

**DATE:** April 22, 2015

**SUBJECT:** Adult Learner Initiatives Overview

**ACTION RECOMMENDED:** Information

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Tennessee Reconnect and Complete: Adult Learner Re-Engagement Initiative

There are over 85,000 adults aged 25-64 who have earned at least 50 percent of credits toward a degree but have never finished college. The purpose of Tennessee Reconnect and Complete is to locate these adults and provide some resources for Tennessee institutions to reach out to them and encourage them to complete their degree. Through an RFP process, a vendor has been selected and will commence work soon on locating contact information for these adults. In August 2015, THEC and the Governor’s office will host a meeting for institutional representatives to kick off the re-engagement efforts. Attendees will be provided a guidebook highlighting best practices, outreach resources, and the contact information for their former adult student non-completers. Institutions will then be able to reach out to the adults directly, offering information about their institution as well as the statewide Tennessee Reconnect and Complete effort.

Creation of an Adult Learner Portal

THEC is working with the University of Tennessee system and the Tennessee Board of Regents to develop a web portal focused on providing resources to adults returning to, or enrolling for the first time, in postsecondary education. Adults will be provided options that fit their needs, schedules and goals. The portal will also be designed to allow former students to enter transcript information and receive back a list of academic pathway options, institutions offering those options, and information about careers connected with those academic pathways. The web portal is anticipated to be completed by November 2015.

Ready to Reconnect: Institutional Mini-Grant Competition

In February, THEC released a call for proposals to public and private not-for-profit two- and four- year institutions and TCATs for the Ready to Reconnect mini-grants. These grants will be awarded for the purpose of providing services and support to adult learners to increase their success in postsecondary education. To be eligible for this grant, applicants must first complete the Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) assessment through the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), and institutions will identify innovative solutions on the basis of the challenges revealed through the ALFI assessment results. The ALFI process provides a detailed report of strengths and challenges based on how the institution serves adults through 1) a self-assessment from

faculty and administration and 2) an inventory of adult learners at the institution.

Twenty-eight institutions submitted intents to participate, meaning that we anticipate 28 institutions will complete an ALFI assessment, work toward being designated as “adult-friendly” and become better equipped to meet the unique needs of adult learners. Institutions should complete the ALFI assessments by May 15th and proposals are due July 15th. THEC will award approximately 10 Ready to Reconnect grants to institutions in August.

#### Conducting Adult Learner Research & Building the Policy Framework

Beginning this fall, THEC will pursue a large scale research project which will include 1) a longitudinal quantitative data analysis on factors related to adult learners’ success using THEC’s Student Information System; 2) a request to Tennessee higher education faculty to conduct original research on the state of adult learners; and 3) a request to Tennessee higher education administrators and non-profit organizations to develop qualitative analyses of evidence-based practices in serving adult learners. This year-long research project will culminate in publication and a convening in Fall 2016.

#### Prior Learning Assessment Technical Assistance to Institutions

Through the support of a grant from the Ford Foundation, THEC provided technical assistance to six institutions to develop and strengthen their prior learning assessment programs and offerings. Six public institutions were selected through an application process, and each engaged in a comprehensive review of their PLA practices and policies. All participating institutions provided THEC with their PLA policies, procedures, and marketing documents; completed a policy questionnaire; and participated in surveys and interviews of current faculty, staff, and adult students. In December 2014, THEC compiled comprehensive reports from this data designed to assist institutions in understanding areas of strength and areas needing improvement in regards to PLA. In March 2015, each institution provided a detailed action plan to align with the recommended standards and best practices and currently is implementing the recommendations of this strategic action plan.

#### Completion Innovation Challenge Grant ending May 1, 2015

In 2011, Tennessee was one of 10 states that received a \$1 million Completion Innovation Challenge Grant from Complete College America. The grant initially supported the successful creation of the Prior Learning Assessment Task Force and the resulting statewide PLA standards; the expansion of the Degree Compass course and major recommendation tool from Austin Peay State University to five additional institutions; and institutional Completion Academies to provide a platform for public institutions to develop targeted completion strategies. With unspent funds, THEC was able to further support joint UT and TBR Co-Requisite Remediation Academies to expand this model statewide, and to support Default Guided Pathways convenings to allow institutions to agree on default sequencing of courses to guide students through the Tennessee Transfer Pathways in each academic discipline.