

May 7, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Regents  
FROM: David L. Buhler  
SUBJECT: College Access Challenge Grant Annual Report

Background

The Board of Regents was originally designated in 2008 by Governor Huntsman and then again in 2010 by Governor Herbert, as the state agency to apply and receive the College Access Challenge Grant Program (CACG) from the U.S. Department of Education. The CACG is a formula grant and was created and funded as part of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007, and was extended in 2009 through the Healthcare and Education Affordability Reconciliation Act with the purpose of helping low-income students and families learn about, prepare for, and finance postsecondary education. The program at the federal level received an appropriation of \$150 million for fiscal years (FY) 2010-2014. The Office of the Commissioner reports and applies annually and their proposal was approved in August 2013 for fiscal year 2014, and thus Utah received \$1.4 million dollars of these federal funds. The grant is under the direction of Melissa Miller Kincart, Assistant Commissioner for Outreach and Access, with management support from Maria Martinez, CACG Grant Manager and Stephen Rogers, Outreach Manager for UHEAA.

As outlined in the grant proposal the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, UHEAA, and our college, university, and K-12 partners are pursuing the following three objectives:

1. To provide information to students and families on postsecondary education: benefits, opportunities, planning, financing options (including activities associated with financial literacy), FAFSA completion, and outreach activities for students who may be at risk of not enrolling in or completing college.
2. To develop and deliver professional development events and resources for school counselors at secondary schools, as well as financial aid administrators, college admissions, recruitment staff, access and outreach personnel at institutions of higher education to improve knowledge and capacity to better assist them in their roles in working and increasing students and parents understanding of:
  - 1) Admission requirements and application deadlines and processes; 2) Financial aid and scholarship opportunities and procedures; 3) Academic and financial preparation to improve postsecondary success; 4) Activities such as tutoring/mentoring, and support instruments and models to assist students in preparing for and succeeding in college.

3. To expand and enhance the statewide infrastructure in Utah which will foster partnerships among federal, state, local agencies, community based organizations, businesses and public and higher education to significantly increase the number of low-income and underrepresented students who are prepared to enter and be successful in postsecondary education.

### Issue

The College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) has assisted the Utah State Board of Regents, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, and the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) in moving forward on 19 coordinated initiatives aimed at increasing the number of low-income and underrepresented students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. We have made substantial progress in implementing the goals and activities outlined in our grant proposal. This federal grant has been instrumental in helping us maintain capacity and momentum toward increasing academic and financial preparation so more Utah citizens might more fully participate in postsecondary education. As a result of our centralized programming services and those provided by our subgrantees, we reached **115,118 Utah students and families, 1,895 school counselors, 61 financial aid administrators, and 229 college admissions and access staff** throughout the 2013-2014 reporting period.

### CACG 2012-2013 Program Highlights

#### **Awareness**

- **Utah Scholars Initiative (USI)**

The Utah Scholars Initiative, started in 2006 in just four districts, has expanded to 14 districts and 141 schools. Nearly 28,000 8<sup>th</sup> grade students received the USI presentation this year and nearly 7,000 new students signed up to be a Utah Scholar. All students receive an age appropriate, monthly newsletter which currently reaches over 10,000 students. USI's newly designed and updated website now allows parents to also elect to receive the newsletter. This year a total of 1,982 students will receive the USI medallion for completing the USI Curriculum. This demonstrates growth of nearly 15 percent from the previous year.

A new 10<sup>th</sup> grade follow-up presentation was created to ensure students are on track with the USI curriculum and thus eligible for the Regents Scholarship. The follow-up presentation was emailed to all counselors who incorporate it into their college meetings and advisories. Utah Scholars also launched the Coaches program this year in four schools. Current college students, who are representative of the diverse populations of Utah Scholars, serve as coaches and meet with students weekly.

