



The Potential of

# Degree Reclamation

A Path to Reclaiming the Nation's  
Unrecognized Students and Degrees

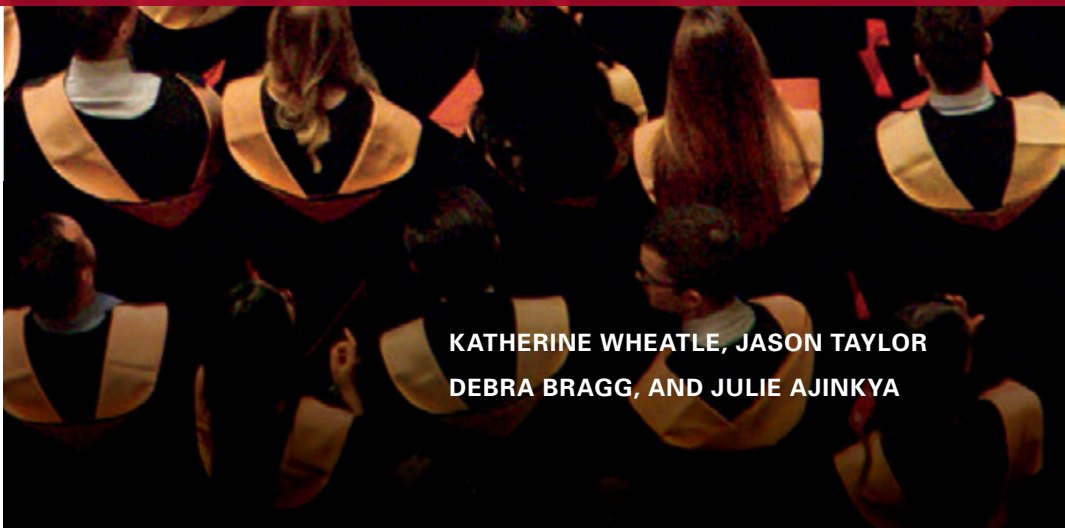
A REPORT BY

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AND

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Due Research Team

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# Degree Reclamation:

## Turning Potential Completers into Degree Holders

**MILLIONS OF AMERICANS** have attended college, accruing significant amounts of college credit, without ever receiving a college credential that appropriately recognizes their learning and effort. In 2015, there were more than 35 million such Americans aged 25 years and older, a group widely recognized as having “some college, no degree.”<sup>1</sup> Millions of Americans enter higher education with the expectation of completing a degree, yet nearly one in five leave empty-handed after investing considerable time and resources, and amassing substantial debt. Labor economists project that by 2020, 65 percent of all U.S. jobs will require a college education,<sup>2</sup> thus the higher education system must take greater responsibility for helping the “some college, no degree” population finish what they started and get back on the pathway to economic and social prosperity. Despite labor market demands for a more educated workforce and engaged citizenry, nearly all states are currently below the college attainment levels needed to fill these future jobs.<sup>3</sup>



**35 MILLION**

**Americans aged 25 years and older have “some college, no degree”**

**THIS EQUATES TO ALMOST**



**ONE IN FIVE ADULTS (17 PERCENT)**

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**Degree reclamation** deploys evidence-based and equity-focused strategies for institutions and systems to support potential completers—students who have accumulated roughly two or more academic years’ worth of credit and have stopped out of an institution or transferred from a two-year to a four-year institution before receiving a degree—in attaining degrees that are meaningful to their education and career goals.

Two national efforts—Project Win-Win (Win-Win) and Credit When It’s Due (CWID)—have helped institutions do just this for their students. These initiatives provided institutions with powerful reengagement strategies for reaching a priority subset of the “some college, no degree” population: those individuals who have completed a significant number of credits at one or more institutions and are already eligible for the associate’s degree. They also helped institutions identify and reengage students near the degree completion finish line to complete their necessary remaining credits for an associate’s degree. Collectively termed “degree reclamation” efforts for their focus on enabling students and institutions to get credit for earned but unrecognized degrees, Win-Win and CWID have already led to “reclaiming” over 20,000 new associate’s degrees. The degree reclamation policies and processes developed and implemented through Win-Win and CWID help institutions, communities, systems, and states work to directly drive gains toward national degree attainment goals. The purpose of this brief is to explain the degree reclamation imperative and offer a vision for scaling this strategy nationwide to reach significantly more students.



