



THE COLLEGE PROMISE SERIES

Depicting the Ecosystems of Support and Financial Sustainability for Five College Promise Populations

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ETS POLICY EVALUATION & RESEARCH CENTER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Depicting the Ecosystems of Support and Financial Sustainability for Five College Promise Populations

The college promise movement is aimed toward making the attendance and completion of college affordable for eligible Americans in hundreds of local communities and states throughout the United States. Many college promise programs are designed with the intent of enabling students to start and complete college degree and/or postsecondary certificate programs without taking on unmanageable college debt. Two significant issues were examined at the June 2019 symposium, “Depicting the Ecosystem of Support and Financial Sustainability for Five College Promise Populations,” sponsored by ETS and the College Promise Campaign (CPC) — with the generous support of the ECMC Foundation and the Strada Education Network. Those issues were:

- How would college promise programs be enhanced if they were reconceived with a deeper understanding and intent to accommodate the diversity within the postsecondary student population?
- How could extant and new funding models be aligned to leverage the financial support needed to develop and implement subpopulation-targeted ecosystem designs?

ETS and CPC identified five student populations to initially consider for tailored college promise program designs (see Figure 1):

1. traditional-aged college students (18–24 years old),
2. adult students,
3. undocumented students (DREAMers),
4. student veterans and
5. justice-impacted students (incarcerated/formerly incarcerated students)¹.

Figure 1 The Five College Promise Student Populations



Next, ETS and CPC invited scholars, practitioners and student representatives to join a design team and co-create the college promise program for their student population.

The symposium united design teams with members of the higher education community, scholars, policymakers, student representatives and other stakeholders to review and comment on comprehensive ecosystems of support for the five postsecondary subpopulations as they make their way to, through and beyond college (see Figure 2). The premise was that postsecondary students across subpopulations vary in their needs and benefits accrued from assistance with academic support, health care, employment, transportation, food, housing and other financial support as they navigate college access and success (see Figure 3).

¹ During the symposium, the design team introduced the terminology of justice impacted to describe all students involved in the criminal justice system — noting that student involvement with the probation and court system without incarceration may also be a challenging issue while pursuing their postsecondary education.

Figure 2 All Students Getting to, Through and Beyond College

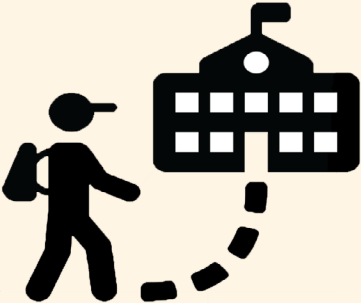


TO COLLEGE	THROUGH COLLEGE	BEYOND COLLEGE
		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 16.7 million students were at the undergraduate level in 2017.• 35% of undergraduate students enrolled in two-year institutions in 2017.• 66.7% of recent high school completers who finished high school earlier in the calendar year enrolled in college as of October 2017. Enrollment varies on the basis of students' sex, race/ethnicity and income level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 35.1% of first-time postsecondary students starting at two-year institutions during the 2003–04 academic year earned any degree (certificate, associate degree or bachelor's degree) by Spring 2009.• Attainment varied on the basis of sex, age, race/ethnicity, highest level of parent's education, dependency status when first enrolled, dependent student-family income in 2002, timing of postsecondary enrollment, intensity of enrollment, remedial courses taken in 2003–04, work intensity in 2003–04, control of first institution and income quartile in 2003–04.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 48.3% of first-time postsecondary students whose first institution was a public two-year institution took out loans within 12 years of entering postsecondary education.• \$13,800 was the median cumulative amount owed 12 years after starting college among first-time postsecondary students who began in 2003–04, took out federal education loans and attained associate degrees.

