully completing gateway courses in quantitative reasoning and 65 percent in statistics.



The **Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)**, which originated at the Community College of Baltimore County, is an innovative approach to basic writing programs that accelerates students through their remedial writing course and their gateway course in one semester. This form of corequisite remediation has led to more than double the success rates for students with 74 percent successfully completing gateway courses in English. ALP is showing great promise and has now been implemented on 97 campuses around the nation. Statewide programs are under way in Arkansas, Indiana, and Michigan.



# GAME CHANGER

## Full-Time is 15

**4%**  
graduate  
on time<sup>1</sup>

For every 100 U.S. university students, barely more than a third graduate on time from flagship campuses and fewer than one of five from non-flagship campuses. **At community colleges, almost no one graduates on time.**

The consequences are clear when so few students finish college on schedule. For starters, the longer it takes to graduate, the more it costs students and the taxpayers who subsidize them. An extra *semester* of college costs the typical university student more than \$4,300 and a student at a two-year college almost \$1,500 — which is often tacked on top of student loans.<sup>2</sup>

Wasting money isn't the only consequence of running the clock. The longer it takes to graduate, the more life gets in the way. As the calendar turns, students find their lives increasingly taken over by jobs, relationships, marriages, children, and mortgages. These happy circumstances incrementally rob more and more time and attention from studying and progress toward academic goals. So, the more life gets in the way, the less likely graduation becomes.

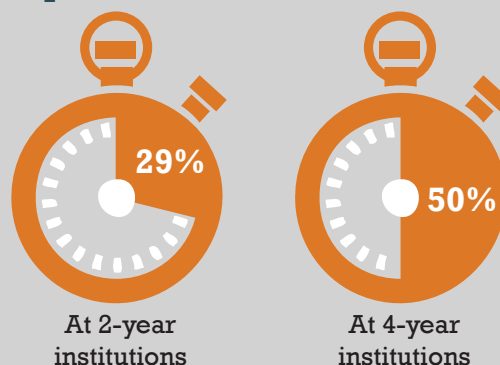
For too many students, the end results are a few years of courses, no degrees, and often crushing debt: It is estimated that college dropouts today carry somewhere between \$5,700 and \$9,300 in student loans, depending on whether they attended a two- or four-year institution.<sup>3</sup> The lasting financial burdens of their failure become suffocating obstacles to success as dropouts discover they cannot qualify for good wages and rewarding careers.

The corrosive effects of lengthy time to degree cascade across the economy: Fewer U.S. citizens earn the incomes necessary to buy homes, cars, and other necessities or even cover the basic costs of educating their children or providing their health care. Critical skill gaps widen, employers resist creating new jobs or relocate altogether — and the nation falls behind.

Time is the enemy of college completion. The nation simply cannot attain the college graduates it needs to be competitive without adopting policies to significantly cut time to degree and increase full-time enrollment at a minimum of 15 credits per semester. Consider these sobering facts:

### Most students are NOT taking the credits needed to graduate on time.

#### Students taking 15+ credits per semester



Source: Postsecondary Analytics, How Full-Time are "Full-Time" Students?, prepared for Complete College America, October 2013.

1 Graduation rate at community colleges.

2 College Board. "Average Published Undergraduate Charges by Sector, 2012-13." Table 1A. Retrieved September 30, 2013, from <http://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/average-published-undergraduate-charges-sector-2012-13>.

