Council Conversations

WASHINGTON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

August 2014

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FAFSA Completion Initiative Planned for 2015

The Washington Student Achievement Council is taking the lead in the statewide FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) Completion Initiative. This effort is part of the Student Aid Internet Gateway, which allows school districts and authorized GEAR UP and TRiO grantees to access their students' FAFSA completion status. The FAFSA Completion Initiative is expected to go live at the beginning of 2015.

For more information, contact Weiya Liang at 360-753-7884 or weiyal@wsac.wa.gov.

Letter From the Executive Director

By Gene Sharratt, Ph.D.

Summer is a busy time for the Washington Student Achievement Council. At the forefront of our work is development of the Strategic Action Plan. Once approved by the Council, this plan will help us progress toward achievement of Washington's two statewide attainment goals:

- All adults in Washington, ages 25-44, will have a high school diploma or equivalent.
- At least 70 percent of Washington adults, ages 25-44, will have a postsecondary credential.

Council members have made stakeholder engagement their highest priority in the development of the Strategic Action Plan. Initial recommendations stem from the work of three committees composed of Council members and policy staff from partner organizations. The draft plan, which was reviewed at the August Council meeting, remains a "work in progress" until final adoption this fall. The Strategic Action Plan will shape the Council's policy and funding recommendations for the 2015 legislative session.

The Council's August meeting was the last for our student representative, Rai Nauman Mumtaz. Nauman has served the Council and the state with distinction. His energy, commitment, and substantial contributions will be missed. Members and staff wish him the best in the pursuit of his own postsecondary goals.

Other significant summer activities at the Washington Student Achievement Council include:

- Concluding a very successful College Bound Scholarship sign-up campaign, with 88 percent of eligible students to date successfully completing all requirements.
- Convening the Pave the Way conference, which focused on postsecondary completion strategies for underrepresented students.
- Wrapping up a highly successful 2014 GET enrollment period, with 5,500 new accounts opened and more than $127 million invested.

Our work this summer sets the stage for a very productive fall and legislative session.

Meet Hootie, the College Super Saver

In plenty of time for the upcoming 2014-15 enrollment year, the GET program is pleased to welcome its newest team member: **Hootie, the College Super Saver!** GET's new mascot will be tagging along with the program's outreach team, connecting with families at community events and resource fairs throughout the state.

The GET marketing team introduced Hootie with an entertaining video and sent him on a whirlwind tour of colleges throughout the month of August.

Hootie has already been invited to visit a number of schools across the state. Keep an eye out for him at an event in your community soon.

GEAR UP Provides Campus Experiences for High school Students

Washington State GEAR UP ran two, three-day college knowledge summer camps this year. Participants included 180 high school students from 27 schools.

Students lived in a residence hall, ate food in the cafeteria (like real college students!), and had the opportunity to explore two college campuses: Central Washington University and Eastern Washington University. Programming helped attendees learn how to prepare for college, covering topics like financial aid and college admissions.

Student Achievement Council staff provided supervision and support, while college students from each campus mentored attendees. Students had a great time, with the most common comment being "I want camp to be longer!"

Register Now for GEAR UP West

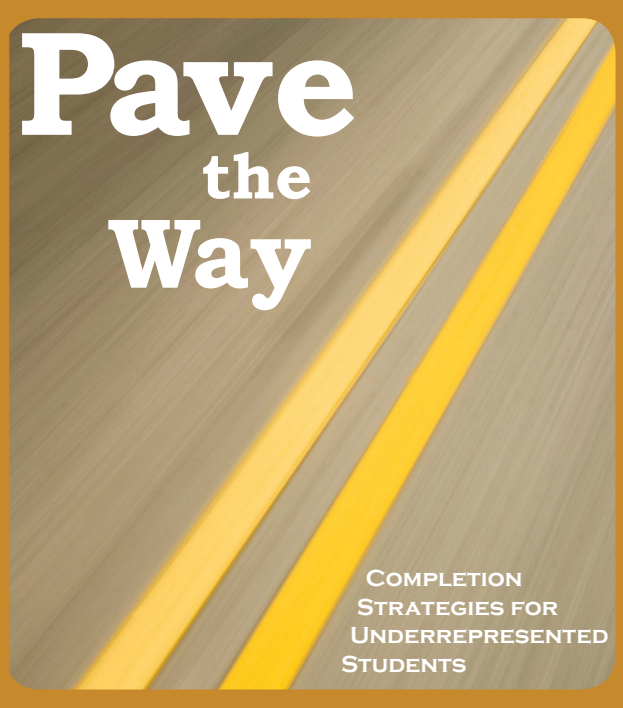
GEAR UP West is a collaborative regional conference for college access practitioners from ten western states. Washington State GEAR UP will host the event October 26-28 at the Westin Hotel in Seattle. About 600 participants are expected to attend the 8th annual conference, which has the theme "Expanding Opportunities."

Keynote speakers include Tacoma Mayor Marilyn Strickland, Pulitzer Prize winner Leonard Pitts, Jr., and Native artist and educator Louie Gong. The Wenatchee High School Mariachi Program will perform and provide a student panel.

Sixty-three breakout sessions at this year's event will examine best practices related to college freshmen support services, college match/selection, equity and support for underrepresented populations, financial literacy, and more.

For more information, or to register, visit the event website.

Pave the Way Seeks to Improve Support for Underrepresented students



Over 500 professionals gathered at Clover Park Technical College on August 12 for the Pave the Way conference. The conference, convened by the Washington Student Achievement Council, encouraged attendees to share best practices and create action plans focused on improving completion rates for underrepresented students. Featured speakers included James Curtis, a Tacoma native who now serves as a Pierce County prosecutor, and Vincent Tinto, a nationally renowned expert on student retention and distinguished professor emeritus at Syracuse University.

Attendees included student support professionals from a variety of institutions and organizations throughout the state, all committed to student success. Discussions focused on the importance of ongoing interaction and encouragement to keep students engaged, and of setting and communicating high expectations for students to strive toward. Dr. Tinto led a case study exercise, and participants left eager to put new strategies to work.

To view the #PavetheWayWA twitter feed of reflections on the conference, check out the event's Storify page. Additional materials and resources can be found on the Council website.

Next Council Meeting:

October 8-9, 2014
Pacific Lutheran University
Tacoma

Our Mission: We advance educational opportunities and attainment in Washington

In pursuit of our mission, the Washington Student Achievement Council:

- Leads statewide strategic planning to improve educational coordination and transitions.
- Supports Washingtonians through the administration of financial aid, a college savings plan, and support services.
- Advocates for the economic, social, and civic benefits of postsecondary education.

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