**WIN-WIN AND CWID  
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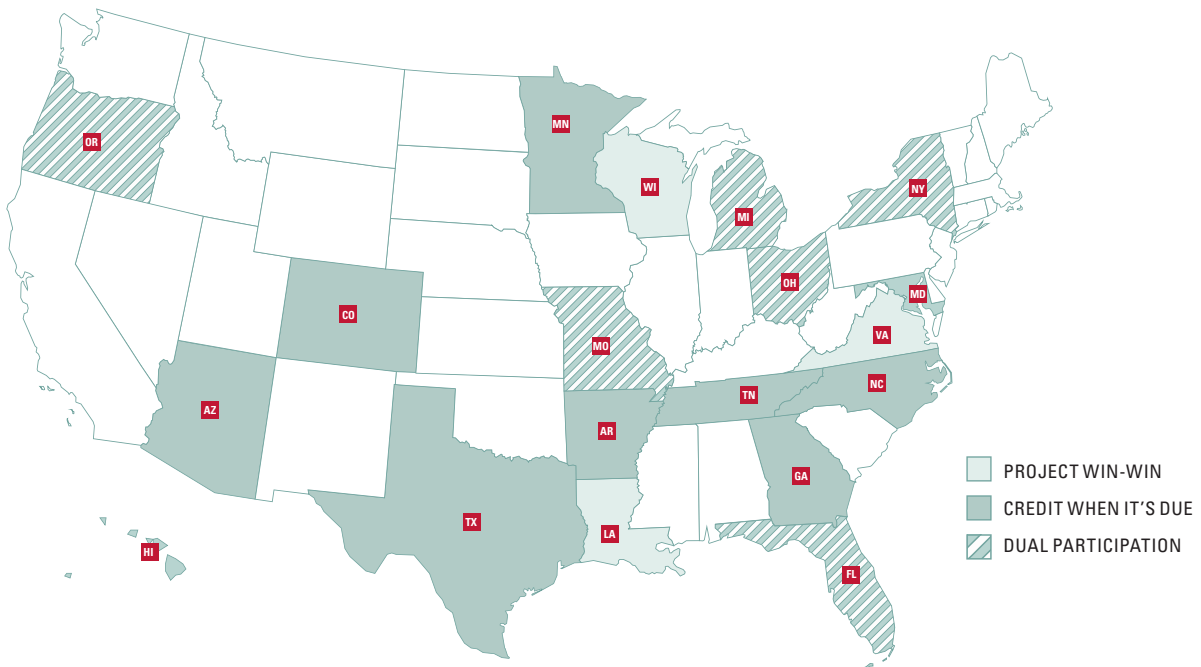
# Two Models, One Mission: Project Win-Win & Credit When It's Due

**COLLECTIVELY, WIN-WIN AND CWID** provide strong evidence of degree reclamation success. Though their approaches are distinct, both initiatives have similar objectives in reducing the “some college, no degree” population and in seeking to identify, recognize, and confer credentials to these hard-working students. Together, Win-Win and CWID have been implemented at 556 institutions in 17 states (see Figure 1). To date, both projects have collectively:

- 1** Produced approximately 20,000 associate’s degrees,<sup>a</sup>
- 2** Identified and reengaged students close to associate’s degree eligibility thresholds
- 3** Driven changes to institutional and state policies and practices identified as barriers to degree completion.<sup>b</sup>

**FIGURE 1**

## States Participating in Project Win-Win and Credit When It’s Due



a. The total number of degrees awarded, to date, by participating institutions as a result of Project Win-Win and Credit When It’s Due efforts.

b. These outcomes are documented in greater detail in project publications *Searching for Our Lost Associate’s Degrees: Project Win-Win at the Finish Line* (Adelman, 2013), and *Optimizing Reverse Transfer Policies and Processes: Lessons from Twelve CWID States* (Taylor & Bragg, 2015).

