Team 6 – Slipstream Narrative

Need

Of the nearly three million youth age 16 to 24 who graduated from high school last year, about one million have not enrolled in college[1]. Yet, it is interesting to note that even as seniors were finishing up their high school careers, the majority (nine out of ten graduates) of non-college enrollees were expecting to go directly to college or enroll in a vocational, technical or trade training program[2]. Somehow, there is a gap then between aspiration and enrollment. If we are to make strides toward meeting our nation’s ambitious 2020 college completion goal of boasting the highest proportion of college graduates in the world, we will need five million more students than expected to graduate college[3]. It is prudent, then, to better understand the characteristics and motivations of “non-enrollers” in order to design programs and services that provide the motivation, self-efficacy, and support needed to bridge the divide.

Although not homogeneous, non-enrollers do share some commonalities. According to data collected by the United States Department of Education[4], not surprisingly, non-enrollers fared worse academically in high school than their college-going counterparts due to enrollment in less rigorous courses and fewer hours spent on homework. They are more likely to be male, from the rural South, with parents who did not attend college. The reasons many high school graduates do not attend college vary, but according to the Imagine America Foundation, the top five reasons are: no one in their family has gone to college; they didn’t do well in high school; they do not know how to choose a college; they think they won’t fit in; and they think they can’t afford college. For whatever reasons students wait to enroll in college, those who do delay are at considerable risk of not completing a postsecondary credential when compared with their peers who enroll immediately after high school graduation[5].

The key, then, is to capture these students just before or after high school and offer opportunities which will provide the motivation and sense of self-efficacy needed to engage in college level learning experiences as soon as possible. These students need help to clarify their goals, and they need a support system in place to help them build a bridge between aspiration and college attainment.

In some ways, not attending college right out of high school might actually have its advantages. One college study showed that high school students who decide to postpone college for at least a year often perform better than their peers, and students who had taken a year off had consistently higher grade-point-average[6]. Of course, that year off, or “gap year,” should be spent doing something productive that will help them focus their areas of interest, so that when they do enroll in college, they have a better sense of their attributes and aspirations. If the “gap year” learning experience provides an on-ramp to college by offering transferable academic credit for proven knowledge and skills, then students will also be two and half times more likely to enroll, persist, and complete a degree program, according to research conducted by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning[7]. Enter Slipstream: a gap-year alternative that will provide the motivation, the skills, the experience, and the credit non-enrollers need to begin their journey toward college enrollment and completion.
Value

**Students:** Students who would not have considered attending college would have gained skills and knowledge to help them prepare for post-secondary opportunities. These individuals would also benefit from learning in a cohort environment for continued collaboration and support beyond the Slipstream experience. Additionally, these students would bring a wealth of hands-on and global perspectives back to chosen post-secondary institutions once they matriculate.

**Secondary Institutions:** A critical collaboration would be between high schools and college outreach/enrollment services. Slipstream opportunities would best be advertised to students who are contemplating whether or not to begin a post-secondary degree or certificate program or to enter the workforce. Slipstream would become part of the regular conversations between students and counselors during their eleventh year of secondary studies.

**Post-Secondary Institutions:** Post-Secondary institutions would see a rise in enrollment and completion. The students participating in Slipstream would have also built upon the skills, attitudes, and behaviors needed to be successful in college which would, in turn, impact completion rates for institutions.

**Government:** Albeit students completing post-secondary credentials are in-line with President Obama’s 2020 College Completion Agenda which could transform a nations’ economy, countries that serve as host sites would benefit from the increased aid and support.

**Community Based Organizations:** While there are numerous community based organizations and volunteer educational experiences in the United States and abroad, collaboration between these organizations and post secondary institutions have the potential to reinvent the educational volunteer experiences and educational outcome for participants. Currently, participants have vast opportunities that promote incidental learning; however, if the learning was more intentional and focused, students could gain competencies that could directly translate to college preparedness as well as credit for prior learning or even direct credit if both institutions can work together to offer specific credit through colleges course and curriculum.

**Faculty:** To have a successful program, there would need to be faculty interested in participating in the volunteer experiences as well as developing curriculum that develops reading, writing, mathematical, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. If technology permits, the faculty
would serve as online instructors during the experience and they would continue to mentor the participants once they have returned which would help establish a cohort of learners once the students transition into a more traditional post-secondary educational setting.

**Description**

Slipstream is an open initiative allowing students to access and enroll in a project of their own volition; however, students will likely be referred to Slipstream by their high school guidance counselor, teacher, parent, social worker, or peers.

Once engaged on the website, students either sign up for an existing project that has been pre-evaluated for college credit by a third party provider such as NCCRS or ACE CREDIT, or they can use a crowd source function to generate interest in creating a new project centered on an interest they want to pursue. Projects can be completed virtually or on-site and will be supervised by faculty from participating colleges. To create a project, students must go through a series of approvals with the faculty member prior to the start date and work in groups to complete the projects.

A website and student portal will be created allowing students to interact both formally and socially online before, during, and after their projects. The portal will be monitored by Slipstream staff and faculty as appropriate. Upon completion of the project, the faculty member supervisor will provide a detailed review of each student’s participation and help them to identify their own learning as a result of their participation. To earn college credit, students will need to be actively engaged and must complete a final project or other form of assessment to demonstrate their learning.

Participating institutions will agree to accept the third-party evaluations should a Slipstream student apply and be accepted to a degree program. In the case of student-created projects that have not been evaluated for credit, students may seek prior learning assessment of their Slipstream experience through special arrangement with LearningCounts.Org, an online portfolio development program.

It is anticipated that funding will be provided through grants, through support of participating institutions, and through private donations. Funding will cover administrative oversight of the program including web development and monitoring, outreach/recruitment efforts, faculty stipends, and staff costs.

**Impact**

Success of the program can be judged using a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures including:

1) number of students “slipstreamed” through the program;
2) feedback from “slipstreamers” regarding value of and satisfaction with the program;
3) self-assessment to gauge motivation and/or readiness to consider college enrolment;
4) number of students who progress through to a successful college enrolment;
5) number of credits awarded on transfer for Slipstream projects;
5) number of students who persist to receive a college degree.