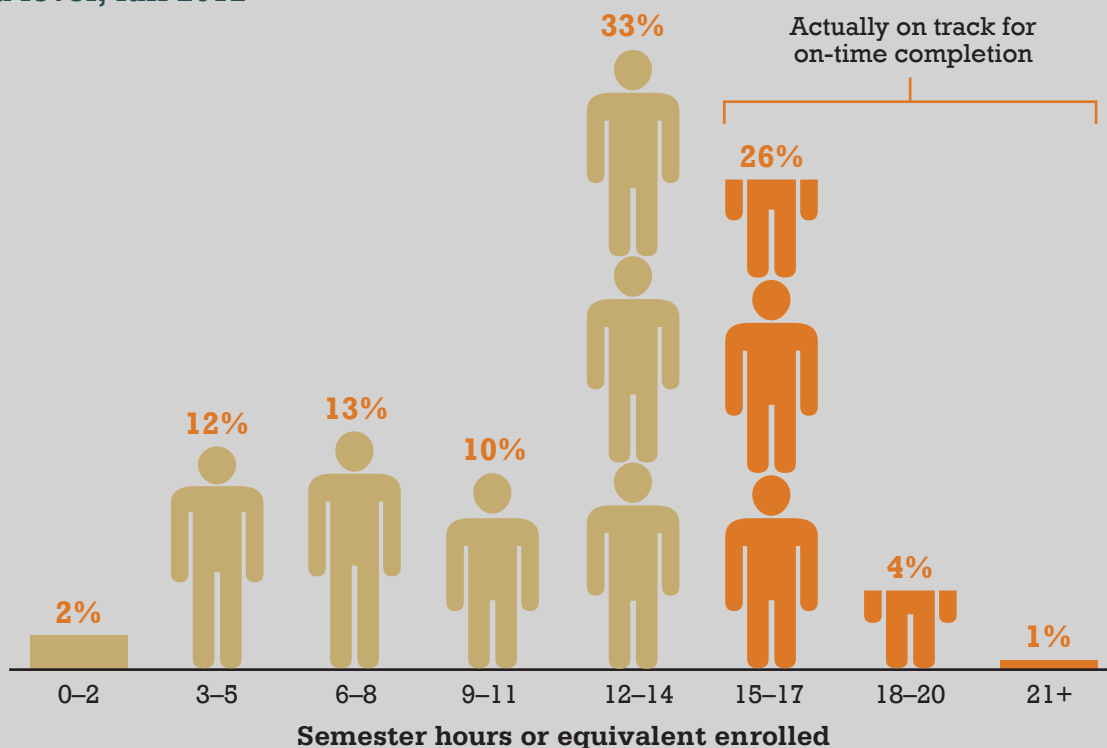
3 National Center for Education Statistics. "Federal Student Loan Debt Burden of Noncompleters." Retrieved September 30, 2013, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubdocs2013/2013155.pdf>.





## Most students DON'T take the credit hours necessary to graduate on time.

Percentage of undergraduates by course load level, fall 2012



Source: Postsecondary Analytics, How Full-Time are "Full-Time" Students?, prepared for Complete College America, October 2013.

## Among African American and Hispanic students who start at 2-year colleges, few graduate even when given double time.

African American, full-time



6% associate degree within 3 years



9% associate degree within 4 years



Hispanic, full-time



10% associate degree within 3 years



16% associate degree within 4 years





## DO THIS: Make 15 Full-Time



### STATUS

In September 2011, Complete College America released a groundbreaking report entitled *Time is the Enemy*, which highlighted the problem and outlined practical strategies for shortening time to degree.

Many states are now taking action through initiatives that reduce excess credit hours and encourage students to take at least 15 credits each semester.



### THE ESSENTIALS

However, there's still plenty of room to do more — and lawmakers and policymakers can play a key role. Consider the following policies for improving student success and holding down costs for taxpayers:



#### Create incentives for students to take "15 to Finish."

The math is pretty obvious: The chance of graduating on time without accomplishing at least 15 credits each semester, or 30 over each academic year, drops significantly. Yet federal financial aid policies require that students be enrolled only in 12 credits each semester to be considered eligible for assistance. Most damaging, this standard has become known as "full-time" attendance. To shorten time to degree, incentives must be created to increase the number of students who enroll in 15 credits or more each semester. Incentives can be as simple as preferred parking on campus and as substantial as financial aid policies that reward credit accumulation.



### PROOF POINT

Twenty states now have credit caps for associate and bachelor's degrees, and three states are in the process of adding them.



#### Limit the amount of credits required to earn a degree.

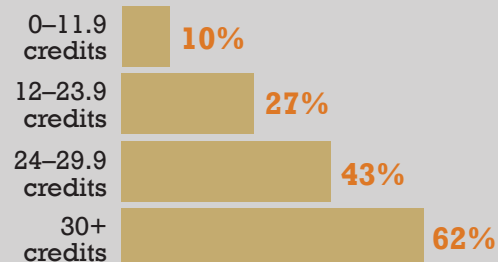
States should cap bachelor's degree programs at 120 credits, except when accreditation or licensure requirements demand more. In nearly all instances, quality associate degrees can be accomplished in a maximum of 60 hours.



