



UTAH SYSTEM OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

TAB E

January 14, 2022

Board Statewide Online Education Task Force Report

The Board Statewide Online Education Task Force met on January 10, 2022, under the leadership of Task Force Chair Aaron Osmond, with all committee members in attendance. The group reviewed the proposed USHE Online Concept Validation Study from the Cicero Group, dated December 13, 2021, and discussed its importance in understanding and defining the mission and goals of the statewide online education initiative.

Recommendations

The task force and Commissioner recommend that USHE proceed with the study.

Attachment

Organization: Utah System of Higher Education
Project Title: USHE Online Concept Validation Study

Date: December 13, 2021
Client: Scott Wyatt
Email: Scott.Wyatt@ushe.edu

Organizational Objectives

The Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) is exploring opportunities to improve degree completion across the state by creating and/or facilitating an option for online learning that would explicitly aim to serve adult learners who have A) started but never completed a degree/certificate program, or B) never enrolled in a postsecondary degree/certificate program. Currently available postsecondary offerings have left nearly 400,000 Utah residents with unfinished degrees. USHE would like to understand how it might best provide opportunities for, and even motivate these individuals to enroll in and complete a postsecondary degree or certificate(s) and is contemplating options, including developing a dedicated online institution, creating a new entity within an incumbent institution, facilitating an autonomous subunit(s) within one or more institutions building on existing collateral, or other potential options, for this purpose. USHE believes that flexibility, cost, time-to-completion, institutional identity/association(s), and program relevance/appeal, program structure (i.e. stackable credentials), and online interface are all important factors. USHE would like to engage a research partner to study, and quantify these factors to understand nuances in preferences and needs across various constituencies to help inform decisions about exactly how to optimally structure an institution and/or program(s) in this endeavor.

Research and Strategy Objectives

The following research objectives are intended to help USHE achieve the organizational objectives outlined above:

1. Understand, and document the current landscape of postsecondary offerings for Utah residents, with a focus on institutions, programs, and resources that serve non-degreed adults ages 25-50
2. Identify broad opportunities to fill unmet demand for non-degreed adults across Utah
3. Determine specific needs and preferences of non-degreed adults in terms of potentially completing a postsecondary degree or certificate(s)
4. Measure perceptions of higher education generally, as well as assumed outcomes of completing a degree or certificate(s) at USHE institutions with respect to other parallel options
5. Measure actual demand for postsecondary degrees/certificates amongst non-degreed adults
6. Evaluate preferences around receiving a degree or certificate(s) from A) each of the existing USHE institutions, B) an entirely new USHE institution, or C) a private enterprise
7. Determine which degrees/programs, delivery structures, and pathways to/through credentials and degrees are most appealing to this constituency
8. Understand price/demand preferences for the offering(s) in question

Recommended Approach

To achieve the desired objectives, Cicero proposes a collaborative research approach with customizable options dependent upon USHE's ultimate needs and scope. During the engagement, Cicero will utilize its expertise in research, strategic consulting, and the higher education landscape, both broadly, and in Utah, and in this instance - USHE's core focus area of online education for adult learners across the state and will rely on a deep and iterative working relationship with USHE stakeholders.

- **Phase 1: Landscape Assessment – Desk Research**
 - Review and synthesize internal USHE data – along with any extant studies – and any available secondary data to understand when/where/why Utah students historically discontinue postsecondary education prior to completion (*the extent of this analysis will vary based on availability of data and on the existence of relevant analyses or prior studies that might be leveraged for this work*)
 - Overlay extant studies with internal data to generate first-stage hypotheses, as well as outline themes and questions to explore in subsequent phases

- **Phase 2: Hypothesis Generation - Constituent Interviews and Focus Groups**
 - Conduct in-depth research interviews with 8-10 individuals who will share insights around why they have not enrolled in postsecondary education, or have begun, but not completed a postsecondary program, as well as which programs, price levels, modalities, institutions, etc. might entice them to enroll in and complete a degree program or certificate
 - Interview participants will be selected to consist of a mix of the following characteristics:
 - Age 25-34 (early career)
 - Age 35-50 (mid-career)
 - F/T employed
 - P/T employed
 - Urban
 - Rural
 - Parents of children living in the home
 - Non-parents
 - 0-50 credits earned
 - 50+ credits earned

