



I. Executive Summary

Wyoming and the nation face a shortage of employees with the skills necessary to compete in an increasingly complex, global economy. Studies estimate that by 2020, 65 percent of the jobs in Wyoming will require some form of postsecondary credential. Indeed, Wyoming employers continue to demand higher numbers of skilled employees.

In response to that looming shortage, Gov. Matthew H. Mead committed Wyoming to participate in the Complete College America Alliance of States, a national effort to apply research and best practices toward increasing college completion rates. The Governor appointed a multi-disciplinary team to develop a plan and recommendations for helping greater numbers of students earn a degree or credential.

Wyoming is currently performing well compared to the rest of the country. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, Wyoming ranks tenth in the nation among community college graduation rates. Wyoming's community colleges are performing well ahead of the national average in terms of completions per 100 full-time equivalent students. Although Wyoming's results already rank among the best in the nation, our community colleges can do better, and they are committed to doing so. In addition, the University of Wyoming (UW) is performing well when comparing first-year to second-year persistence and graduation rates at similar four-year, public, doctoral granting institutions. While the rates are strong, UW is committed to improving them.

In collaboration with the Wyoming Community College Commission, the Wyoming Association of Community College Trustees, the college Presidents, the University of Wyoming, industry, and legislators, the Complete College Wyoming team has created a plan for improving college completion in Wyoming. The plan includes strategic goals, such as significantly increasing the number of completers by 2022, ensuring that degree-seeking students rapidly complete gateway courses, creating statewide stakeholder buy-in for achieving these goals, and establishing metrics to measure the colleges' success. UW is committed to increasing the number of baccalaureate degrees completed and reducing the time to degree completion.

In that context, the key goals and objectives of the plan are framed in four categories: participation, progress, performance, and placement. Within each category, the Complete College Wyoming team has developed key objectives and metrics for measuring the colleges' success in each area.

This plan outlines what work needs to be done to improve student success and why that work is critically important for

students, communities, and Wyoming's economy. The next step will be to generate broad understanding of and commitment to the plan from the colleges, UW, the Wyoming Community College Commission, legislators and others, and then to refine and implement strategies, both locally and statewide, to achieve these goals. Faculty and staff understanding and commitment will be critical to the success of the effort. And lastly, all stakeholders must commit to supporting these strategies, utilizing CCW-established metrics and benchmark data, and allocating the resources necessary to make these strategies successful.

II. Introduction

In his February 24, 2009, address to a Joint Session of Congress, President Obama stated, “America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.” The goal, more specifically, is quite audacious: increase the U.S. college degree attainment rate from 40% to 60%, which means 10 million additional Americans between ages 25-64 with an associate or baccalaureate degree. Currently, only 37% of 25-64 year olds possess an associate’s degree or higher in Wyoming. In Wyoming, that goal has been considered more broadly to also include certificates and other credentials of value that address the State’s specific workforce needs.

Underlying the President’s call to action regarding college completion is a growing body of evidence that by 2020, the majority of jobs in the United States will require some form of postsecondary credential. Indeed, a well-known study produced by the Georgetown Public Policy Institute’s Center on Education and the Workforce, suggests that 63% of the jobs nationally will require such preparation. The Georgetown study predicts that 62% of Wyoming’s workforce will need a career certificate or degree by 2018; Complete College America estimates 65% by 2020, and the Lumina Foundation study predicts 60% by 2025. The Wyoming Department of Workforce Services placed that figure at 51%. Put another way, unless colleges can significantly increase their production of degreed and credentialed students, more Americans will be competing for fewer and fewer jobs and companies will be forced to hire less than fully qualified individuals for open positions.

Taking up the charge in Wyoming, educational leaders and community college trustees have worked with Governor Matthew H. Mead to address Wyoming’s responsibility and response to emerging national college completion initiatives. The Governor supported these efforts, committing Wyoming to developing a statewide college completion approach with assistance from Complete College America (CCA), a non-profit group funded in part by the Bill and Melinda Gates and Lumina Foundations.