**TABLE 1**

**Summary of Degree Reclamation Models: Project Win-Win and Credit When It’s Due\***

DIMENSIONS	PROJECT WIN-WIN	CREDIT WHEN IT’S DUE
<b>Goal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Located former students from associate’s degree-granting institutions who had 60 or more credits but were no longer enrolled and had not been conferred an associate’s degree. Participating institutions retro-actively awarded to the individuals the degree for which they qualified. Students who were near-completers (no more than 9 to 12 credits short of an associate’s degree) were also located and encouraged to re-enroll to complete the degree.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Enables transfer students currently enrolled at four-year colleges to complete credit requirements for an associate’s degree while pursuing the baccalaureate. University credits are transferred back to the community college where students who have met degree requirements are awarded the associate’s degree.</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Located near-completers and encouraged them to re-enroll.</li> <li>■ Assisted institutions with developing communications campaigns to message value of efforts and locate students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develops marketing campaigns to communicate the value of the associate’s degree to students and broader stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<b>Systems Development and Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Assessed systems and services for locating former students.</li> <li>■ Identified system and service efficiencies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Aligns two-year and four-year partnerships.</li> </ul>
<b>Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Developed methods to mine student-level data.</li> <li>■ Used National Student Clearinghouse and state longitudinal data to match and locate students who transferred or completed degrees at other institutions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Integrates new transfer indicators and metrics into state and institutional data systems.</li> </ul>
<b>Technology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Explored and rated degree audit software.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Enhances technology infrastructure and automation capacity for transcript exchange, course equivalencies, degree audits, and student consent.</li> </ul>

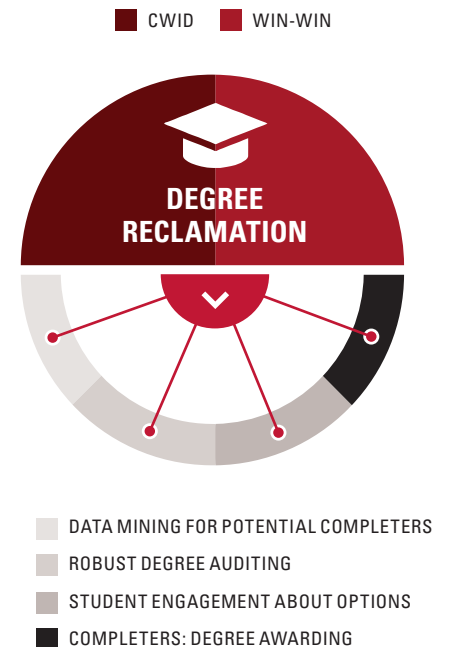
*\*Note: Project Win-Win concluded in 2013, and Credit When It’s Due is still ongoing.*

DIMENSIONS	PROJECT WIN-WIN	CREDIT WHEN IT'S DUE
<b>Institutional and State Policy Change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed new institutional degree-awarding policies that removed barriers to degree completion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develops consistent reverse credit transfer policies, procedures, and protocols for system-wide adoption.</li> <li>Eliminates transcript exchange and graduation fees and forms that were barriers to degree completion.</li> <li>Incentivizes institutions to participate in reverse credit transfer through state performance-funding mechanisms.</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional Participation and Student Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaged over 60 institutions.</li> <li>Awarded over 4,500 associate's degrees.</li> <li>Re-enrolled over 1,700 near-completer students to seek college degrees.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awards degrees based, in part, on competencies and learning outcomes, not just credits and courses.</li> <li>Engages over 500 institutions.</li> <li>Awards more than 16,000 associate's degrees.</li> </ul>

**AN ANALYSIS** of the core activities associated with Win-Win and CWID suggests a degree reclamation process that is comprised of four main components:

**1 Data mining for potential completers:** This process used student credit and enrollment data to identify a refined list of potential completers, also known as the *universe of interest*. The projects deployed technology to better track students and to assist in creating pathways for their success. Finally, project participants developed a better understanding of the diverse mix of students and the special needs of these populations through data analysis.

**2 Robust degree auditing:** This process audited student credit, and considered reverse credit, articulation agreements, prior learning credit, competency-based credit, or other substitutions to meet degree requirements. Additionally, the projects built the technological capacity of institutions to use degree audit and transcript exchange software while also considering options for expert manual reviews. Both projects also helped participants apply state, regional, and institutional policies to make seamless connections among academic records.