- **Social Marketing Campaign**

For the Utah System of Higher Education to reach the "big goal" of having 66 percent of Utah's workforce with postsecondary degrees by 2020, it is essential to increase college participation from student populations who may have never considered higher education as a viable option. The StepUp to Higher Education campaign is a social awareness campaign that encourages all Utah youth to dream big about their futures, and then act on those dreams by preparing for and completing college. Whether aiming for a one-year certificate or a four-year degree, StepUp provides tips, tools, resources and conversation starters on preparing and paying for college so that obtaining higher education can be a reality for all Utahns.

**Target Audiences:** 12 years of age and under: *Encourage the Dream*; Youth 12 and over: *Inspire to Act*; and parents, families, mentors and educators: *Support the Journey*.

**Strategies and Grassroots Efforts – Youth 12 and over, Inspire to Act:**

To engage our 12 and over target audience we, in partnership with Love Communications, developed a way to deliver the message in real life scenarios so teenagers could see and feel for themselves that college is what will make their dreams a reality. Teens were placed in real-life work situations – classroom, mechanics shop, and a software development company. They were blindfolded and dropped into the heat of things, where the blindfold was removed. The unfamiliar environment along with immediate tasks to complete, delivered a stunned and flabbergasted student. On screen graphics then encourage viewers to “Take on anything. Take on College.”

**Outcomes:**

- Traffic to StepUpUtah.com is up 115.97% with 43,996 visits over last year.
- Visitors are viewing 2.43 pages and spending 1:22 minutes on the site – well above industry average.
- There is increased engagement throughout the state particularly in rural areas.
- The Facebook page attained 321 additional likes this year, a 115% increase.
- The Teen Take Over Facebook contest increased page “likes” by 125, with 8,536 students ages 12-17 engaging with our page during a month-long promotion to solicit teens for our ads. Engagement means “the friend” saw activity on our page and can include posts, posts by other people, page “like” adds, mentions, and check-ins.
- The KJZZ high school sports partnership showcased the StepUP message to over 18,000 fans at 10 high school football games throughout the state with in-game promotions, PA announcements and sideline banners. As added value we received Larry H. Miller Movie Theater advertising and on-air TV spots.
- An estimated 9,300 high school-aged students were directly exposed to our message through radio station community events, van hits, and station remotes at community events (Fun runs, Haunted Houses, RSL game, Hogle Zoo and concerts).
- 75,000 College guides distributed.

**Strategies and Grassroots Efforts – 12 and under Campaign, Encourage the Dream:**

For the 12 and under campaign, we continued to create tools for parents, educators, and community members to use to start early conversations with children about going to college.

StepUp took part in the KSL-TV Chalk Art Festival, a unique family-centered community event that draws over 15,000 people. Direct interaction with hundreds of children took place on the day of the event. Kids dreamed about what they could “be” when they grew up as they took pictures in the standee cut-outs of scientists, pilots and graduates.

A new children’s book was written and illustrated titled “Monte and the World of Possibilities” which discusses all the things you could do and be, and how an education is required to make this happen. The book will be disseminated to all 1st and 2nd grade classes in the fall. A launch public relations event will be held this fall with support from the Governor and community partners.

● **Financial Aid Nights, and FAFSA Completion Events**

As a result of our partnership with UHEAA, specifically their outreach teams, events across the state have continued to increase awareness to students and families about how to plan, pay, and

utilize resources to attend postsecondary education. This year there was a focus on expanding the geographical reach to better serve students who may be at risk of not enrolling in or completing college. This year UHEAA was able to reach 43 schools in 24 school districts.