The Governor appointed a team of community college leaders and staff, Wyoming Community College Commissioners, lawmakers, business leaders, the University of Wyoming, and the Wyoming Association of Community College Trustees to spearhead the effort. To date, the Wyoming team has participated in a Complete College America annual conference in the winter of 2012, and in CCA’s Completion Academy during the summer of 2013 to identify aggressive completion goals and make recommendations to various state constituencies. Individuals from the team have also participated in workshops designed to address some of the specific barriers to student success, including developmental (remedial) coursework, student choice and decision-making, and lack of clarity related to educational goals and progress. This plan represents, in part, an initial set of goals and metrics developed by the Complete College Wyoming team and aimed at improving Wyoming’s college completion rates. Additionally, this plan incorporates completion- planning work of the Presidents’ Council to create a broad-based plan for the deliberate, thoughtful implementation of completion strategies across Wyoming.

The Complete College Wyoming (CCW) team has intentionally adopted a critical tagline of *Access, Success, and Completion* to underscore the philosophy that a quality educational experience is necessary in order to create competent “completers,” and to emphasize that access to a college education remains a central mission of Wyoming’s institutions. Additionally, the emerging plan addresses quality education with a focus on innovation and accountability. By their very nature, the goals outlined in this plan will demand innovation, and their achievement can only be understood in terms of effective data collection and reporting.

Built on the Complete College America framework – which emphasizes setting game-changing strategies in target areas that are known to have an impact – this plan centers on and recommends goals and metrics in four key areas: **participation, progress, performance, and placement.**

Improving college completion rates is not, exclusively, a college and university problem. Rather, it is an economic development problem for the State of Wyoming. Employers across the State demand that the institutions are agile in delivering solutions for providing the trained employees they need for their businesses to be competitive and thrive. Businesses will neither grow nor relocate, nor will the local or state economies diversify, without the confidence of those companies that they can attract and hire the skilled talent they need. Wyoming's community colleges and university are the pipeline for many of those skilled employees.

Meeting this expectation is a hallmark of the community college and university value propositions, and Wyoming's colleges have long been nimble in responding to employers' and communities' needs. However, producing the number of new college graduates necessary to close the looming employment gap requires the commitment of the community colleges and the University of Wyoming in partnership with the K-12 system, private industry, and Wyoming political leaders.

We must not lose sight of the fact that while completion is critically important, our commitment to our state extends to providing personal enrichment, job skill enhancement and cultural opportunities. We cannot do one at the expense of the others.

In that context, this document outlines the Complete College Wyoming plan for improving college completion rates, for providing the skilled employees Wyoming employers demand, and for reporting UW and community college student success to the Legislature and the taxpayers of Wyoming. Doing so, very simply, is in our state's interest.

III. History, Background and Context

Although the data demonstrate a looming employment gap in Wyoming, the state's community colleges are currently performing very well in comparison to completion rates in other states. According to a *Chronicle of Higher Education* report, about 30.4% of Wyoming community college students complete an associate's degree in 4 years, while about 18.2% graduate with an associate's degree in 2 years. These figures rank Wyoming 10th among the 50 states in terms of graduation rates. Further, in terms of completions per 100 full-time equivalent students, Wyoming currently averages 17.9 completions per 100 FTE. By comparison, the national average for the same metric is 14.2 completions.

Recent University of Wyoming data indicates that 26% of students graduate in 4 years, 47% of students graduate in 5 years, and 54% of students graduate in 6 years. According to the ACT's National Persistence and Graduation Rate Data, UW compares favorably with similar type institutions.

In general, Wyoming's community colleges and university are already performing well compared to peer institutions in other states. Credit for this performance is due to the dedicated administrators, faculty, and staff at the institutions, and to the Governor and Wyoming Legislature for their generous support of higher education in Wyoming. These national comparisons of performance, though laudable, will not close Wyoming's employment gap or solve the business recruitment and diversification issues discussed earlier.

In short, although Wyoming is already doing very well comparatively, the community colleges and UW are committed to doing better. Access remains a core element of the institutions' missions, but enrollment is no longer the only key measurement of institutional success. Even as employers demand increasing numbers of skilled employees, the Legislature is increasingly interested in understanding the return to the state for its investments in higher education.

That return is measured broadly by the number of students who leave a community college or UW with a quality education. And that outcome is at the heart of the Complete College Wyoming plan.