# 3

**Student engagement about options:** This process informed students at appropriate points of their options to consent to sharing records, receive a degree, or remain in contact regarding credit accumulation. In addition, the project helped participating institutions align advising and transfer or re-enrollment support to best serve students and help them claim the credentials they have earned.

# 4

**Degree awarding:** Institutions participating in both projects awarded degrees and other credentials that contribute to meaningful education and employment outcomes. They also eliminated procedural barriers to credentialing, including graduation (e.g. applications to graduate, graduation fees, and unnecessary holds).

Degree reclamation efforts benefit both institutions and broader society. When institutions undergo these processes, they see gains in completion, collect better data and improve data systems, provide more relevant services to students, and improve administrative systems. Likewise, communities are better served by their postsecondary institutions when degree reclamation efforts are aligned with needs of the local economy and focus on increasing the number of credential holders among adult learners and communities of color. Learning from successful implementations to date, the degree reclamation process is most effective when undertaken as part of a broader commitment to, and key strategy for the following factors and actions:

- **Credentials with strong labor market value:** With a focus on degree relevancy, degree reclamation helps students navigate their options for increasing their marketability in the workforce based on their goals. Degree reclamation also communicates and elevates the value of college degrees, especially the associate's degree.
- **Equity:** Students of color, low-income students, first-generation students, and adult learners have higher rates of attrition and lower rates of degree completion compared to their counterparts.<sup>4</sup> Degree reclamation closes completion gaps by improving access for underrepresented populations; assessing and acknowledging practices and assumptions about serving stop-out and transfer students; and identifying and addressing what is not working to best serve all of today's students, especially students of color, low-income students, and adult learners.
- **Continuous improvement of the completion process:** Degree reclamation equips implementers with the skills needed to document, evaluate, and adjust to improve process efficiencies, increase outcomes, and erase equity gaps. It also helps to consolidate the data nationally to assist in disseminating best practices and policies.



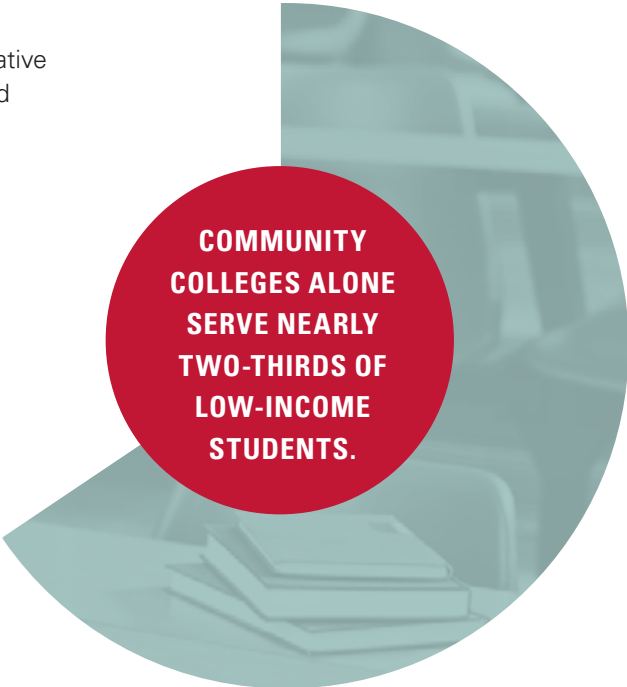
# Degree Reclamation as an Equity and Completion Strategy

**STUDENTS WHO LEAVE COLLEGE** without a degree are not a homogenous group. Given that degree reclamation targets a diverse group of individuals and is intentional about efforts to engage underrepresented students, degree reclamation has the potential to address existing inequities and disparities in degree attainment.

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 Current Population Survey suggest disparities in the percentage of individuals with at least some college, and these disparities are particularly large when it comes to age and race/ethnicity.<sup>5</sup> Research indicates that although Black and Latino students are more likely than their White peers to begin their postsecondary pathway at a two-year college, they are less likely to transfer to a four-year college and earn a degree (associate's or bachelor's).<sup>6</sup> Community colleges alone serve nearly two-thirds of low-income students.<sup>7</sup> Many students of color and low-income students at public community colleges do not graduate with an associate's degree within 150 percent of normal time<sup>8</sup>, and only 20 percent of community college transfer students complete an associate's degree prior to transfer.<sup>9</sup> Considering the profile of 21<sup>st</sup>-century students (e.g., first-generation, from low- to moderate-income families, age 24 or older, from communities of color, highly mobile, working full-time, enrolled part-time, and serving as caretakers),<sup>10</sup> degree reclamation is uniquely positioned to be an effective completion strategy to address equity gaps in attainment.