Figure 3 Ecosystem of Student Needs



A central design assumption made by all five design teams is that for students to achieve the full benefits of college promise programs, equity must be central to the development of these initiatives. Therefore, while applying an ecological lens, each design team made equity — as it is defined by the needs of their respective populations — central to its framework. The report is a compilation of these final products and a summary of the thoughts and processes that helped the teams design their college promise ecosystems of support.

Report Structure

The report's three major sections and associated chapters include:

Setting the Context (Chapters 1–4)

- Chapter 1: An introduction to challenges in postsecondary education today, a description of the college promise movement and the development of the ecosystem design teams
- Chapter 2: An overview of key college facts and figures to provide additional context
- Chapter 3: The voices informing the ecosystem designs that highlight the insights provided by the various groups at the symposium, including stakeholders and knowledge navigators²
- Chapter 4: A data profile for the five subpopulations (see Figure 1)

Five Population Tailored College Promise Program Designs (Chapters 5–9)

- Chapter 5: Traditional-aged College Students (18–24 years old): How College Promise Programs Can Support College Access, Persistence and Completion
- Chapter 6: Adult Promise Programs
- Chapter 7: Promoting College Access and Success for Undocumented Students: Context Matters in the Ecosystem of Support Services

² Knowledge navigators was the term used at the symposium to refer to those scholars, policymakers and members of the higher education community who participated in the symposium by leading conversations and offering insights used by the authors of the report.

- Chapter 8: Enhancing College Access and Success for Student Veterans: Providing Economic Opportunity and Supports Beyond the GI Bill Through College Promise
- Chapter 9: Supporting Incarcerated Student Success

Financing the College Promise Program Designs (Chapter 10)

- Chapter 10: Explores the program features in need of funding, lists the various potential funding sources and explains how programs might knit these resources together

Bringing the Ecosystems Together (Chapter 11)

- Chapter 11: Integrates the common themes across the ecosystem design papers

Setting the Context

Several sections of the report are devoted to setting the context and providing background information on the five subpopulations, as well as the postsecondary environment in general. A data profile was developed for each of the five populations, and in the chapter on the voices of the ecosystems, there is a summary of each design team's "spark talk" presentations. These 10-minute discussions provided a forum for the design teams to share the big ideas about the needs and backgrounds of the population for whom they developed a college promise ecosystem. Maria Evans, a sketchnote artist, captured the key points of the presentations and discussions. Her work visually captures the essence of the symposium dialogue.

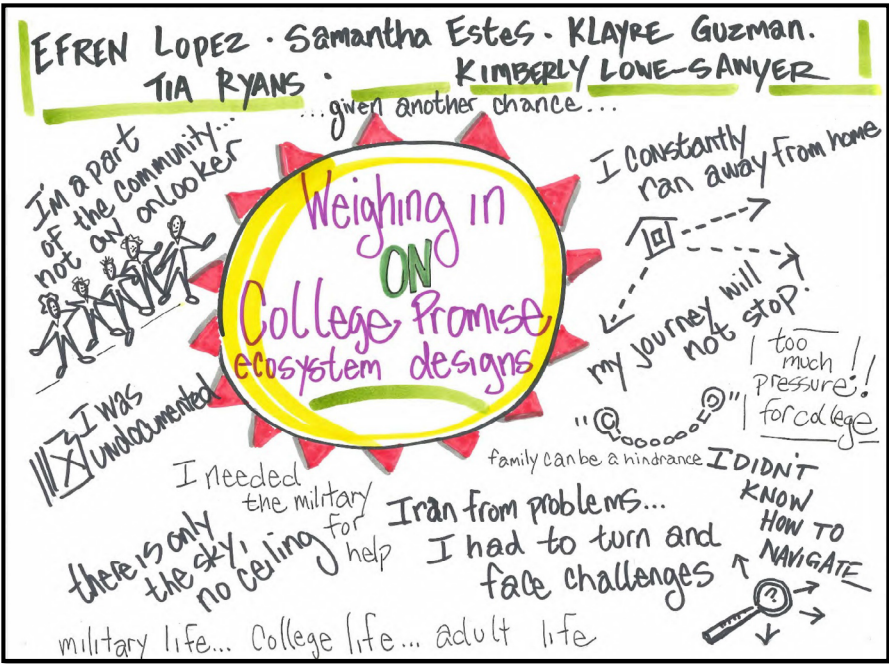
The information profiled in the college fact and figures chapter was divided into three categories: college students today, student supports and paying for college. See Figure 4 for a summary of the contextual data presented in this chapter.