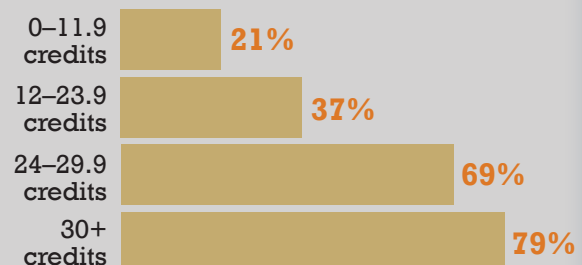
**Establish banded tuition.** Ensure that taking 15 credits per semester costs no more than the current 12-credit standard. This provides another powerful incentive for students to complete on time because there are no financial consequences for enrolling in a heavier course load.

### THE POWER OF 15 CREDITS: More students graduate when they complete 30+ credits in their first year.

#### Associate degree



#### Bachelor's degree





### FEWER EXCESS CREDITS, MORE FULL-TIME ATTENDANCE



When the **University of Hawai'i** system started its “15 to Finish” initiative, it developed a multipronged public relations campaign to change campus culture at multiple levels. It found that taking 15 credits per semester benefits even poorly prepared students — not just the most “college ready.” Between 2011 and 2012, campuses experienced a 14.7 percent increase in the number of undergraduate students enrolled in 15 or more credits.



Full-time enrollment in **Connecticut** community colleges increased dramatically when colleges began using full-time enrollment status as the default when processing student financial aid applications. The strategy shows students that attending college full-time is often more affordable than they expect.



To reduce the likelihood that students will earn unnecessary and excessive credits, **Texas** colleges and universities lose their state subsidy for students who exceed a certain credit-hour threshold. Additionally, students are charged out-of-state tuition if they exceed limits for repeating courses or if they take classes that have content essentially identical to ones they have already completed.



**Florida** is using comprehensive degree acceleration strategies such as dual enrollment (allowing students to earn college credit while in high school), early admission, credit by examination, and Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate credit. These strategies are made possible through a common course-numbering system that allows credits from two-year colleges to be easily transferred to four-year institutions.



**Minnesota** state grants pick up where Pell grants leave off by providing additional support for low-income students who want to take more than 12 credits per term. By funding students up to 15 hours, instead of 12, the state lifts the ceiling imposed by the federal program.



Students at most **West Virginia** institutions, including community colleges, pay a flat rate for full-time attendance (12-plus hours), so it doesn't cost them more to take 15 hours than 12. While this is common at four-year institutions in other states, it is unusual at community colleges, which many low-income students attend. (Also, many of the state's need-grant recipients receive additional merit-based PROMISE grants, which require students to complete 30 hours per year.)



Most courses at **Washington** community colleges are five credits, and the default full-time load is three courses per quarter (nine per academic year), which is enough to graduate on time. Students who take two courses (10 credits) do not get the maximum state grant or Pell award, and courses of less than five quarter credits are unusual. Almost six of 10 community college students with state need grants take 15 credits or more.



## GAME CHANGER

# Structured Schedules

**37%**  
**attend**  
**part-time**

**Almost 40 percent of U.S. students attend college part-time to work the jobs they need to have the education they desire. Most will never graduate.**

We think we're doing them a favor when we allow students to take as long as they want to finish a certificate or degree. But the data prove the opposite is true: Our good intentions have enabled their failure and the misery that follows. Most part-time students will never graduate.

It doesn't have to be this way. Most students begin college going full-time. They're eager to start, and they imagine the joy they will know in their caps and gowns.

But quickly the cold realities hit them. Broken remediation classes block their entrance into college-level work. The courses necessary to stay on track aren't available when they're needed or when everyday life demands will allow. Many students become worn down by exhausting efforts semester after semester to balance the jobs they must work to afford the college they desire.

Full-time becomes part-time as courses are shaved off schedules little by little to work more hours to pay the bills. Fifteen credit hours get cut to 12 ... then to nine ... and then to six. Finally, the hours on campus get cut to zero.

After years of efforts, most part-time students drop out. They will suffer the worst of all worlds: high school graduates burdened with college debts but no degree.

Denying students part-time enrollment is NOT the answer. There will always be those who will insist on going to college part-time. Instead, we must help more students go full-time, and we can.