- **Phase 3: Hypothesis Validation - Online Survey**
 - N=500 comprehensive survey. The questionnaire design will be heavily informed by the findings from qualitative research (interviews and focus groups), along with continued collaboration and prioritization with USHE stakeholders. A sample size of N=500 will ensure statistical viability of survey data and will allow for some segmentation of responses i.e., urban/rural, age, credits earned, and/or basic demography, which will enable more targeted approaches to eventual solution design.
 - i. Survey takers will be comprised of a mix of the same characteristics delineated for qualitative research participants. Specific quotas will be collaboratively decided upon at the time of survey recruitment, and representation from ‘Rural’ Utah residents will be integral to the integrity of this study.

Aside from screening and demographic data collection, the survey will be comprised of four main sections. (Additions to these sections, or modification, can be made within the scope of this research, particularly as insights are obtained in the qualitative phase of research.)

1. Explore the reasons for never enrolling, or not completing a postsecondary degree or certificate(s), with particular focus on understanding and measuring specific barriers to enrollment/completion
2. Measure demand/desire for non-degree adults to complete postsecondary degree or certificate(s)
3. Understand which attributes would entice individuals to enroll i.e., programs, modalities, institutional ties, expected outcomes, endorsements, pricing, etc. (The Cicero team anticipates potentially deploying a MaxDiff analytical methodology in this section, which will quantify, and rank order preference across the list of tested attributes)

4. Understand the role of cost relative to expected value and return on investment, and general price sensitivity amongst prospective students. (For the question of price sensitivity, Cicero’s research team may, as deemed appropriate, deploy a Van Westendorp pricing tool within the survey. This specialized survey instrument uses a proven statistical methodology to identify optimal pricing for a given product or service, and in this case, would be used to inform USHE at which price, or range of prices this offering would be most appealing.)

Project Deliverables and Timeline

- Summary report comprised of approximately 40-50 slides, incorporating interview/focus group insights, key themes, direct quotes, survey data results, and executive summary covering project objectives and highlighting key findings, implications, and recommendations.
- Discussion Guide for in-depth-interviews and focus groups
- Summary of interviews
- Summary of focus groups
- Full reporting of survey data
- Survey data cross tabs

Project Timeline

We anticipate this project will require approximately 12 weeks to complete. Additional targeted needs or special requests for interviews beyond what has been outlined here may impact timeline.

PHASE / WORKSTREAM		Week												
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Project Kick-Off	Project Kick-Off													
Phase 1 Landscape Assessment	Analyze available internal USHE data and relevant extant studies													
	Generate/refine initial hypotheses													
Phase 2 Hypothesis Generation	Recruit, schedule, conduct in-depth interviews													
	Recruit, schedule, facilitate focus groups													
Phase 3 Persona Development + Journey Mapping	Design survey questionnaire													
	Program, launch, and field survey													
	Analyze survey results and build final project report													
Final Comprehensive Presentation														

Project Fees and Professional Arrangements

Total Project Fees: \$98,500 (assuming 12-week engagement based on terms noted above; includes all professional fees, research-related hard costs, and research participant incentives and honorariums).

The project will be charged on Net-30 day terms. 50% of the project will be invoiced up-front and 50% of the project will be invoiced at the delivery of the final report. The above project costs are all inclusive of the actions/services described in the statement of work, including:

- Project management and coordination of all logistics related to the project
- Ongoing collaboration with USHE leadership and key team members
- Strategic thought leadership throughout the project (including Cicero team members being available for on demand and scheduled meetings throughout the engagement)
- Design of all required documents, including screening guides, participation invites, and survey questionnaire
- Incentive fulfillment for quantitative study
- Robust reporting of all research and strategic consultation based on research findings

Cicero Group Qualifications

Our team members have a depth of experience from top-tier strategy consulting and corporate firms, institutions of higher education, and government and not-for-profit entities. Our team includes current and former c-level executives, board members, business professors, economists, lawyers, diplomats, researchers, and data scientists. This experience and diversity help us deliver cutting edge methodologies and perspectives to every project. Many Cicero team members speak multiple languages and we have collectively lived and worked across six continents.