Figure 4 College Facts and Figures Summary

COLLEGE STUDENTS TODAY	STUDENT SUPPORTS	PAYING FOR COLLEGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. college students today are more demographically diverse than in the past and have varying needs. • Not all high school students attend college immediately after high school. • Many students enter college academically unprepared. • Of the approximately 20 million college students expected to attend college, six million will attend two-year institutions and 7.8 million students will attend part time. • Most new jobs will require people with postsecondary credentials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A significant portion of college students experience challenges with meeting their basic needs (i.e., housing and food). • Many postsecondary students need additional supports to become academically prepared to be college and career ready. • Comprehensive student supports can improve postsecondary persistence and completion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The average total cost of college has been rising. • The average total cost of attending degree-granting institutions varies by institution type and student-living situation. • The percentage of average college cost (tuition, fees, room and board) covered by the maximum Pell Grant has declined. • Individuals and families are responsible for an increased portion of postsecondary expenditures. • The cost burden of college is not borne by all families equally.

Student Insights on College Promise: Inclusion, Engagement and a Sense of Belonging

Figure 5 Capturing Student Input



Sketchnote of Symposium Discussion by Maria Evans

At the June 2019 symposium, we asked a student from each of the five design teams to engage their colleagues in learning about their lived experiences. From the outset, we acknowledged that one student could not speak on behalf of the student population they represented. However, five speakers narrated their educational journeys. Their opening remarks and the ensuing conversation elucidated the common experiences and concerns applied to all five student populations, as well as experiences that may be unique to their student population (see Figure 5). Together, they shined a light on what it takes to enable students to function fully as they make their way to, through and beyond postsecondary education. The student panel made nine primary recommendations for college promise programs (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Summary of Student College Promise Program Recommendations

STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLEGE PROMISE PROGRAMS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Training/professional development for college faculty, staff and administrators regarding interacting with nontraditional students• More personalized attention and involvement from professors• Housing support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater involvement from peers, the community and local politicians• Greater monetary support, especially for nontuition expenses such as textbooks• Mentoring programs, both general and major specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expanded office and student services hours (weekends and evenings)• Raising awareness of college promise programs and what they have to offer to students, families and faculty/staff/administrators• Compensation for professors teaching courses to nontraditional students

Five College Promise Ecosystem Designs

The project culminated in the symposium “Depicting the Ecosystem of Support and Financial Sustainability for Five College Promise Populations” and includes a compilation report of five ecosystem design papers authored by the external design teams. This report brings together the various college promise frameworks and provides ideas for tailored program features to enable success to, through and beyond college for the respective populations. Abstracts for each of the papers are included below, in addition to the sketchnotes produced during the conference spark talk presentation on each of the five populations.

Traditional-aged College Students (18–24 Years Old): How College Promise Programs Can Support College Access, Persistence and Completion