- 47 Financial Aid Nights were hosted with 5,153 attendees.
  - 63 FAFSA Completion Events took place with over 2,195 total attendees (this represents a per-event attendance increase of 50% over the 2013 FAFSA Season).
  - A total of 668 students completed a FAFSA application at one of these events.
  - A total of 21 booths events were attended. Financial aid information reached 5,334 individuals.
- **Utah College Application Week (UCAW)**  
This year USHE partnered with the American Council on Education and their American College Application Campaign (ACAC) to pilot Utah's first ever College Application Week (UCAW). UCAW's purpose is to help high school seniors navigate the college admissions process and ensure each participating student submits at least one college admissions application during the school day during the designated week. Utah's College Application Week took place November 11-15, 2013 with a special focus on low-income, first generation students who may not have otherwise considered applying.

UCAW was piloted in three districts and eight high schools across the state. A total of 2,311 students participated, 55% of which were first generation college students. 1,572 college applications were submitted that week. Surveys were administered to all participants and as a result of UCAW's efforts we learned:

- UCAW increased student's interest in attending college by 87%.
- 25% reported they did not previously plan to apply to college before participating in UCAW.
- 66% reported they did not have knowledge of the FAFSA.

Additionally, parents, higher education access and admissions professionals, college students, and community members donated 451 hours of volunteer service to assist the schools in their efforts.

## **Professional Development for Counselors**

- **USHE Secondary School Administrator and Counselor Conference**  
For the fifth year in a row we hosted the conference for secondary school administrators and counselors. With the lessons learned from the previous four years we hosted our strongest conference yet. The focus this year was financing college with a theme of "Paying for College is Possible". As Utah continues to have one of the lowest FAFSA completion rates in the nation we felt it was imperative to host a conference centered on funding a college education, specifically the first steps all students should take, completing the FAFSA. In partnership with UHEAA, we were able to create a data wheel showing Utah's FAFSA completion rates from the previous year by school district. On this wheel attendees could view the number of FAFSA's started versus how many were completed, percent of FAFSA filers who were Pell eligible, the average Expected Family Contribution, percent of district students receiving free or reduced lunch, and the median household income and average income of families who submitted a FAFSA. We felt this was a valuable tool in showing districts where they stood in regard to FAFSA completion and how they

compare to other districts. We were fortunate to have Greg Darnieder from the U. S. Department of Education give the keynote address and discuss the national landscape surrounding FAFSA completion, affordability, and economic argument for a college credential.

- A total of 527 administrators, counselors, college access, admissions and recruitment staff had the opportunity to attend and deepen their knowledge on paying for college.
- Participants were able to choose from 28 workshops covering such topics as FAFSA completion, engaging students in social media, empowering Latino students, parent involvement, undocumented student support, as well as sessions on the statewide initiatives such as the 15 to Finish campaign, concurrent enrollment, Utah Scholars, Utah Education Savings Plan, scholarships, and panel sessions highlighting college, university, and business leaders.
- Representatives from all USHE schools, as well as UCAT, BYU, LDSBC and Westminster College, StepUp, Utah Scholars, UESP and UHEAA had information booths and were able to answer questions and distribute materials for the upcoming academic year.
- 80% of attendees agreed they developed a greater understanding of college preparation, admissions and financial aid processes.
- 91% agreed that this conference prepared them to help students and families plan for college.

- **UHEAA National Training for Counselors and Mentors (NT4CM), FAFSA Boot Camps, Financial Aid Workshops and presentations**

As a result of our partnership with UHEAA and their outreach team we have been able to expand professional development opportunities for counselors, mentors, access advisors, and other community partners to increase their awareness of how students and parents can plan and pay for postsecondary education.

