

## **An Opportunity: The Rise of Working Learners**

Seventy percent or 14 million students work while in college, 43% of which are low-income and a third of which are over 30<sup>1</sup>. These working learners usually do not make enough to afford college because wages overall have not kept up with inflation, thus are lower in real terms, while tuition costs have risen steadily. Adding to this complex picture, employers cannot find the workforce they need and the call to expand education and skills to a much broader cohort of learners (e.g. employees, trainees, neighborhood residents, laid-off workers, unemployed youth, ex-prisoners, retirees), grows ever louder. What's needed are non-traditional pathways with on and off ramps, wrap-around support services, and high-quality work experiences that can be transcribed, transferred and stacked toward an employer verified certificate and ultimately to a degree.

The architecture of four-year universities was not designed around the needs of adult and working learners. That's changing, but we can and must accelerate these changes. We have a way forward – On-ramps.

## **The Concept: On-ramps to Broaden Education and Economic Opportunities for Working Learners**

### *What are On-Ramps?*

On-ramps are well-designed entry points for working learners and adult students to access higher education to start and stack competences and credit to: 1) advance learners' economic mobility in the short term; 2) supply employers in high demand industries with skilled workers; and 3) catalyze change within universities to re-envision pathways and redesign the architecture for a broader array of learners.

On-ramps, ideally, should include:

1. Access to four-year higher education, an employer-validated, labor market credential attached to recognized competences and credits, which can be accumulated and stacked over time. Examples might include badges, certificates, boot-camps, apprenticeships, or employer centered programs (e.g. delivered at the work place).
2. Wrap around support services such as child care, transportation, career navigation, basic needs, financial aid, bridge efforts such as refreshers in math, communication, professional needs or other services to support students attain the skills and credentials.
3. Re-engagement services and strategies to enable ways for students in on-ramp to later return for additional education or skill acquisition attached to a pathway (s) toward a degree
4. Career building opportunities through on the job or experiential learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Carnvale and Smith, 2018, Balancing Work and Learning: Implications for Low-Income Students, Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce.

On-ramp design criteria should consider:

- Competency frameworks including internal articulation agreements (and, where appropriate, external ones as well) to ensure the credit and the credential are transferable, transcriptable and stackable to a pathway(s).
- Determine costs, who pays, how much, and relationship to financial aid.
- Employer partnerships to both deliver experiential opportunities and validation that the competences taught are the competences needed.
- Community and city partnerships to deliver wrap-around support services.
- Outcome metrics for learners, employers and universities.
- Student re-engagement strategies.

### **The Proposed Initiative**

Eleven public urban universities, which collectively serve over 230,000 students (median demographics are 55% non-white, 41% Pell and 19% adult students) will work together to pilot and support on-ramps for non-traditional learners in four-year universities. Working together, they will not only advance their own efforts, but collectively address the following:

- What are the biggest roadblocks to innovating in this space?
- What solutions are already out there that could be aggregated and/or adapted to accelerate the development of these options?
- To what degree can we map these changes across universities to come up with strategies to help others redesign their own architecture to advance toward these goals?

Given the depth and scope of this effort, we divide the eleven institutions into two groups, each with a different focus. One group is piloting on-ramp programs; the second will focus on employer partnerships to optimize the learn-earn component and building out competences in support of that. There will of course be some overlap. Both will work on competency frameworks and wrap-around service provision. Collectively, we will create a framework for non-tradition pathways, and have catalyzed changes on eleven campuses to better serve adult students and other working learners, identified metrics for measuring adult on-ramps and quality work-relevant experiences, and developed a playbook for others to follow. Time frame: Three years.

### **Deliverables**

1. Eight institutions piloting on-ramps, and seven institutions (some the same) building next generation employer partnerships, which collectively will build foundation for non-traditional pathways to reach a larger, broader cohort of learners. Of these, five institutions are part of both groups.
2. Map roadblocks to innovations that impede the creation and progressions of non-traditional pathways and solutions mapped to each barrier.
3. A dashboard of metrics for measuring outcomes for students, institutions, and employers.
4. Playbook for other institutions.

## **The Proposed Cohort**

### ***Piloting on-ramps for a broader set of learners***

- *Florida International University's (FIU) CyberSecurity Fundamentals*, open to students and the community, targets technology and information security jobs, identified by the Miami-Dade Economic Development Organization. FIU is also launching Urban Potentials Labs, a center in FIU's Office of Engagement which partners with industry to provide opportunities to community members in high demand fields and is currently about to launch an apprenticeship program in Healthcare.
- *IUPUI and IU Health* plan to provide work experience for IUPUI students and Education opportunities for IU Employees to meet Indiana's health workforce shortages.
- *Portland State University (PSU)* is crafting a competency-based learning program in GIS with built-in hands-on practical experience, that will be designed as a long-term structured collaboration among GIS employers, community partners and PSU. GIS, and more broadly geospatial technology, is a DOL-identified high growth industry.
- *SUNY, University at Albany* is developing a micro-credential program for their technology industry, recognized by U.S. News as the third fastest growing in the nation.
- *University of Memphis (UM)* is launching a non-traditional pathway to educate FEDEX workers, 50% of which do not have credentials post high school, leading to high school equivalency and ultimately to a college degree.
- *University of North Texas (UNT)* built the New College at Frisco on the 5-million-dollar mile north of Dallas, which is a partnership-based educational approach to support the adult learners and employers in this region.
- *University of Rutgers-Newark (RU-N)* is launching our Coding Bootcamp and Data Science Bootcamp in Newark, NJ to advance economic development opportunities for emerging professionals and career changers of Newark and to address the increasing demands for professionals with coding skills and data science expertise in the innovation economy.
- *San Jose State (SJSU)*, in response to regional demand, integrated some terminal masters' degrees with industry, providing the degree programs directly at company locations and offer parallel degree programs to educate working adults from a mix of companies.

### ***21<sup>st</sup> Century employer partnerships to build quality experiences***

- *Cleveland State* partners with University Hospital System and Cuyahoga Community College to address nursing shortages.
- *Morgan State's* Careers Pathways Initiative provides internships and other experiential opportunities in high demand fields, identified by the Maryland Labor Department.
- *SJSU* also partners with Jabil Industry and the Santa Clara County Social Services Agencies to meet continuous demand for technology and social service workers.
- *University of North Carolina, Charlotte* partners Bank of America for a 17-month work-based, technology-focused experience with competitive pay, executive mentorship, scholarships and a 95% placement rate.
- *RU-N* plans to build industry partnerships with Apple, Audible, Prudential, and RWJBarnabas Health to create a pipeline of skilled talent for apprenticeships and full-time employment in coding and data science with an industry mentorship program.
- *FIU, IUPUI, PSU, UM and UNT* are also building employer partnerships as part of their work.