As a result of the need to respond to employers, as well as emerging new expectations from the Legislature, the Complete College Wyoming team has identified a number of broad goals that will help focus the work of improving college completion rates, and that lead to more specific efforts and strategies for achieving those goals. Following are the CCW team's high-level completion goals:

- Increase completion at the community colleges significantly by 2022. The Community College goal, established by CCW in October 2013, is to increase community college certificate and associate degree recipients by 5% annually, with a base year of 2011-12 and a time period of 10 years to end in 2021-22. This goal was approved by the Wyoming Community College Commission in October 2013. The 2011-12 base year provides a comparison point for measuring goal attainment and effectiveness of success strategies implemented after that year. Expected impact will begin to be measured in 2014-15. The UW President and UW Board of Trustees support the goal to increase the number of baccalaureate degrees conferred at UW by 2% annually (base year of 2011-2012) beginning in the academic year 2016-2017 and ending in the academic year 2021-2022.
- Ensure that every degree-seeking student completes gateway courses in English and in Math within their first 30 credit hours at the Wyoming Community Colleges.
- Create statewide stakeholder buy-in for achieving Wyoming's completion goals.
- Develop capacity and support for Guided Pathways to Success strategies.
- Identify the metrics that are important to Wyoming.

These goals identify key starting points, based on national research about efforts that are most likely to have significant positive impact on completion rates. However, the CCW team, in collaboration with the college Presidents and Wyoming Community College Commission staff, has organized these broad goals into categories that can be clearly defined, well understood, and easily measured. These categories, definitions, and measurements are detailed in the following section.

IV. The Agenda

Wyoming is poised to become a leader through its efforts to align the programs of its seven community colleges and one university with defined state interests. As local economies become more globally focused and knowledge-based, community colleges and university are a critical way for learners to gain access to postsecondary education, and perhaps more importantly, successfully complete their educational goals.

The five state interests outlined in the Wyoming Community College Strategic Plan frame this agenda, which is build on four primary concentrations of student engagement and success.

A. Wyoming State's Interests

1. *Educated citizenry*: Increase the educational attainment of Wyoming residents by offering them access to a wide range of educational, training, and cultural programs.
2. *Diversified economy*: Contribute to the diversification of Wyoming's economy by supporting the expansion of business and industry into new areas.
3. *Workforce development*: Respond to the needs of existing and emerging industries by providing a well-prepared and well-trained workforce.
4. *Efficient and effective systems*: Maximize return on investment by implementing system-wide

efficiencies to enhance community college operations.

5. *Accountability and improvement*: Improve the educational success of Wyoming residents by measuring outcomes and responding to findings, whether negative or positive.

B. Four P's of the Complete College Wyoming Agenda

The Complete College Wyoming (CCW) agenda represents the nexus of its work with the Complete College America Alliance of States, the consensus thinking of the community college presidents, and a near-term refinement of the Wyoming Community College Commission's statewide strategic plan. Importantly, while it will guide the work of the colleges in improving completion rates, it is also a blueprint that legislators can use to understand the work that needs to be done, the resources required to do that work, and the measurements to ensure that the work is generating results.

The University of Wyoming's, University Plan 4, also helps to guide their efforts in the same proactive directions as described above.

The CCW agenda is organized based on student **Participation**, student **Progress**, institutional **Performance**, and university or workforce **Placement**.

1. Participation

UW and community colleges will increase the rate at which Wyoming residents participate in higher education thereby ensuring our citizens, economy, state and society thrives.

- Alternate delivery modes will be considered **in order** to increase access specific degrees and certificate for working adults.

2. Progress

UW and community colleges will increase the rate of student progress through critical milestones along their academic pathway toward degree or certificate completion.

- Community colleges will transform developmental education and pursue partnerships with school districts to do so.
- Uniform progress metrics will be tracked.

3. Performance

UW and community colleges will sustain and improve their performance for the betterment of Wyoming's economic and social vitality.

- Decrease average time to degree or certificate.
- Increase certificate and degree completion rates.
- Increase the portion of state funding of community colleges which is allocated based upon progress and/or completion metrics.
- Track uniform completion metrics.

4. Placement

UW and community colleges will strengthen Wyoming's economy and society by increasing the rate at which student certificate and degree completers enter the Wyoming workforce.