- The UHEAA outreach team planned and provided 12 FAFSA Boot Camps to partners from GEAR UP, TRIO and the Utah College Advising Corps. FAFSA Boot Camps are half-day, intensive, hands-on training for school personnel to learn how to host FAFSA Completion Nights at their respective schools. New this year was the ability for UHEAA to implement interactive, real-time, Virtual FAFSA Boot Camp Webinars. A total of 194 individuals were trained.
  - The UHEAA outreach team organized, traveled to, and hosted 12 district and regional NT4CM workshops with information on scholarships, financial aid planning, and a training on UHEAA's blog, its social media and other online web resources on paying for college. 266 counselors and mentors were trained.
  - Additionally, the UHEAA outreach team traveled to and participated in conferences where invited, and delivered trainings if requested. This year UHEAA presented at 15 conferences to a total of 848 people.
- **Collaborative Counselor Training Initiative (CCTI)**  
CCTI, a series of online modules designed to be used by school counselors to improve effectiveness in preparing all students for college, continued to expand through Utah State University's Counselor Education Program and University of Utah's School Counselors program. Delivery of the full CCTI curriculum is now a routine part of the UU's graduate program for School Counselors. Students complete module 1 during their first course, module 2 during practicum (spring year 1) and modules 3 and 4 during their internship (year two fall and spring). The second cohort of students will receive a salacity designation on their official transcripts of School

Counselor, College and Career Readiness when they graduate. This year the University of Utah extended its offering of the CCTI curriculum to in-service counselors. During this first year a partnership between Granite School District, USHE, and the University was established for cost sharing of the expenses of this offering. Eleven Granite District Counselors completed the training. The number of course facilitators available to moderate the CCTI course doubled with the addition of two Granite, and one Canyon's School District facilitator.

During fall 2013 and spring 2014, six in-service school counselors, one GEAR UP/Special Educator and one K-12 teacher completed Utah State University's College and Career Readiness for Professional Educators, an online, 3-credit, graduate level course. Partnerships have been formed with four school districts (Alpine, Jordan, SLC and Cache) and departments in two institutions of higher education. Partnership districts and institutions are eligible for the reduced, recording-fee-only tuition rate. The course will be offered every semester for the foreseeable future, and additional district partnerships will continue to be established.

### **Statewide Infrastructure**

- **College Access Network of Utah (CANU)**

College Access Network of Utah (CANU), the statewide access network made up of K12 partners, higher education access colleagues, and business partners continues to grow and strengthen as the group continues to meet regularly. CANU's mission remains to: support and strengthen programs and services that encourage the access and attainment of higher education for Utah's underserved, low-income, first generation, and historically underrepresented student populations, and supporting the goal of 66 percent of all Utahns to have a credential beyond high school by 2020. CANU has generally had six working groups: College Readiness and Success, Public Policy and Advocacy, Family and Community Engagement, Program Collaboration and Mapping, Early Awareness Outreach, and Data Sharing and Assessment. This year we are happy to report that two new working groups have been established to meet the needs of Utah's growing diverse population, Undocumented Student Access and Success and Adult College Completion. Both committees are chaired by USHE staff members and have a diverse representation from nearly all of Utah's public and private not-for-profit institutions. Additionally, a new co-chair was recently voted in as the prior term ended. The new co-chair Ruth Patiño Stubbs is from Weber State University and directs their Education Access and Outreach office.

- **ImPACT Subgrant: *Improving Preparation, Access, & Communities Together***

In its fourth year, this subgrant opportunity encourages college and university access and outreach programs to develop, strengthen, and/or enhance collaborations between K-12 schools and communities. The Office of the Commissioner received 20 RFP submissions from eight different institutions. Eight subgrants were selected, three programs were expansion grants of previously funded programs, three were new startup initiatives, and another two were planning grants. We disbursed just over **\$388,434** of our \$1.4 million 2013-2014 CACG funds in support of these institutions and programs.

This federal grant is consistent with the Regents' strategic priority of increasing participation in higher education. It has been instrumental in helping the Utah System of Higher Education maintain capacity and

momentum toward increasing academic and financial preparation so more Utah citizens might more fully participate in postsecondary education.

Commissioner's Recommendation

This is an information item only; no formal action by the Board is required. However, the Board is encouraged to read and take note of the information memorandum, and note that further follow-up will be handled by the Commissioner's Office as part of the Board's Participation strategic objective.

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David L. Buhler  
Commissioner of Higher Education

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