Begin by accepting that many students will need to work to help pay for college. In fact, data show that they're working more hours today than ever before. That's not a surprise given the high costs of higher education.

The greatest help we can provide is straightforward: predictability. Structured schedules — for example, going to school every day from 8 a.m. to noon or from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. — provide the daily certainty that allows easier job scheduling. Gone are the every semester negotiations with employers and child care providers.

For many students, going full-time now becomes manageable. And full-time attendance can mean that graduation is twice as likely or more.

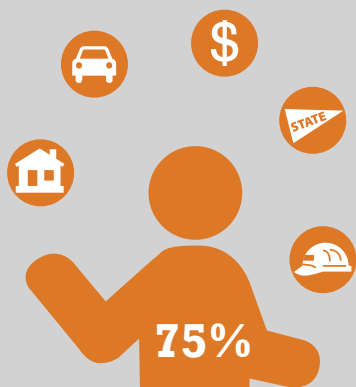
Wherever structured scheduling has been implemented, it has been extraordinarily successful for students. In Tennessee, it has regularly produced graduation rates of 75 percent or higher for career certificates. In New York, structured scheduling has enabled associate degree students to graduate at double the rate of their peers trapped in traditional schedules.

Simply put, structured scheduling is a Game Changer.

States should leverage the good intentions that led institutions to accept limitless part-time enrollment and redirect that generosity to make the changes necessary to deploy structured scheduling across the state. The greatest help we can provide is straightforward: **structure** and predictability.



## Most U.S. college students struggle under exhausting demands.



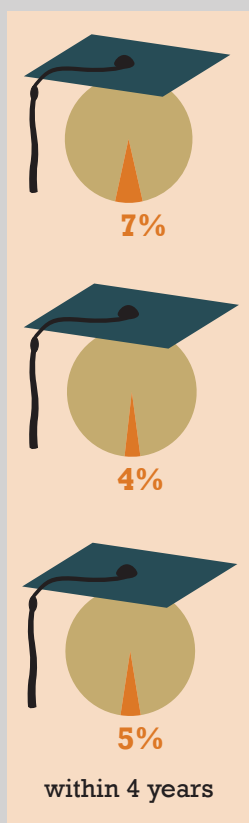
75% of students are college commuters, often juggling families, jobs, and school.



25% of students attend full-time at residential colleges.

## Part-time students rarely graduate, even when given twice the time.

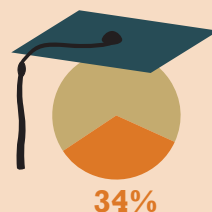
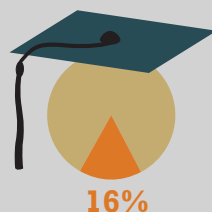
### 2-year college associate degree rate



### 4-year college bachelor's degree rate

(Non-flagship) (Flagship)

All students



African American



Hispanic



within 8 years

within 8 years

\*Fewer than five states reported, so data were suppressed.

Source: 2012 Complete College America/National Governors Association data collection.



## DO THIS: Structure Schedules for Predictability



### STATUS

Indiana, New York, and Tennessee are leading efforts to expand structured scheduling, making it available in community college settings as well as certificate programs. Twenty-plus years of data at the Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology — where graduation rates soared to 75 percent and higher in career certificate programs — along with major improvements on other campuses strongly suggest that states should scale structured scheduling across their campuses. As the new majority of today's college students juggle work, family, and school, this is a Game Changer with a notable return on investment.



### THE ESSENTIALS

To be successful, structured scheduling must have these key elements:

- **Full-time enrollment should be emphasized.** Full-time students are much more likely to graduate. Use structured schedules to enable more students to go full-time by designing five-day-a-week structures in morning or afternoon blocks — for example, 8 a.m. to noon or 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. This level of predictability makes life easier to manage for working students and students with children.
- **Structured scheduling should be combined with whole program choices.** Structured scheduling is easiest to accomplish when it is used in whole programs of study. Students should make one choice of their program of study — for example, computer networking — and then colleges should make all the other decisions about the necessary sequence of

courses. In this way, students choose majors, not individual courses. The colleges then structure the required course sequences in coherent, connected schedules. This approach has the added benefit of eliminating common errors by students when choosing courses.

And institutions benefit when they can predict with near certainty — often semesters or even years in advance — the timing and capacity of required courses needed to complete chosen programs on schedule. Accurately forecasting future faculty and classroom space demands boosts institutional productivity and ensures a more cost-effective use of resources.