Many students of color (i.e., African American, Latino, and Native American), low-income students, and adult learners earned degrees as a result of Win-Win and CWID, and this preliminary evidence is promising for future degree reclamation efforts. However, results were based on available states and readiness of institutions to participate in this work, and left students of color underrepresented as degree awardees. This outcome left us with important unanswered questions:

- At what step(s) in degree reclamation processes do we lose students of color, and why?
- Do students of color earn too few credits to qualify in an institution's initial universe of interest?
- Should institutions broaden their parameters to include more potential completers?



**COMMUNITY COLLEGES ALONE SERVE NEARLY TWO-THIRDS OF LOW-INCOME STUDENTS.**

- Are students of color harder to locate, and therefore, to reengage?
- Are students of color more likely to face economic hardships that result in unpaid fees that prevent institutions from awarding their degrees?

To reduce missed opportunities, future scaling plans for degree reclamation must include collaborations among institutions; state systems of higher education; and local, regional, and national partners such as adult learner advocates, Black and Latino male initiatives, advocates for minority-serving institutions, and student success initiatives focused on students of color, low-income students, and adult students. To scale degree reclamation and impact larger numbers of underrepresented students, institutions and states must invite, integrate, and strengthen the capacity to serve large numbers of underrepresented students as part of participation in degree reclamation activities.

The field will benefit from more equity-focused research that results from degree reclamation projects. CWID data suggests that degree reclamation efforts make a significant contribution to recovering degrees for low-income students, as well as some students of color and adult students.<sup>e</sup> However, data from both Win-Win and CWID suggest that more work is needed to engage underrepresented students who are potential and near-completers. Future degree reclamation efforts must embed data collection into implementation to identify when and where underrepresented student populations get left behind and use these data to inform and improve implementation and practice. When scaled with equity as a core principle, degree reclamation efforts can help close attainment equity gaps for underrepresented students across the nation.

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e. Results are from all CWID states that reported this data.

# Addressing the Completion Challenge: The Need for Degree Reclamation

**MANY STATES AND ORGANIZATIONS** have established college completion goals intended to increase the proportion of individuals with a high-quality college credential by 2025. The Lumina Foundation estimates that 16.4 million additional credentials need to be completed beyond current projections to reach its goal of bringing the total number of Americans with degrees, certificates, and other high-quality credentials to 60 percent.<sup>11</sup> This goal demands a 68 percent increase in the current production of credentials. Degree reclamation can help to reach students for whom higher education has failed, and it can address systemic barriers to degree completion. By adopting the degree reclamation strategies and principles outlined in this brief, states, systems, and institutions will advance their own college completion goals and address a set of problems that has plagued higher education for decades.

- **Degree reclamation can decrease the number of students with some college and no degree.** Data from U. S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey show that in 2015, approximately 35 million Americans 25 years old and over have some college, no degree; this equates to almost one in five adults (17 percent).<sup>12</sup> Degree reclamation aims to specifically target the "some college, no degree" population who entered higher education with the expectation of completing a degree but left empty-handed.
- **Degree reclamation can support underrepresented student populations and reduce inequity in college completion.** Students of color, low-income students, first-generation students, and adult students have higher rates of attrition and lower rates of degree completion compared to their counterparts.<sup>13</sup> Degree reclamation has the potential to reach millions of underrepresented Americans who have started college and not completed by disaggregating data to understand underrepresented students' enrollment patterns and outcomes and by developing equity-minded degree reclamation strategies that reengage underrepresented potential completers.
- **Degree reclamation can provide a pathway to completion for students with mobile and non-continuous enrollment patterns.** College students are incredibly mobile and display non-continuous enrollment patterns, and these patterns often result in students leaving higher education without a college credential.<sup>14</sup> All students who benefit from reverse credit transfer efforts, like that prescribed in CWID, attend at least more than one institution but some exhibit even more mobility. For example, about 60 percent of students in Colorado's CWID efforts attended three or more institutions. Degree reclamation creates policies and processes that specifically engage students who are highly mobile and have non-continuous enrollment patterns.
- **Degree reclamation can support students with personal barriers to completion.** The majority of students report leaving college for personal and financial reasons such as personal and family health problems, psychological and emotional problems, family responsibilities and volatile family situations, inadequate financial resources or aid to pay for school, changes in their job situation, and conflicts between employment and college demands.<sup>15</sup> For students that stop out or transfer due to personal reasons beyond the control of the institution, degree reclamation strategies allow flexibility for how and when students can complete their degree by systematically creating policies that engage and reengage students when they stop out or transfer.



