Breakthrough Models Incubator: Background and Context

In November 2011, the Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC) announced a challenge to accredited higher education institutions: develop next-generation online and blended programs that lead to breakthroughs in completion rates and time-to-completion of high-quality associate’s or bachelor’s degrees at affordable costs, particularly for underserved populations. NGLC awarded ten grants (up to $1,000,000 each) for innovations resulting in effective and personalized learning (http://nextgenlearning.org/wave-iii). The Breakthrough Models Incubator will explore these and other institutional or degree-program innovations that improve cost, quality, and access.

The Breakthrough Models Incubator builds on NGLC with the goal of accelerating the development and implementation of breakthrough models. The Incubator will engage institutions that are committed to adopting practices that optimize their education and business models, improving student outcomes and institutional productivity. By demonstrating what is possible through their designs and implementation, Incubator institutions will catalyze broader efforts to improve the quality, completion, and affordability of college.

The Incubator will move institutions through a structured exploration and design process. Within six months after completing the program institutions should launch their new initiative. The program will provide:

- Community: a leadership community that allows institutions and individuals to leverage expertise, networks, and skills
- Curriculum: education and exploration of specific issues, such as competency-based models
- Connections: introductions to thought leaders in NGLC and other networks
- Coaching: one-on-one and group coaching and facilitation
- Capital: funds to facilitate planning and longer-term implementation support, if the initiative is selected

The Incubator’s success will be defined by the success of its participating institutions. The Incubator’s purpose is to help higher education visionaries design and implement new models that dramatically improve student outcomes and college success.
Vision for Postsecondary Breakthrough Models

NGLC’s vision for breakthrough degree and institutional models is to blend the best of face-to-face and online learning, resulting in deeper learning at scale, with equal or lower costs along with greater effectiveness and improved rates of degree completion. NGLC believes that dramatic learning gains are possible if we scale the best of what we know about student learning and success. These models also will help address concern about the quality, cost, and affordability of higher education.

We hope Incubator institutions, along with NGLC grantees, will create and implement programs that:

1. Design learning experiences, assessment, and feedback around specific course and degree program learning outcomes, for subject-matter, non-cognitive, and deeper learning competencies.

2. Use learning science research to develop effective, targeted learning environments.

3. Deploy blended or supported online learning environments to increase personalization, engagement, and efficiency.

4. Combine online and face-to-face components to make learning more effective and affordable particularly for low-income and minority students, who might especially benefit from the support of interpersonal interaction blended with individualized, technology-enabled instruction.

5. Deliver targeted, customized supports to improve retention and completion with limited resources.

6. Use learning analytics and performance management systems to deliver quality, affordability, and continuous improvement.

7. Enable secondary school students to gain college credit or otherwise ease the transition from high school to postsecondary learning, taking advantage of the capability of technology to enable bridging between secondary and postsecondary education that may accelerate students’ progression toward the completion of degrees.

8. Be allowed sufficient autonomy and flexibility to incorporate innovations in areas such as the use of time, the role of instructors and other staff, and instructional delivery, and business models.

Each of the ten NGLC-funded “breakthrough” programs combines these elements in a distinctive approach to serve a specific high-need population of aspiring college students. They include, for example, College for America at Southern New Hampshire University, a competency-based program predicated on the performance of tasks rather than the taking of tests; Ameritas College of Brandman University, where Hispanic students will gain both English proficiency and an associate’s degree in a dual-language immersion program; and the University of Washington’s bachelor’s completion program in early childhood education that will use MOOCs.
About NGLC

In order to address the barriers to educational innovation and to tap the potential of technology, EDUCAUSE, the League for Innovation in the Community Colleges, the International Council for K–12 Online Learning (iNACOL), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation launched the Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC) in October 2010. NGLC seeks to dramatically improve college readiness and completion in the United States, particularly among low-income individuals, through the applied use of technology.

The program provides investment capital, builds evidence, and fosters an active community of innovators and adopters in pursuit of this goal. Funding in Waves I and II focused on “building blocks” to support new educational approaches such as blended learning or learning analytics. Wave III focused on breakthrough models of education at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. To date, NGLC has awarded approximately $40 million in grants.

For additional information

For more information about the Next Generation Learning Challenges please visit http://nextgenlearning.org. To learn more about the NGLC-funded breakthrough models for college completion that will launch in fall 2013, go to http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/NG1233.pdf. For more information about the Breakthrough Models Incubator, or to request application materials, please contact Nancy Millichap at nmillichap@educause.edu.