Cicero's experience and expertise in higher education is immense. Cicero's Higher Ed practice has partnered with a broad range of higher education institutions, systems, and organizations over the course of the last two decades, driving real and actionable impact for each. Particularly relevant to this project, Cicero has conducted sophisticated, in-depth research projects for a bevy of our higher education partners (as well as many large organizations in other industries), and brings deep capacity and perspective to this work. A small sample of our higher education clients is provided below:

We understand that project details change rapidly, and that responsiveness is essential. Our clients have access to a senior member of the project team 24/7 by telephone or email to answer questions or provide clarification. It is our intention that this relationship is truly collaborative, and we want to be available to be a true partner in the work.

Example Cicero Higher Ed Clients



Project Team

Team Member	Role
Aaron Andersen	Senior Partner, Higher Education Practice Lead
Ben Aplanalp	Engagement Manager, Higher Education Specialist
TBD	Analysts/Associates

In order to ensure the successful completion of projects, we take a very proactive approach to project management throughout the course of our work with clients. This includes working sessions with the client as needed and regular reporting and collaboration. Our philosophy is to begin with and continually refine outputs and deliverables to ensure that by the end of the project, the work products not only meet client expectations, but prove to be extremely valuable inputs to clients' strategic decision making.

Bios of Cicero team members are included below to provide perspective on the level and depth of expertise that Cicero brings to each client engagement. Aaron Andersen, who leads Cicero's Higher Education practice, will serve as Cicero's lead on the project, with an expert team comprised of highly qualified consultants and researchers led by Ben Aplanalp on a day-to-day basis. NOTE: *Specific individual qualifications for the additional project team members can be provided based on the timing of the project, as individual analyst and associate assignments cannot be made (or promised) until the project timeline is firmly established. Bios of potential team members are provided here for information only.*



Aaron Andersen
Senior Partner
Cicero Group

Prior Experience

- Principal Organizational Consultant, University of California Berkeley
- Senior Policy Analyst, University of California Berkeley
- Teaching and Research Fellow, Harvard University
- Associate Director, Program Administrator, Utah State University
- *Harvard University, EdM*
- *Cornell University, MPA*
- *Utah State University, BS History*

Aaron Andersen is a Senior Partner at Cicero Group and leads Cicero's Higher Education practice. In this role he focuses on helping systems and institutions of higher education develop data-driven strategies to improve student outcomes, enrollments, and operations.

Prior to joining Cicero Group, Aaron worked for over a decade in leadership roles in higher education. His experience included high-profile direction of large-scale operational restructuring efforts, consolidating disparate business units into new reporting, data management, and program delivery structures. In addition, he has led significant vertical optimization initiatives, bringing marketing, acquisition, conversion, and retention efforts into alignment around aggressive organizational targets. His experience also included key roles managing cost and resource management and allocation processes through periods of institutional retrenchment, evaluating and standardizing policies across business units, and architecting solutions to align faculty and administrative interests.

Specific to his higher education work since joining Cicero Group, Aaron has led large-scale engagements with institutions and systems across the country, helping these systems to develop and implement comprehensive student outcome improvement-focused strategies across a range of different approaches including brand and enrollment optimization,

segmentation and competitive analysis, strategic planning, analytics and data strategy, operations improvement, and program evaluation and development, among many others.

Aaron has earned master's degrees from Harvard University and Cornell University in Higher Education and Public Administration, respectively. He has a bachelor's degree in History from Utah State University.