- **Degree reclamation can expand re-enrollment and reengagement policies and practices.** While most institutions invest heavily in programming and services to enroll and retain students, they dedicate few, if any, resources to reengage students who leave the institution. Degree reclamation expands state and institutional policies to reengage and re-enroll students who left the institution without a degree and confer them a degree when they earn it. For example, as a result of Win-Win institutions' outreach efforts to students who had stopped out of institutions, 1,668 students returned to college to complete their degrees.
- **Degree reclamation can develop technology and data capacity.** Data systems fail to adequately track student enrollment, credit accrual, and learning across institutions. If students transfer or discontinue enrollment at a single institution, many institutions do not know if or where they re-enroll. Similarly, students do not have access to technology and systems that allow them to aggregate and package their credits to demonstrate their learning across institutions in meaningful ways. Degree reclamation efforts develop and enhance data systems that help institutions identify and monitor students who should be completing degrees.

Given the daunting challenge of college completion, the need for degree reclamation could not be greater. The adoption of degree reclamation strategies can help address multiple systematic barriers to degree completion for students whom higher education has largely ignored.

# Toward Best Practices for Associate's Degree Completion: Principles of Degree Reclamation

**WIN-WIN AND CWID PROJECTS** have revealed critical lessons and promising practices to help shape a singular vision of degree reclamation. Both efforts led to institution- and system-level change that extends degree reclamation to large numbers of potential completers. These strategies include making degree audits a normal institutional practice, developing data systems within and across institutions that can make accurate student data available to multiple institutions, and modifying state and institutional policies (such as residency, recency, and credit articulation) that serve as barriers to degree completion. As degree reclamation efforts continue to expand to new states and institutional systems, there is an urgent need for shared strategies to help efficiently and effectively scale these efforts to serve a growing population of students with highly mobile and non-continuous enrollment patterns.

The successes of Win-Win and CWID converge into a set of principles that reflect a shared vision for degree reclamation efforts. These core principles provide both a foundation and vision for advancing degree reclamation strategies.

- 1 Recognize that students deserve these degrees.** Millions of students have invested time and financial resources in their learning and have accumulated significant amounts of college credit, yet higher education systems and institutions do not systematically recognize their learning. Degree reclamation establishes policies and processes to officially recognize student learning based on existing, institutionally defined degree requirements and standards.
- 2 Communicate and elevate the value of college degrees.** The associate's degree offers economic, social, and educational advantages for individuals and society, and degree reclamation communicates the value proposition of associate's degrees to students, former students, and the public. These same benefits of degree attainment for underrepresented student populations are multiplied when students receive a bachelor's degree. Degree reclamation not only awards degrees, but also communicates the value of college degrees and other credentials.
- 3 Address inequities in degree completion.** Given the large gaps in degree completion across race/ethnicity and income, degree reclamation examines inequities in degree completion and develops policies and processes to support underrepresented students' degree completion.

**4 Maintain progress on degree pathways.** The pathway to a college degree has been disrupted and derailed for many students, but degree reclamation leverages degree audits and credit articulation to reengage students and keep them on a pathway to a college degree.

**5 Leverage technology and data systems.** Many students are lost in the higher education ecosystem because existing technology and data systems lack the capacity to perform key functions such as locating students who stopped-out or automatically auditing degrees. Degree reclamation leverages technology and data systems to build capacity to confer degrees to students who rightfully earned them.

