Chapter 26

Technology Paved the Road for Students in a High-School Dropout Recovery Program to an Online College Class

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ABSTRACT

Although there are Federal programs that are intended to assist a wide range of people with getting a college education, the educational attainment statistics confirm that these programs are not reaching the students who are the least apt to go to college. This chapter describes how technology enabled 52 inner-city high school students, 49% of whom had cumulative high school grade point averages (GPA) that were between 1.0 and 1.9 points, to be dually enrolled in an online college class and their online high school classes. The class average for the quizzes the students completed was 88% and the students who took the final exam scored, on average, 86%. There were some unexpected delays and difficulties along the way, but the students performed at a college level in a difficult class.

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. no longer has the highest proportion of college graduates among the developed nations and at the same time the financial hardship from the 2008 recession has exacerbated the enrollment shift of high school graduates away from college. Many lower-skill jobs have vanished for American workers because the recession forced employers to either automate those positions or subcontract them to international businesses. By the year 2020, two in three domestic jobs will require at least some higher education which is especially troubling for low-income, urban students of color, who are disproportionately represented among those not going to college.

The objectives of this chapter are to provide:

1. An example for how technology can increase access to post-secondary education for a diverse group of students by expanding the use of a program that is already in place in

most states and that already has resources dedicated for post-secondary education; and

2. Evidence that a diverse group of students who are enrolled in online high schools and dropout recovery programs can successfully complete college-level academic work.

BACKGROUND

In his 2015 State of the Union address President Obama presented a plan to make a 2-year community college education free for some students (The White House, United States Government, 2015). He also called for an overhaul of the tax code that redirects benefits away from wealthy Americans in order to extend tax credits for college. He stated:

To make sure folks keep earning higher wages down the road, we have to do more to help Americans upgrade their skills. America thrived in the 20th century because we made high school free, sent a generation of GIs to college, trained the best workforce in the world. We were ahead of the curve. But other countries caught on. And in a 21st century economy that rewards knowledge like never before, we need to up our game. We need to do more.

By the end of this decade, two in three job openings will require some higher education -- two in three. And yet, we still live in a country where too many bright, striving Americans are priced out of the education they need. It's not fair to them, and it's sure not smart for our future. That's why I'm sending this Congress a bold new plan to lower the cost of community college -- to zero.

Keep in mind 40 percent of our college students choose community college. Some are young and starting out. Some are older and looking for a better job. Some are veterans and single parents trying to transition back into the job market. Who-

ever you are, this plan is your chance to graduate ready for the new economy without a load of debt. Understand, you've got to earn it. You've got to keep your grades up and graduate on time.

Tennessee, a state with Republican leadership, and Chicago, a city with Democratic leadership, are showing that free community college is possible. I want to spread that idea all across America, so that two years of college becomes as free and universal in America as high school is today. Let's stay ahead of the curve. And I want to work with this Congress to make sure those already burdened with student loans can reduce their monthly payments so that student debt doesn't derail anyone's dreams. (The White House, United States Government, 2015)

An audience of 31.7 million people tuned into the State of the Union address and heard the President announce his plan to make community college free (Rhodan, 2015). What was the "educational landscape" that drove President Obama to offer this high-profile proposal that a community college education should be made available to every American without cost? Some educational statistics are presented below to help answer this question, and information specific to the state of Ohio is also presented because the current project was based in Ohio.

High School Graduation

On January 13, 2013 the DOE National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that high school graduation rates (expressed as Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR), are at their highest level since 1974. During the 2009-10 school year, 78.2% of high school students nationwide graduated on time, a substantial increase from the 73.4% recorded in 2005-6, specifically a gain of 4.8%. The graduation rates for Ohio during that same time rose from 79.2% in 2005-6 to 81.4% in 2009-10. Although Ohio's AFGR is higher than

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