- UW and community college completer participation in the Wyoming workforce will be tracked once workforce data becomes available via a state longitudinal data system.

v. Measurement and Evaluation

The CCW agenda is not only aggressive in its approach to implementing strategies and objectives to improve student success. It is also fully committed to evaluating the efficacy of these activities and measuring effectiveness, utilizing defined metrics and benchmarks. Success can only be validated by the broader community of stakeholders if it can be defined, and ultimately measured. The CCW agenda will examine its impacts by consistently measuring the work of the community colleges and UW through the following metrics.

The CCW Team has identified the following initial list for metrics. The goal is to identify a limited number of significant metrics that can be utilized to assess and strengthen the completion efforts for all of the institutions within the state.

- Courses completion rates
- Degree and “high value” certificate completion rates
- Average time to degree or certificate completion
- Gateway course completion rates (within the student’s first 30 credit hours)
- Transfer rates
- Employment in Wyoming
- Workforce performance and/or participation rates
- Student retention and persistence: semester-to-semester, fall-fall

VI. Conclusion

This document represents a strategic plan for Wyoming to improve the efficacy of its colleges, while ultimately assisting more students in the completion of their educational goals. Doing so is not only in Wyoming’s educational interests, it is also in the state’s economic interests. As the primary source of skilled workers for Wyoming employers, the Wyoming community colleges and UW must be equipped to produce the increasing number of trained employees and well-educated citizens that employers demand. Achieving that goal requires broad-based commitment to a clear, long-term plan, as well as commitment to identifying and securing the resources necessary to make it a reality.

CCW, Updated November 6, 2013

Wyoming Community Colleges Completion Agenda

Appendix A

1. Participation

Goal Statement: The agenda is committed to maintaining access in all forms and increasing the rate at which individuals participate in Wyoming Community Colleges, thereby ensuring our citizens, economy, and society thrive.

- 1.1. Objective: Increase participation in credit-bearing coursework and programs
- 1.2. Objective: Increase the rate and frequency of Wyoming high school student participation in dual and concurrent enrollment
- 1.3. Objective: Increase the number of students enrolling in High School Equivalency programs at Wyoming community colleges.
- 1.4. Objective: Continue to strengthen participation in non-credit courses to serve business and industry workforce needs, or for lifelong learning and enrichment
- 1.5. Objective: Increase the number of at-risk and underrepresented students in post-secondary programs
- 1.6. Objective: Utilize best, proven approaches to engage and inspire learners

2. Progress

Goal Statement: The agenda is committed to ensuring students are progressing through critical milestones along their academic pathway up to and toward the completion of their educational goal.

- 2.1. Objective: Increase the rate at which students placed in developmental coursework succeed in those classes
- 2.2. Objective: Ensure the effectiveness of developmental coursework by increasing the rate at which students succeed in their subsequent coursework
- 2.3. Objective: Encourage and celebrate progress towards completion by increasing the number of students achieving academic milestones
- 2.4. Objective: Increase the rate at which students persist from semester to semester
- 2.5. Objective: Increase the retention and progress of at-risk and underrepresented students in postsecondary programs

3. Performance

Goal Statement: The agenda is committed to sustaining and improving the performance of Wyoming's seven Community Colleges for the improvement of Wyoming's economic and social vitality.

- 3.1. Objective: Increase the number of degrees and certificates produced, with a specific focus on those seen as high-value for Wyoming's needs (CCW goal—increase 5% annually over the next 10 years.
- 3.2. Objective: Increase the number of Wyoming students achieving the completion of high school equivalency credentials
- 3.3. Objective: Focus on student success at the root of the educational enterprise by increasing the rate at which students succeed in credit-bearing coursework
- 3.4. Objective: Ensure colleges are focusing on all aspects of workforce development by increasing the production of valuable non-credit certificates and credentials
- 3.5. Objective: Ensure Wyoming community college graduates outpace the nation with respect to the rates at which they pass licensure and certifications required to enter the workforce
- 3.6. Objective: Increase the performance of at-risk and underrepresented students in post-secondary programs
- 3.7. Objective: Utilize best, proven assessments to confirm effective learning and improve educational

environments

4. Placement

Goal Statement: The agenda is committed to strengthening Wyoming's economy and society by increasing the rate at which students enter the workforce or transfer to a university.

