

# Clear Connections Project Promising Practices

## Truman College Incentive Program

### DESCRIPTION

The Incentive Program promotes college awareness among Adult Education students and demonstrates—through gradual immersion along with student support—that entering and completing college is an achievable goal. Adult Education students may be overwhelmed by the prospect of navigating college admissions, lack the confidence to begin college-level coursework, and face financial barriers. The Incentive Program addresses all of these needs. Adult Education students have the opportunity to successfully complete their English as a Second Language (ESL) or General Educational Development (GED) programs and make a smooth and successful transition into a college credit program.

- **In Phase 1:** Students continue their Advanced ESL or GED studies and enroll in one college credit course, which they receive tuition-free. Students may participate in Phase 1 for up to three semesters.
- **In Phase 2:** Students fully transition to college credit courses. They have experience navigating the college system and have completed some of their basic coursework. They may enroll in as many courses as they like; for every course they pay for, they receive one tuition-free (to a maximum of eight, counting both phases).

The college assesses financial aid eligibility as students approach Phase 2. Those who qualify take that route instead of entering Phase 2 because financial aid reduces student financial burden, helps students afford books and fees, and helps preserve limited college resources. These students—called Phase 3—are still considered successful outcomes of the program.

*“It is very gratifying to sponsor a program that helps students set ambitious (yet realistic) academic and career goals, and then witness their steady progress toward achieving a certificate and/or an associate degree, increasing the likelihood of family-sustaining jobs and full integration into the community.”*

– Ann Darnton, Truman College

### PARTICIPATION

The Transition Specialist distributes flyers and makes informational class visits to make students aware of the program. Interested students then attend a “College 101” presentation in which they hear from advisors, learn how community colleges fit into the educational system, and find out about the available program options. They must also attend an orientation to receive an application and learn about program policies.

**College:** Harry S. Truman College

**Location:** Chicago, Illinois

**Staff Size:** 274 full-time; 882 part-time

**Student Body:**

Credit: 7,444

Developmental: 369

Adult Education (AE): 12,856

Career & Technical Education (CTE): 451

**Program Name:** Incentive Program

**Program Goal:** Successfully transition Adult Education (AE) students into college credit courses

**Program Started:** FY 1999; redesigned in 2007

**Number Served Each Year:** 411 in FY 2009

**Participants:**

Gender: 57% Female, 43% Male

Average Age: 31.05 years

**Race/Ethnicity (General Adult Education):**

African American: 12% Asian: 12%

Caucasian: 14% Hispanic/Latino: 62%

**Annual Program Budget:** FY 2010 – \$100,000 projected (in tuition waivers);

FY 2009 – \$140,868

**Average Cost Per Student:** \$344.49 per semester (in tuition waivers)

**Staff:** 1 full-time Transition Specialist; support from staff in other departments

**Program Leads:** Jay Landau, Transition Specialist; Ann Darnton, Assistant Dean, Adult Education

### RESULTS

- **75 percent** of Incentive Program students enrolled in Fall 2008 continued in college credit courses in Spring 2009
- **87 percent** of program participants completed their credit courses
- **81 percent** of participants received a passing grade
- **52 percent** of passing grades were As
- Completion and success rates were significantly higher than the student body as a whole

## To stay in the program, students must:

- Have good attendance and make satisfactory progress in their Adult Education courses
- Maintain at least a 2.0 grade point average (GPA) in college credit courses
- Take no more than two consecutive semesters off

## PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Begin program in Level 7 or above ESL, or in a GED-level course
- Meet in-district residency requirements
- Score 50+ in the native speakers' COMPASS reading test
- Intend to pursue a certificate or associate degree
- Have no prior US college coursework
- Complete an Incentive Program application

## FUNDING AND STAFFING

Students receive tuition waivers from the college for their Incentive classes, so the college absorbs tuition costs instead of expending funds. In general, Incentive students are filling seats that would otherwise have gone empty. The program recoups some of the value of the waivers through student payment of tuition and fees (both during and after Incentive participation), ICCB reimbursement, and financial aid.

One full-time Transition Specialist focuses on coordinating this program. However, college advisors give presentations and spend considerable time advising and registering students each semester. One business office staff member processes all tuition waivers and ensures that the Phase 1 dual enrollment requirement is satisfied.

## IMPACT

Many Adult Education students at Truman have traditionally transitioned into the college credit program. The Incentive Program has been successful in encouraging more to do so and preparing these students to succeed once they do transition. As Incentive students complete their Adult Education studies, they have an academic plan, have received academic advising, are aware of program requirements, and have begun to fulfill those requirements with coursework.

Truman instituted a robust tracking system in 2007. Since that time, the college has collected data to verify what was already apparent: students who begin their studies in the Incentive Program are going on to complete degrees and certificates.

## IMPACT ON NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

The majority of Incentive Program students are low-income, independent students. Most attend school part-time, are employed, and have families. The eight tuition-free classes that these students receive help to ensure that they are not overwhelmed by the financial burdens of college attendance. Few other scholarship programs exist that financially assist part-time students and students who are ineligible for financial aid.

## CHALLENGES

As the program grew and became increasingly successful, Truman was asked to scale back the benefits available to participants so that tuition waiver totals could be substantially reduced. Also, because students' academic goals vary and the exact number of participants fluctuates, it is impossible to predict the exact dollar value of waivers that will be awarded in a given semester.

## SUCCESS FACTORS

- Communication, support, collaboration, and buy-in from all departments and programs involved, including credit and Adult Education faculty and the highest levels of the administration.
- Strong academic advising to provide Adult Education students patient and motivating guidance to help them begin college careers.
- Transition staff that are familiar with the characteristics of first generation and/or immigrant college students. Running a larger program would require more staff to provide the individual attention needed.
- An appropriate eligibility threshold. Truman increased the eligibility threshold for ESL students from Level 6 to Level 7 because Level 6 students were not testing high enough for the majority of college offerings. The number of students who are advanced enough for this program creates a natural cap.

## THE CLEAR CONNECTIONS PROJECT (CCP)



Women Employed

Women Employed launched CCP to help more low-income working students connect with the services they need to complete college certificates and degrees. Through CCP, Women Employed works with community colleges, community-based organizations, and policymakers to spotlight promising practices and promote and implement policy reforms. Read our policy brief, *Building Illinois' Workforce of the Future*, to learn more about the challenges adult students face and what colleges, state agencies, and legislators can do at [www.womenemployed.org/clearconnections](http://www.womenemployed.org/clearconnections). Contact Meegan Dugan Bassett at [mbassett@womenemployed.org](mailto:mbassett@womenemployed.org) or 312.782.3902 x249 for more information.