## Community Partnerships Can Support Degree Reclamation

Everyone in a community has a stake in improving postsecondary attainment. Community actors, including educators, families, policymakers, businesses, and community-based organizations and foundations, can play a vital role in supporting successful implementation of degree reclamation activities. Funder- and federally supported community partnerships emphasize the effectiveness of collaboration across sectors and the importance of aligning systems to increase postsecondary degree attainment.

Degree reclamation increases community postsecondary degree attainment rates and benefits society at large. Degree reclamation partners play different roles to see results:



**Institutional practitioners can audit their databases to identify eligible students;**



**Community organizations can help locate students to encourage reenrollment**



**Employers can financially support employees returning to school.**

For instance, employers and institutions could collaborate to develop an agreement for employer-provided financial assistance to employees designated as near-completers. Similarly, employers who need to fill positions could work with institutions to identify and hire near-completers and award microgrants to cover the cost of outstanding credits and other fees related to reenrollment and graduation. When working together and across sectors, communities systematically eliminate barriers to degree attainment and support local economic growth.

# Policy and Practice Recommendations

## Institutional Policy and Practice

Institutions need to make degree reclamation a priority and systematize strategies to ensure that all students are conferred degrees they have earned. To adopt degree reclamation as a critical degree completion strategy, institutions must:

- **Develop policies and procedures to identify, locate, and reengage students who stopped-out or transferred.** Institutions must improve strategies to reconnect with potential completers and re-enroll near-completers. This begins with the development of policies and the investment in personnel and resources dedicated to degree reclamation.
- **Be prepared to address needs of students who stop out.** If we do not address the issues that caused potential completers to stop out in the first place, why should they re-enroll? Institutions will likely need to invest in more student services to help prevent stop-outs and assist mobile students. Increased investments in student support services, including academic, career, personal, and financial supports, are just as beneficial to the “some college, no degree” population as they are to all students. Connecting students to internships, clinical hours, and other workforce alignment strategies will incentivize students to return to college to complete their degree. Without these necessary measures, potential completers will continue to face the same or similar barriers.
- **“Opt-out” but check in.** “Opt-in” refers to institutional degree-awarding policies require that a student’s consent to have a transcript exchanged and/or to accept a newly awarded degree (and in most cases, file a degree application, often with a graduation fee). These policies have proven to be a major barrier to award degrees. Rather, institutions should shift to opt-out models, where the institution exchanges transcripts and awards the degree whenever a student qualifies, unless the student explicitly declines the degree. Once the degree has been conferred, institutions must take the necessary additional step to locate and inform students and provide them with an option to decline the degree if it negatively affects them.
- **Interpret FERPA mandates consistently across the state.** FERPA requires schools to have written permission from an eligible student to release any information from a student’s educational record, but these rules are often interpreted differently across institutions and states. Colleges within the same state or region should work collaboratively with their legal counsel to institute consistent interpretations of FERPA mandates to make it easier for institutions to share transcripts and other student data between institution types (e.g., four-year to two-year, public to private).
- **Invest in and coordinate use of degree audit technology.** Institutions should enhance degree audit capacity and coordinate technology across departments to consolidate accurate information about students and, to the extent possible, automate degree auditing functions. Using a hybrid approach of automated and manual degree audits will help practitioners both create efficiencies in degree audit processes and accurately identify potential course substitutions.

- **Institutionalize degree audits.** Degree audits provide students with an accurate and updated assessment of their progress toward a degree. Institutions should leverage degree audit capacity to regularly and continuously assess students' progress toward a degree.
- **Create microgrants for students with outstanding debt.** Ultimately, an institution should want to know how many students are ineligible to be awarded their degree due to financial holds. Unpaid bills can serve as a barrier to sharing transcripts between institutions. If a student owes money to their current or previous institution, the transcript will remain on "hold," or will not be released by the institution, until the debt is satisfied. Though a delicate issue for many institutions, small investments like microgrants help to relieve near-completers of unpaid bills and fees and, in the end, contribute to institutional completion goals.
- **Consider more flexible initial student universe parameters.** Some potential completers from key student demographics may have been lost because they completed too few credits to qualify within the parameters set by institutions. Widening an institution's credit threshold by 5, 10, or 15 credits may significantly change how many underserved students appear as potential completers.