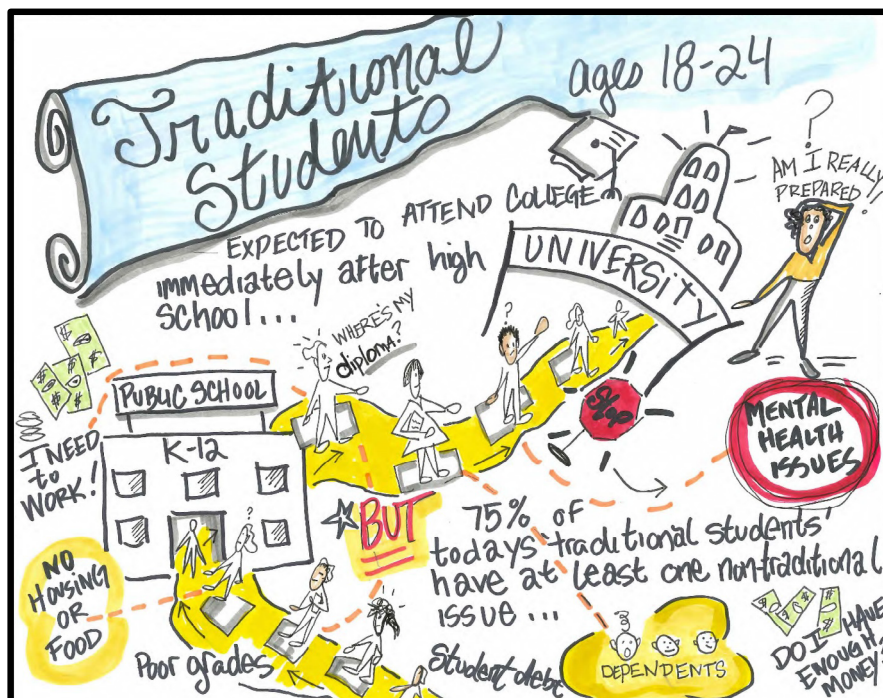
Mary Rauner¹ and Sara Lundquist^{1,2}

¹WestEd, San Francisco, California, United States

²Lumina Foundation, Indianapolis, Indiana, United States

Today’s traditional-aged college students, those 18–24 years old, differ greatly from those who came before them. Most possess at least one nontraditional trait (e.g., attending school while working or having dependents) and are from underrepresented populations, including people of color, individuals in low-income situations and first-generation students. Many must contend with needs beyond academics and tuition financing, such as food insecurity, homelessness and mental health issues. A college promise framework for supporting traditional-aged college students includes student supports (financial assistance; messaging and communication about the program, advice, feedback, support and deadlines; and academic supports and student services) and program features (place-based eligibility requirements and cross-segment/cross-sector partnerships). This report also identifies strategies for funding continuity and suggests methods for evaluating the efficacy of this framework.

Figure 7 Depiction of Traditional-aged Students’ Demographic Information



Sketchnote of Symposium Discussion by Maria Evans

Note: For facts and figures about the population, see Chapter 4. For the design team paper, see Chapter 5.

Adult Promise Programs

Louis Soares¹, Adam Bush², Hadass Sheffer³, Patricia Steele⁴, Nate Johnson⁵, Reuben Ford⁶ and Jessica Gibson⁷