■ **15 credits per semester.** To finish on time, full-time enrollment should mean 15 credits per semester. Structured schedules within programs of study should be constructed to contain at least 15 credits. The five-day structure of well-designed structured schedules makes accomplishing this goal much more possible.



■ **Student cohorts boost success.** A natural — and very beneficial — consequence of structured scheduling is the formation of student cohorts. When students in the same program of study move from course to course on the same schedule five days a week, working groups and learning communities of students commonly form. These informal alliances provide vital student-to-student support and a strong sense of connectedness to faculty and institutions. Studies have proven that students are more likely to succeed when they don't feel alone.





### STRUCTURED SCHEDULING



Technical and vocational training at the **27 Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology** have an average 75 percent completion rate, with some centers graduating all of their students. Job placement rates also are high. Unlike traditional approaches, students enroll in whole academic programs, not individual courses, streamlining the path to completion by removing the burdens of individual course selection and availability. Programs are offered Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., and attendance is taken. Finally, the complete program costs and the time it will take to graduate are clearly presented up front, allowing students to plan ahead and know with certainty when they will graduate. Many of the Colleges of Applied Technology's more successful program elements were included in a new state law that created a unified community college system, which is adding structured scheduling now.



At the **City University of New York (CUNY)**, students enrolled in the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) benefit from consolidated structured schedules, cohorts by major, small class sizes, required full-time study, and comprehensive advisement and career development services. There have been six ASAP cohorts totaling 4,594 students. The ASAP graduation rate is more than three times the national average for other urban community colleges.



The **University of Montana (UM) Western** is the only public college in the country to offer Experience One, an innovative program in which students participate in a structured schedule and take only one course at a time. The semester is divided into four-credit blocks with students meeting five days a week for three to four hours a day in either a morning or afternoon session. UM Western has seen significant increases in graduation rates and the majority of their students are enrolled with 15 credits or higher.



**Texas State Technical College (TSTC)** will implement a form of structured scheduling at two locations beginning in the fall 2013 semester. The TSTC approach is intended to reduce fragmentation, allowing for more collaboration and teamwork to boost skill attainment and content mastery.

In this connected learning approach, students still attend the same number of semester credit hours but in larger, less interrupted segments. Skills are sequenced in a logical order based on real-world applications, linking work and learning with direct input from business and industry. This allows students greater opportunity to collaborate in authentic, project-based experiences that emphasize teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills in addition to learning essential technical knowledge, skills, and abilities — all vital to sustained employability.

As one employer stated, “We hire for hard skills. We fire for soft skills.” Adding the cohort model develops a strong sense of community, encouraging students to support each other and to interact regularly with faculty and staff. These are the skills business and industry want and students need to succeed in the classroom, in a career, and in life.



## GAME CHANGER

# Guided Pathways to Success

**135**  
total  
credits

**U.S. students graduate with too many unnecessary credits, and they take far too long to earn their degrees. Taxpayers waste millions. So do students.**

More than 80 credits are earned on average for an associate degree when only 60 is the standard. Bachelor's degree graduates are leaving campus with more than 130 credits instead of the customary 120. And these astronomical excess credit counts don't even include the time students spent in remediation.

Excess credits are those earned beyond what is necessary to complete a chosen program of study. They are often the result of poor choices made when students mistakenly enroll in courses that don't count toward chosen majors. Broken transfer policies can also force students to retake previously earned credits on new campuses. Excessive credit requirements for degrees can cause credit counts to creep skyward as faculty pile on more and more compulsory courses without removing others.

And excess credits can also be the remnants of extraneous courses taken when students can't get mandatory courses needed for majors. To maintain financial aid, these students often engage in an expensive "swirling in place" as they burn time and money on campus waiting for needed courses to appear again.

Of course, exorbitant credits can also represent directionless wandering of the course catalog in aimless odysseys of self-discovery. There's nothing wrong with finding one's future on a college campus, but it would be difficult to choose a more expensive method or venue.

Regardless of the causes, there's no disputing that the United States has an excess credit

problem. Thankfully, some states have begun implementing a Game Changer solution: Guided Pathways to Success (GPS).