Ben Aplanalp
Engagement manager
Cicero Group

Prior Experience

- Management Consultant, RLG International
- Account Manager, Hilti Inc.
- Financial Analyst, CellTrust Corporation
- Thunderbird School of Global Management, MBA
- University of Utah, BA Finance

Ben Aplanalp is an Engagement Manager with Cicero Group. Ben has experience in a variety of industries including Higher Education, Education-Serving Non-Profit for both Higher Ed and K-12, Transportation Logistics, Oil & Gas, Biotech, Software Security, Chemicals, Shipbuilding, Construction, Waste Removal, Marketing & Sales, and Tech Startups. He has made significant contributions in solving clients' business challenges in the areas of process optimization, project management, change management, implementation, leadership coaching and salesforce transformation. Ben drives impact through strategic thinking and thoughtful implementation, utilizing data-driven strategies to achieve meaningful, sustainable improvement for client partners.

Prior to joining Cicero, Ben worked for 5 years as a Management Consultant/Project Manager with the Canadian firm, RLG International. There he partnered with clients to optimize operations and capital projects, and to develop leadership teams. In this role, Ben spent 3+ years living and working in Australia with various multinational Oil & Gas companies in the LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) sector. Before his time with RLG International, Ben worked as an Account Manager with Hilti Inc. serving San Diego area clients in the Energy Production, Public Utilities, and Shipbuilding industries.

Ben has earned an MBA from the Thunderbird School of Global Management and a bachelor's degree in Finance from the University of Utah.

Additional Provisions

The parties agree to hold each other's Proprietary or Confidential Information in strict confidence. For purposes of this Contract, Proprietary or Confidential Information shall include all information or material which (i) is not publicly available; (ii) gives the owner of the information some competitive business advantage or opportunity of obtaining such advantage or disclosure of which could be detrimental to the interests of that party; and (iii) is marked "Confidential," "Restricted," or "Proprietary Information" or other similar marking or known by the parties to be considered confidential and proprietary. The parties agree not to make each other's Proprietary or Confidential Information available in any form to any third party or to use each other's Proprietary or Confidential Information for any purpose other than as specified in this Contract. Each party's Proprietary or Confidential Information shall remain the sole and exclusive property of that party. Notwithstanding the foregoing, Cicero shall maintain and have access to all data for normative and internal business purposes. Additionally, Cicero reserves the right to invite all study participants to volunteer their e-mail address in order to participate in future studies or focus groups.

Each party hereto shall indemnify and hold the other party harmless against any and all liabilities, losses, damages, judgments, claims, causes of action, and costs (including attorney fees and disbursements) which the other party may hereafter incur, suffer, or be required to pay, defend, settle, or satisfy as a result of the party's breach of any terms of this Contract or the party's violation of applicable law.

This Contract shall be deemed executed in and performable primarily in Salt Lake County, Utah. This Contract shall be governed by, and construed in accordance with, the substantive laws of the State of Utah, exclusive of the choice of law rules of that state.

Any suit between the parties that arises from this Contract or relates to the subject matter of this Contract must be filed in a state or federal court in Salt Lake County, Utah. The parties expressly submit to the jurisdiction of said courts for purposes of any litigation arising from or related to the Contract and expressly waive any rights they may have for venue to lie elsewhere. If a party files suit in violation of this paragraph, the opposing party shall, upon motion to the court, be entitled to dismissal of the suit, and shall further be entitled to recover its reasonable attorneys' fees incurred in connection with the motion.

The parties shall submit any dispute between or among them to mediation with a mutually agreeable mediator at a mutually agreeable time and place. The parties will negotiate in good faith to choose a mediator and a time and place for the mediation, and will pay equal shares of the mediator's fee. Absent an emergency or other compelling circumstances, such mediation must be completed before, and as a condition precedent to, filing of any lawsuit that arises from this Contract or relates to the subject matter of this Contract.

In the event any party files a lawsuit against another party that arises from this Contract or relates to the subject matter of this Contract, the prevailing party in such action shall be entitled to recover, in addition to damages or other forms of relief, its reasonable attorneys' fees and costs incurred in connection therewith.

The foregoing paragraphs survive termination of this Contract.

This Contract and any amendment thereto may be executed in any number of counterparts and transmitted by facsimile or e-mail, and each counterpart executed and transmitted in such way shall be considered an original for all purposes and shall together constitute one and the same instrument.