¹American Council on Education, Washington DC, United States

²College Unbound, Providence, Rhode Island, United States

³Graduate Network, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States

⁴Higher Ed Insight, Washington, DC, United States

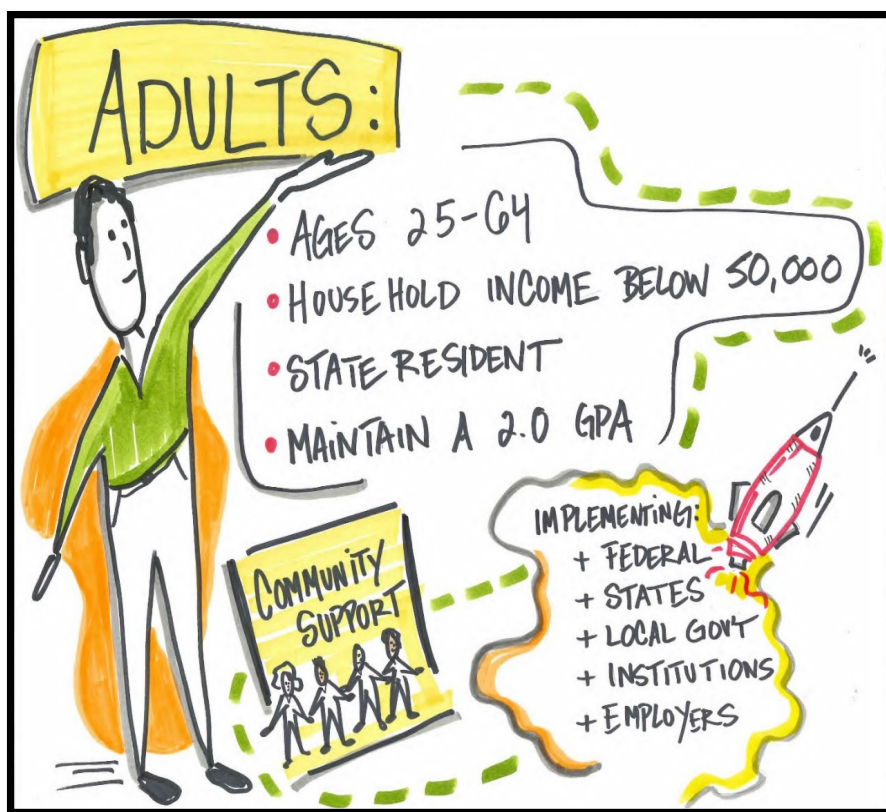
⁵Postsecondary Analytics, Tallahassee, Florida, United States

⁶Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, Ottawa, Canada

⁷Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Nashville, Tennessee, United States

The current U.S. postsecondary system was not designed to address adult students' (those 25 years or older) needs or acknowledge their challenges: nontuition expenses; difficulty completing coursework due to time constraints, as well as additional family and occupational responsibilities; and institutional policies that cause unintentional burdens for older students. This report proposes adult promise programs (APPs) as a solution. We first describe the critical components of an APP, then present support mechanisms that could enhance the outcomes of an APP, outline three APP model designs (federal, state, local) and describe different approaches to the implementation of an APP.

Figure 8 Depiction of Adult Students' Demographic Information



Sketchnote of Symposium Discussion by Maria Evans

Note: For facts and figures about the population, see Chapter 4. For the design team paper, see Chapter 6.

Promoting College Access and Success for Undocumented Students: Context Matters in the Ecosystem of Support Services

Rachel E. Freeman¹, Robert T. Teranishi¹, Ryan Cornner², Jennifer Galvez² and Efren Lopez³