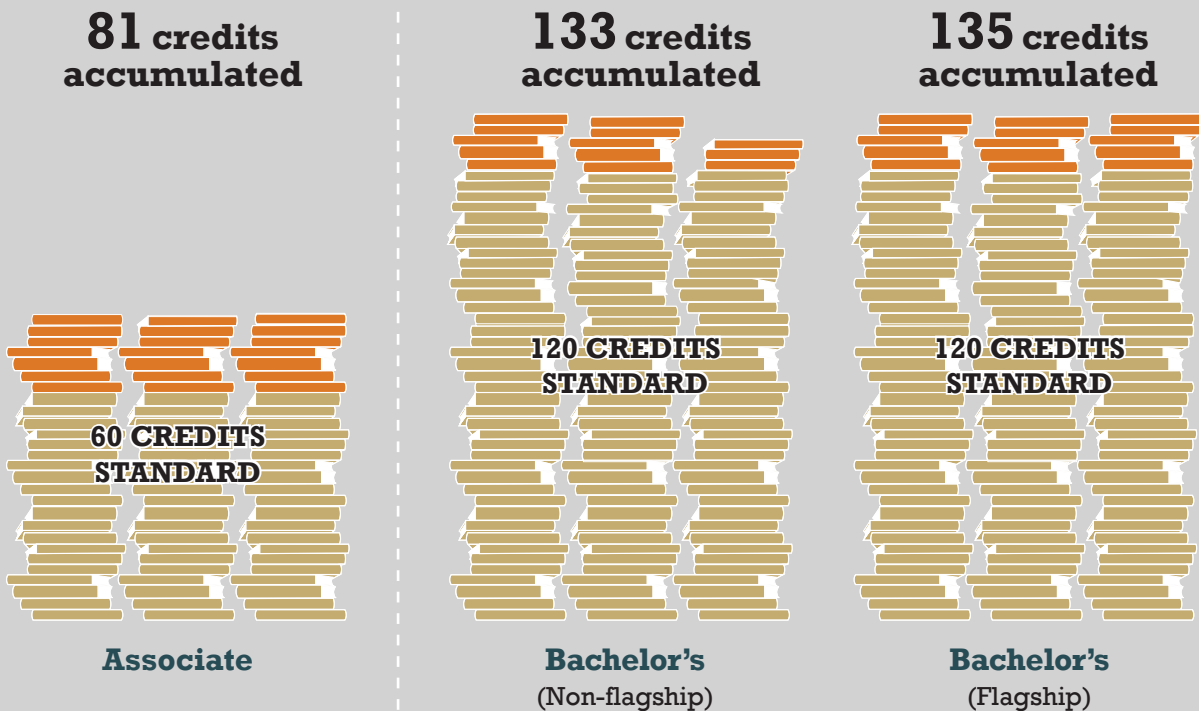
By building highly structured degree plans as default pathways to on-time graduation, states can place every college student on roads to success. No longer will students be considered "unclassified" or "undeclared." All will know the way forward to graduation day — and semester-by-semester plans will be laid out before every student. As important, students must be on their chosen degree pathway: They must ask permission to deviate from it.

Consider this Game Changer a mutual guarantee between students and colleges. Students pledge to stick to their degree plans, maintain at least 15 credits every semester to finish on time, and accomplish all milestone courses along the way. Colleges promise to watch student progress closely, using technology-enabled alert systems to target "intrusive advising" when it's most needed — and guarantee that students will always have access to essential courses whenever they are required along the students' chosen degree plans.