## State-level Policy and Practice

State policymakers and systems are critical stakeholders to the successful scaling of degree reclamation strategies. By working with state higher education and community college systems, both projects demonstrated the importance of improving state data systems, building a tracking system for students that fits mobile and non-continuous attendance patterns of today's college student, adopting state- and system-level degree reclamation policies and procedures, creating policy flexibility in relationship to specific disciplines such as mathematics, and reducing barriers to graduation.<sup>16</sup> In order to continue to encourage their institutions to invest in degree reclamation efforts and help facilitate successful scale, states and systems must:

- **Adopt state- and system-level degree reclamation policies.** Higher education systems and states should provide leadership in the development and adoption of degree reclamation policies by supporting institutional efforts and encouraging institutional innovation. For example, states and systems can facilitate the development of implementation guidelines, convene institutional stakeholders, or support legislation related to degree reclamation.
- **Coordinate data sharing.** State-level data systems are critical to optimal execution of degree reclamation initiatives. In both projects, consolidated state data reporting had gaps in student credits and often did not include information from private institutions, for example. States and systems can ensure that these data gaps are filled and that these data can be shared across institutions, both public and private, and between institutions and their states.



- **Share and protect data.** In addition to data systems, balancing data sharing with the need to protect student data is equally vital to tracking student mobility. Varied institutional interpretations to FERPA sometimes delayed key steps in degree reclamation implementation (i.e., transcript sharing, data matching, and degree audits). States and institutions should consult with data privacy experts to support their development of policies for managing credit transfer and transcript sharing.
- **Support the capacity of minority-serving institutions and regional colleges to successfully implement degree reclamation processes.** Institutions that educate significant numbers of low-income students and students of color need the capacity to engage in degree reclamation processes (i.e., data mining, degree auditing, student reengagement, and degree awarding). State systems and commissions of higher education must invest more to build the capacity of these critical institutions in order to see increases in degree outcomes.
- **Explicitly address attainment gaps in policies and disaggregate data to track progress of and engage underrepresented students.** The implementation of degree reclamation should be accompanied by an explicit equity analysis to identify and reengage underrepresented students. Underrepresented students are more likely than their peers to experience barriers to degree completion, and intentional efforts to communicate with and engage underrepresented students are needed for degree reclamation to reach its full potential and impact.

## Federal Policy

Degree reclamation is primarily an institutional and system/state effort, but federal agencies and policymakers have a role to play in successful execution of degree reclamation across the nation. To best support institutional-, system-, and state-level degree reclamation work, federal policymakers must:

- **Amend FERPA.** Amend FERPA to allow institutions to share appropriate student records with another school where information may be shared for the explicit purpose of conferring a degree or credential.
- **Provide reverse credit transfer guidance.** The U. S. Department of Education must provide clear guidance to institutions and states that are implementing degree reclamation initiatives that require transcript and data sharing while remaining FERPA-compliant.
- **Provide incentives to states and institutions to invest in degree reclamation.** By providing federal appropriations to states who participate in degree reclamation activities, federal policymakers can incentivize more dedicated implementation.
- **Expand federal data reporting in IPEDS to include reporting on students who stop out.** The Department of Education should require institutions to report on students who stop out but have not earned a degree and students who stop out of one institution and complete their degree at another institution.



**THERE IS A NATIONAL IMPERATIVE** to improve college attainment in the United States, and degree reclamation is only one of many college completion strategies that institutions, systems, and states are adopting to address the need for more college graduates. For example, many institutions are investing in strategies such as free college, competence-based learning, prior learning assessment, and guided pathways to reach more students and increase degree attainment. Although many college completion strategies are underway across the country, it is likely that millions of students will continue to find themselves in the position of having some college and no degree.

Without a deliberate institutional effort to identify and reengage students who have non-continuous and mobile enrollment patterns, students with some college, no degree—especially those who are disproportionately low-income and students of color—will be left behind as others reap the social and economic benefits a college degree offers. Degree reclamation must be an integral completion strategy at all levels of postsecondary policy and practice if we, as a nation, are to ensure that no students unknowingly, or because of financial or bureaucratic burden, leave behind degrees critical to their educational and economic momentum and success.

# Endnotes

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