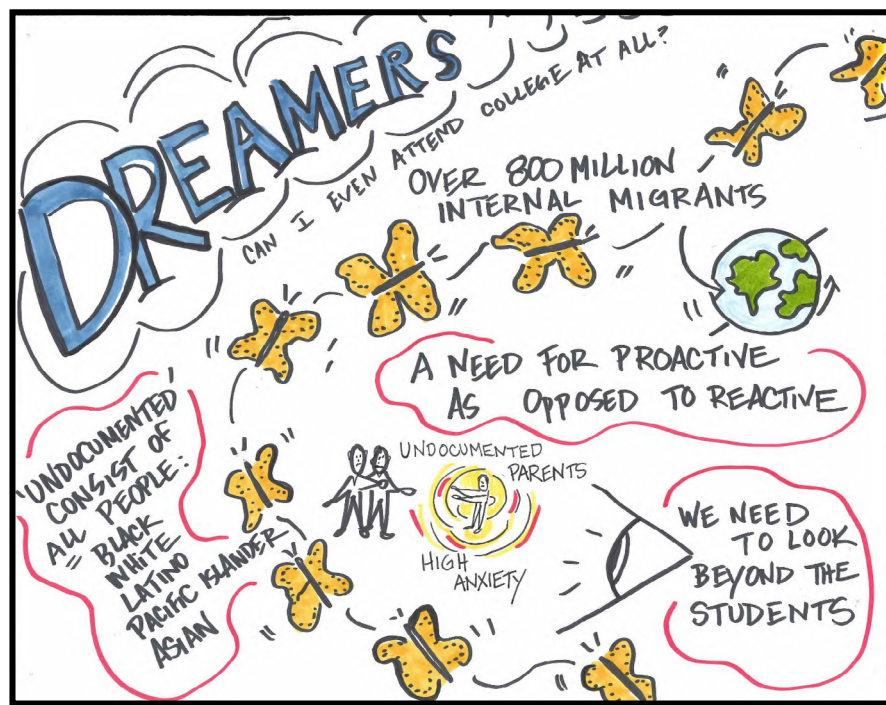
¹University of California, Los Angeles

²Los Angeles Community College District, Los Angeles, California, United States

³University of California, Santa Cruz

Building education equity for undocumented students in higher education is a pressing civil rights issue. To work best with this student population, it is important to understand the federal, state, institutional and community contexts that shape education equity for undocumented students. This report discusses factors at these multiple levels and provides a menu of recommendations to promote access and success for undocumented students in higher education. These recommendations comprise a holistic view of support for undocumented students, such as financial aid, mental health, academic and legal services.

Figure 9 Depiction of Undocumented Students' Demographic Information and Obstacles to Postsecondary Attainment



Sketchnote of Symposium Discussion by Maria Evans

Note: For facts and figure about the population, see Chapter 4. For the design team paper, see Chapter 7.

Enhancing College Access and Success for Student Veterans: Providing Economic Opportunity and Supports Beyond the GI Bill Through College Promise

Beth E. Morgan¹, Rosye Cloud², Sandra Kurtinitis³, Barbara Illowsky⁴ and Sarah Aldridge²

¹Columbia University Center for Veteran Transition and Integration, New York, New York, United States

²College Promise Campaign, Washington, DC, United States

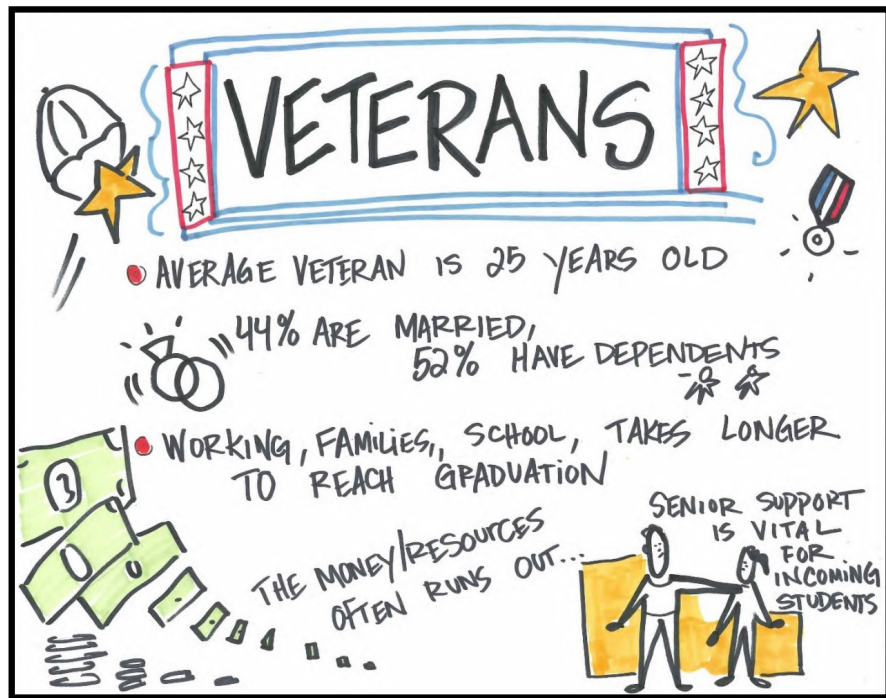
³Community College of Baltimore County

⁴De Anza College

As they return to civilian life, student veterans face a variety of challenges, which get compounded as they navigate the postsecondary system and earn a certificate and/or degree. This report examines the current