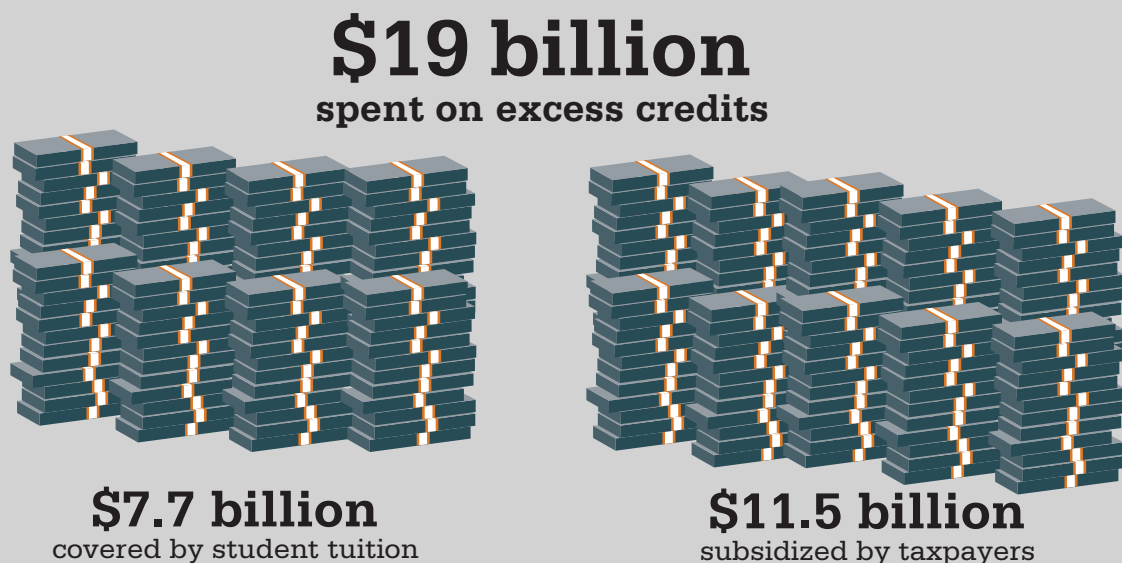
Colleges and universities in Arizona, Florida, Georgia, New York, and Tennessee have demonstrated the effectiveness of this Game Changer: Graduation rates have soared, and attainment gaps have virtually disappeared. Other states can be among the first states to reap the benefits of scaling GPS.



## Students are taking too many credits.



## Every year, U.S. students and taxpayers waste billions of dollars and thousands of hours on unnecessary courses.





## DO THIS: Require Degree Plans, Guarantee Courses, Advise Intrusively



### THE ESSENTIALS

Implementing a successful GPS strategy requires an “all in” commitment to several essential components.

■ **Whole programs of study.** Students choose coherent academic majors or programs, not random, individual courses. In this way, a clear path to on-time completion is prepared for students, semester by semester, all the way to graduation day.

■ **Informed choices and “meta majors.”** Colleges use a range of information such as past performance in high school to provide recommendations to students about programs of study that match their skills and interests. With this information, students can make more informed choices among a set of initial broad academic pathways that ultimately lead to academic programs. For example, first-year students would choose a “meta major” in a broad area such as STEM, health care, business, liberal arts, education, or social science. As students progress, the pathways narrow into more specific majors such as chemistry, accounting, psychology, and nursing.

■ **Default pathways.** Students remain on their chosen path unless given approval to change by an adviser. Students can change their pathway or major but not without permission. Exploration outside one’s major is still allowed and enabled as intentional investigation, replacing aimless wandering. Students stay on track for graduation — and fully understand the time and money consequences of making a change.



■ **Guaranteed milestone courses.** Degree pathways contain critical milestone courses that are prerequisites and must be completed each semester to ensure students stay on track. Not only do these courses provide realistic assessments of student progress, but they also give students early signals about their prospects for success in a given field of study. This information eliminates the problem of students putting off challenging courses until the consequences of changing majors become too damaging and costly.



■ **Intrusive, just-in-time advising.** Innovations in technology now allow student support to be targeted and customized to meet the needs of individual students as colleges can more effectively monitor student progress. Early warning systems make it easy for institutions to track student performance in required courses and target interventions when they are most needed. Academic advisers can focus attention almost exclusively on students most in need of services instead of spreading themselves thinly over burdensome caseloads.



■ **Math alignment to majors.** College algebra has one purpose: calculus. For many students, algebra is a serious obstacle to college success. Instead, we should use statistics and quantitative literacy, which better align with most non-STEM programs of study.



### INNOVATING GUIDED PATHWAYS

In October 2013, four states and the District of Columbia were selected to participate in Complete College America's Guided Pathways to Success in STEM Careers Initiative supported by the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust.

When implemented at scale, the strategies and reforms these states work toward will be the blueprint for how all states can dramatically increase the number of students with high-demand STEM degrees. States will receive technical assistance from practitioners and national experts with specific experience developing GPS and expert facilitation that will support state teams as they develop and implement institutional plans to dramatically increase degree completion.