4.1. Objective: Increase the placement of community college graduates into the Wyoming workforce

4.2. Objective: Increase the rates at which Wyoming Community College students successfully transfer to a four-year institution to pursue a bachelor's degree

4.3. Objective: Increase the placement of at-risk and underrepresented students in positions providing a valuable asset and living wage

Measurement and Evaluation

1. Participation

- Measure: FTE/Headcount in Credit Bearing Coursework
- Measure: CC enrollment as percent of total Wyoming enrollment in higher education (comparing CC's to UW)
- Measure: Enrollments in early college activities (enrollments in dual and concurrent enrollment)
- Measure: Headcounts of Students in High School Equivalency Programs (comparing to high school enrollments across Wyoming)
- Measure: Enrollments in Non-credit coursework (Business, Industry, and Personal Enrichment)
- Measure: Number of at-risk and underrepresented students in post- secondary programs

2. Progress

- Measure: Completion in Developmental Coursework
- Measure: Developmental Students Success in Subsequent Coursework
- Measure: Gateway course completion (completion of gateway Math and English within first 30 hours)
- Measure: Completion of 15 College Credits (total number of students)
- Measure: Completion of 30 College Credits (total number of students)
- Measure: Fall to Fall and Fall to Spring Persistence (compared with WICHE states using IPEDS data)
- Measure: Fall to Spring Persistence (compared with WICHE states using IPEDS data)
- Measure: Retention and progress of at-risk and underrepresented students in post-secondary programs

3. Performance

- Measure: Degree and Certificate Production (number of credentials produced as a proportion of FTE or Headcount and compared to WICHE states)
- Measure: Time to degree
- Measure: High School Equivalency completions (also reported as percent of all high school graduates/GED completers)
- Measure: Credit course completion
- Measure: Non-credit certificate/credential production
- Measure: Licensure and certification pass rates
- Measure: Report increases in the performance of at-risk and underrepresented students in post-secondary programs

4. Placement

- Measure: Percent of Community College completers (degree, certificate, and non-credit credentials) who are in the Wyoming labor force (report employment rate by quarter using UI database)
- Measure: Average earnings of Community College completers who are in the Wyoming labor force (using UI database)
- Measure: Matriculation to a University (use Clearinghouse data – percent of CC students who have completed 12 college-level credits, did not enroll in a CC, and show up at a University)
- Measure: track placement of at-risk and underrepresented students in positions providing a valuable asset and living wage.

VI. Statewide Strategies

This plan provides background and context for the need to improve completion rates in Wyoming deliberately over time, without forcing the colleges to compete with each other for resources, and a framework for doing so and measuring success. It explains, at a high level, what the colleges propose to do and why it is necessary. The next critical step will be to achieve consensus around how that work is to be done. Although this is likely to be a quite local element of the plan in many ways, a number of statewide strategies have already been discussed. These require further discussion, but some strategies include:

- Performance funding
- Curriculum alignment with K12 via the Common Core Standards
- Improving mechanisms for determining college-readiness and placing students into developmental coursework
- Implementing new, holistic models for student advising
- Redesigning developmental education coursework and delivery

With this plan as a framework, Wyoming's community colleges will continue to work with the Wyoming Community College Commission, the K12 system, the University of Wyoming, the Governor, and the Legislature to develop the most effective strategies, locally and statewide, to achieve the goals enumerated in this plan. Further, those partners must also determine the resources necessary for achieving these goals and commit to finding and applying those resources to these important goals.

University of Wyoming Completion Agenda

Appendix B

In accordance with University Plan IV, April 2013, UW is committed to:

Improved retention, persistence, and college completion. Achieving UW's enrollment goals will require a multi-prong strategy, to improve the retention of students who can succeed and to encourage students' persistence to completion of the baccalaureate. The following measures deserve attention:

- *Statewide discussions, with K-12 educators and community colleges, about enhancing the aspirational culture among Wyoming's middle school and high school students. Other pipeline-oriented measures include (1) proposals to review the eighth-grade curriculum, to increase students' access to the Hathaway Scholarship program, and (2) further development of Wyo4Ed, a website that helps pre-college students and their families plan or higher education.*
- *Programs that lower the nonacademic barriers to college success. The Division of Student Affairs has proposed a review of private and public scholarship and aid programs, to lower the fiscal barriers, alongside a review of support for ethnic minority students, students with dependents, athletes, and others who may face barriers outside the classroom.*
- *Implementation of DegreeWorks, a software package that provides easy-to-use, web-based resources for academic advising, degree checking, and course transfer. Early degree checks, conducted as students cross the 60-credit threshold, can augment this tool.*
- *Collaborations between the Division of Student Affairs and UW's academic departments, to help provide four-year curriculum planning for incoming first-year and transfer students pursuing the baccalaureate.*

1. Participation

Goals Statement: Increase student access and persistence through graduation. Metrics are being determined and will focus upon increased outreach to middle schools and high schools; fall to fall persistence of freshmen, sophomores and juniors in college; and reducing time to graduation.

2. Progress

Goal Statement: The agenda is committed to ensuring students are progressing through critical milestones along their academic pathway up to and toward the completion of their educational goal. Metrics are being determined and will focus upon implementation of new general education curriculum including the freshman year seminar; fall to fall persistence of freshmen, sophomores and juniors in college; and reducing time to graduation; implementing UW LASSO, Student Success Services to support academic, financial and personal advisement and academic services.

3. Performance

Goal Statement: The agenda is committed to sustaining and improving the performance of the University of Wyoming for the improvement of Wyoming's economic and social vitality. Metrics are being determined and will focus upon similar metrics established by the Wyoming Community Colleges to include increasing the number of degrees and certificates produced; focusing on student success at the root of the educational enterprise by increasing the rate at which students succeed in credit-bearing coursework; increasing the performance of at-risk and underrepresented students in post-secondary programs; utilizing best, proven assessments to confirm effective learning and improve educational environments.

4. Placement

Goal Statement: The agenda is committed to strengthening Wyoming's economy and society by increasing the rate at which students enter the workforce or transfer to a university. Metrics are being determined and will focus upon increasing the placement of UW graduates into the Wyoming workforce.

Measurement and Evaluation

1. Participation

- Measure: FTE/Headcount in Credit Bearing Coursework
- Measure: UW enrollment as percent of total Wyoming enrollment in higher education (comparing CC's to UW)
- Measure: Number of at-risk and underrepresented students in post-secondary programs.

2. Progress

- Measure: Fall to Fall and Fall to Spring Persistence (compared with WICHE states using IPEDS data)
- Measure: Fall to Spring Persistence (compared with WICHE states using IPEDS data)
- Measure: Retention and progress of at-risk and underrepresented students in post-secondary programs

3. Performance

- Measure: Degree and Certificate Production (number of credentials produced as a proportion of FTE or Headcount and compared to WICHE states)
- Measure: Time to degree
- Measure: Credit course completion
- Measure: Report increases in the performance of at-risk and underrepresented students in post-secondary programs

4. Placement

- Measure: Percent of UW completers (degree, certificate) who are in the Wyoming labor force (report employment rate by quarter using UI database)
- Measure: Average earnings of UW completers who are in the Wyoming labor force (using UI database)
- Measure: Track placement of at-risk and underrepresented students in positions providing a valuable asset and living wage.

VI. Statewide Strategies

This plan provides background and context for the need to improve completion rates in Wyoming deliberately over time, without forcing the colleges and UW to compete with each other for resources, and a framework for doing so and measuring success. It explains, at a high level, what the colleges propose to do and why it is necessary. The next critical step will be to achieve consensus around how that work is to be done. Although there is likely to be a local element of the plan, a number of statewide strategies have already been discussed. These require further discussion, but some such strategies include:

- UW will maintain their commitment and use of block grant funding
- Curriculum alignment with K12 via the Common Core Standards
- Improve mechanisms for determining college-readiness and placing students into appropriate coursework

- Expand student support through UW LASSO program

With this plan as a framework, UW will continue to work with the Wyoming Community Colleges, Wyoming Community College Commission, the K12 system, the Governor, and the Legislature to develop the most effective strategies, locally and statewide, to achieve the goals enumerated in this plan. Further, those partners must also determine the resources necessary for achieving these goals and commit to finding and applying those resources to these important goals.