academic and social needs of student veterans in higher education and recommends reforms — such as financial supports, student services and increased resources — that colleges and universities can implement to build an ecosystem of support for student veterans on campus. Due to a generous post 9/11 GI Bill, many veterans benefit from tuition, fees and a living stipend. These financial benefits are not always optimized due to a significant shortage in college and career counseling services for veterans prior to enrollment. This ecosystem of support is emphasized within the framework of the college promise movement, which aims to make higher education as affordable and accessible as possible for all students.

Figure 10 Depiction of Student Veterans' Demographic Information and Obstacles to Postsecondary Attainment



Sketchnote of Symposium Discussion by Maria Evans

Note: For facts and figures about the population, see Chapter 4. For the design team paper, see Chapter 8.

Supporting Incarcerated Student Success

Julie Ajinkya¹, Sheila Meiman² and Stephen Rose³

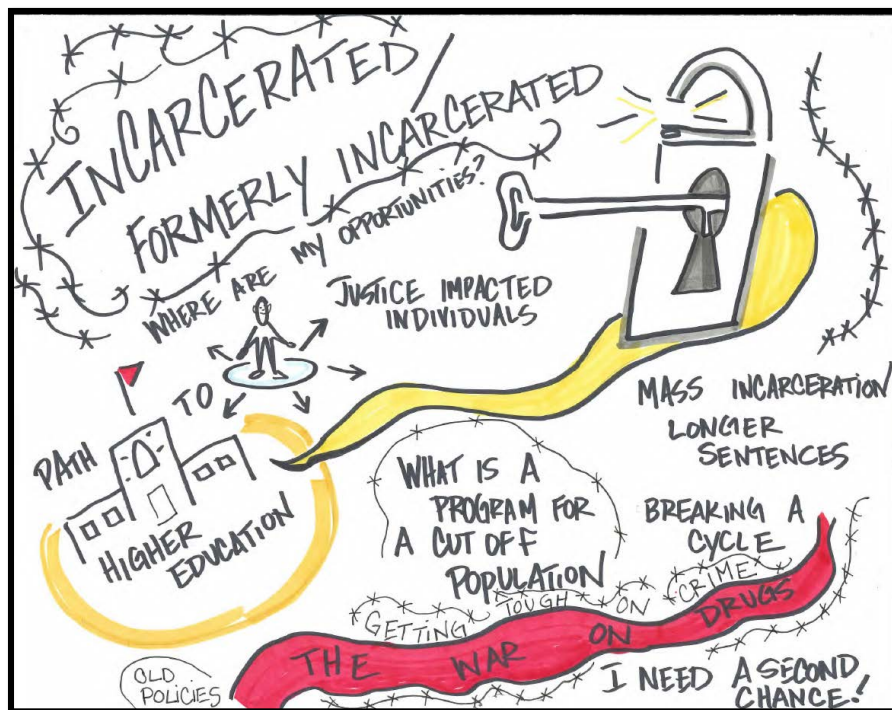
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³Urban Institute, Washington, DC, United States

Postsecondary opportunities during and after prison increase the likelihood of successful reentry into society and may also lower state prison spending by reducing recidivism. However, no college promise program currently targets this population. As a result, this report examines the capacity of promise programs to promote postsecondary access and success for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. It also proposes a state-level supports ecosystem (personal, academic, financial and career) for higher education programs in prison to serve their students and ensure their success.

Figure 11 Depiction of Incarcerated/Formerly Incarcerated Students' Obstacles to Postsecondary Attainment



Sketchnote of Symposium Discussion by Maria Evans

Note: For facts and figures about the population, see Chapter 4. For the design team paper, see Chapter 9.