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### GPS RESULTS



At **Florida State University (FSU)**, degree maps combine with other strategies to increase graduation and close attainment gaps. Since starting degree maps, FSU has cut the number of students graduating with excess credits in half. And in 10 years, FSU's graduation rate for all students has increased 12 percent, rising to 74 percent. More significant, the graduation rate for African Americans has increased to 77 percent, for first-generation Pell students to 72 percent, and for Hispanic students to more than 70 percent.



**Arizona State University's** eAdvisor system is boosting retention and success. First-time, full-time freshman retention rates have climbed to 84 percent, and 91 percent of all students are deemed to be "on track" in their programs, up from just 22 percent three years before.



At **Georgia State University**, degree maps and intrusive advising have boosted graduation rates by more than 20 percentage points in the last 10 years. Pell students (52.5 percent), African American students (57.4 percent), and Hispanic students (66.4 percent) now graduate at higher rates than the overall student body. And more bachelor's degrees are conferred to African Americans than at any other U.S. university.

15<sup>to</sup>  
FINISH

# DO THIS! Implement the Game Changers.

**1. Create the conditions for change by measuring and paying for performance.** It's time to add metrics to funding formulas for colleges and universities that tie student achievement outcomes to state taxpayer investments. Doing so will ensure that student access, progress, and success are equally valued on campus — creating the conditions for change that add urgency to the successful implementation of the other essential Game Changers.



**2. Provide remediation as a corequisite, not a prerequisite.** Far too many students who start in remediation drop out of college — an unsustainable level of failure if the United States is to have the workforce it needs to thrive in the global economy. Starting many more unprepared students in college-level classes with mandatory, built-in academic support will double or triple the likelihood of their success. Students who need more help can also start in college-level gateway classes that spread content over two semesters. Provide parallel remediation in quality technical certificate programs for the most unprepared.



**3. Make 15 full-time.** Only about a third of university students at flagship campuses and fewer than one of five students at non-flagship campuses graduate on time. Only four of every 100 community college students complete an associate degree on time. The United States cannot significantly boost college completion unless it substantially reduces the time it takes students to graduate — because the longer it takes the more life gets in the way. Associate degrees should be capped at 60 credits and bachelor's degrees at 120 credits — with few exceptions. Use banded tuition and provide incentives to encourage many more students to attend college full-time — and full-time means 15 credits per semester.



**4. Add structure.** Almost 40 percent of all college students attend part-time — a level of attendance that almost always predicts failure. Most part-time students will never graduate. Structured scheduling has been proven to make the difference between graduating and dropping out. It adds much-needed predictability to the busy lives of students who are delicately balancing jobs and school. It often makes full-time attendance possible, significantly increasing the likelihood of completion. Cohorts of students naturally form in structured scheduling, adding valuable peer-to-peer support and strengthening connectedness to faculty.



**5. Place all students on Guided Pathways to Success.** Too many students go through college with no clear path to success. On average, U.S. students graduate college with about 135 total credits, which is far more than needed. This level of unnecessary credits dearly costs students and taxpayers and lengthens time to degree. By placing all students on highly structured, default degree plans, excess credits are eliminated and on-time completions become the norm. Enabled by technology, academic advising is intrusive and efficient, targeting students with just-in-time support when they most need help.





## METHODOLOGY & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The data presented in this report, unless noted, were provided by the Alliance states through the submission of Complete College America / National Governors Association common college completion metrics data. The data were submitted by the states during the 2013 data collection period.

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## ABOUT COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

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*It's really about the states ... we're just here to help.*

Established in 2009, Complete College America is a national nonprofit with a single mission: to work with states to significantly increase the number of Americans with quality career certificates or college degrees and to close attainment gaps for traditionally under-represented populations.

The need for this work is compelling. Between 1970 and 2009, undergraduate enrollment in the United States more than doubled, while the completion rate has been virtually unchanged. We've made progress in giving students from all backgrounds access to college — but we haven't finished the all-important job of helping them achieve a degree. Counting the success of all students is an essential first step. And then we must move with urgency to reinvent American higher education to meet the needs of the new majority of students on our campuses, delicately balancing the jobs they need with the education they desire.

Complete College America believes there is great reason for optimism ... and a clear path forward. With a little more support — and a lot of common sense — we can ensure that many more get the high-quality college education that will help them live productive and fulfilling lives. All Americans will share in the benefits of their success.

# COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

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