Financing College Promise Programs

The later part of the symposium included in-depth discussions of college promise finance options and strategies. Participants stressed the importance of identifying what could/should be funded in terms of supports for different student groups, explored the variety of funding opportunities for program supports and discussed how these might be woven together to create comprehensive ecosystems of supports. The discussion was summarized within six themes:

- “Free College” means “Paid for College”
- Deciding what to finance by focusing on program intent and who is being served
- Developing finance structures for ecosystem models
- The politics of funding college promise programs
- Anticipating the winds of change in policies, economy and public support
- Keeping the promise by maintaining and sustaining the college promise movement

There are many expenses beyond tuition and fees that are part of the cost of attendance for today’s college students. While our discussions profiled the overarching needs of students and recognized that no one promise can cover all of these needs, it is important to acknowledge these monetary needs for some students (see Table 1).

When considering financing options, communities, states and the corresponding college promise program leaders must consider the economic, social, civic and political interests of the various stakeholders in designing their promise initiatives. These considerations will inform the approaches needed to broaden the financial and social supports offered to students, as well as provide insights into the political dynamics and will for such changes. When estimating costs and supports to be leveraged, program developers should base their decisions on who is being served and their potential needs.

Another important insight is that there is a second category of college promise program budget expenses beyond those at the level of individual students. Programmatic and operational expenses are often not the focal point of college promise cost discussions. However, program and institutional infrastructure investments help institutions better serve students. Examples include professional development, student support services, collaboration development, and monitoring and evaluation.

Table 1 Synthesis of Ecosystem Design Team Papers: The Student Expenses That Need to Be Considered in Financing Models at the Student, Institution and Government Levels

	TRADITIONAL AGE	ADULT	UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS	INCARCERATED AND FORMERLY INCARCERATED	VETERANS
Possible direct education expenses					
Tuition	Yes	Yes	Yes	Both	Yes
Fees					
Textbooks	Yes	Yes	Yes	Both	Yes
Technology (e.g., computer, phone or internet)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Formerly	Yes
Supplies and major-specific fees (major-related supplies, e.g., uniforms or equipment; major-related fees, e.g., lab fees, background checks or test fees for licensure; educational opportunities, e.g., internships or study at another campus)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Formerly	Yes
Pre-attendance costs (e.g., admissions tests, required immunizations and medical history forms)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Formerly	Yes
Possible ecosystem complimentary expenses					
Food	Yes	Yes	Yes	Formerly	Yes
Housing (rent or dorm fee; electricity; gas and water)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Formerly	Yes
Transportation (public transportation; car purchase or loan payment; car insurance; car maintenance and repairs; gasoline; parking)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Formerly	Yes
Health care	Yes	Yes	Yes	Formerly	Yes
Child care	Yes	Yes	Yes	Formerly	Yes
Legal services			Yes	Both	

Note: Categories of expenses are in bold, with examples of those expenses placed below.

Looking Ahead

With more than 300 local college promise programs in 47 states and 29 statewide promise programs, there is now a critical mass of initiatives for greater collective impact: to bring these programs and colleagues together to leverage program design and development strategies, as well as to highlight and disseminate information on best practices. The challenges associated with postsecondary degree and certificate attainment inequities are complex; solutions focused on these issues must match this complexity. By thinking holistically, we can better understand how systems and their interactions can be leveraged to support social progress in postsecondary attainment. The growing network of college promise initiatives could benefit from framing their work through an ecological perspective, as well as strategizing across different environmental and social domains.

The symposium on “Depicting the Ecosystem of Support and Financial Sustainability for Five College Promise Populations” and the report offer important contributions to informing the larger college promise conversations in communities, states and nationally in multiple ways, including:

- discussing what needs to be financed and by whom,
- bringing to light the varying needs of different postsecondary populations and
- proposing ecologic models of promise support for these specific groups.

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