

Introduction

This report summarizes the goals, strategies and major accomplishments of the Academic Pathways to Access and Student Success (APASS) project at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The report is organized as follows:

- Summary of grant goals and strategies (expected and actual)
- Progress indicators and accomplishments
- Budget status
- Project Director's critical analysis, including changes to goals
- APASS team members, advisory committee and project director signature
- OCCRL contact information

Summary of Project Goals and Strategies (Expected and Actual)

The overarching goals of the APASS project were to identify, examine and disseminate information about *academic pathways* that extend from high school to college for underrepresented minority, low income and first-generation students. We define academic pathways as *boundary spanning curriculum and organizational structures that bridge K-12 with higher education to facilitate student transition to college*. The project documented the goals, features and functions of existing and emerging academic pathways and related policies of state and federal governments. The project was dedicated to documenting the scope and status of a range of academic pathway models in existence or emerging, describing the student groups these models target, identifying which of these models are associated with public policy and funding, and determining if state officials have carried out impact evaluation studies indicating whether these models do, indeed, show of increasing student access to college.

The primary goals of the project were (and continue to be):

1. To conduct a comprehensive search of all 50 states to inventory existing, new and emerging academic pathway models.
2. To examine state and local implementation of academic pathway models that shows evidence of impacting students access to college and their subsequent success.

3. To document the federal, state and local policy environments including legislation and regulations that pertain to development and implementation of academic pathways and understanding how formal public policy and funding influence implementation.
4. To disseminate results widely utilizing a variety of methods, media and approaches (e.g., web site, targeted e-mails, conference presentations, journal publications).

The ultimate outcome of the project was to provide information about academic pathways to multiple audiences: state education officials (primarily administrators), policy makers and local practitioners.

Our methods and strategies for collecting data were multifaceted, including the following:

- **Extensive review of the growing body of literature on academic pathways;** analysis of web sites of the 50 states and synthesis of information disseminated by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE); professional organizations, private firms and not-for-profit foundations such as the Lumina Foundation; and other funding organizations known to support academic pathways. This action was taken to accomplish the following:
 - Define, select and describe predominant academic pathways,
 - Develop a deeper understanding of intended purposes and components/elements of predominant academic pathways,
 - Gain an understanding of the national scope and scale of implementation of the academic pathways by aggregating results at the state level, and
 - Identify evaluations that portray rigorous evidence of the effectiveness of academic pathways.
- **Personal and telephone interviews** with researchers/scholars, policy analysts and evaluators having extensive knowledge of academic pathways to gain insight into policy and practice.
- **A 50-state inventory of states** using e-mail, phone, and Internet survey methods to collect data on:
 - Academic pathways implemented within 50 states at both the state and local levels.
 - Whether and how academic pathways were purposively targeting underserved student groups, as named by state officials.
 - Whether and how academic pathways were utilizing state policy in the form of legislation, administrative rules/guidelines and funding.
- **The APASS web site** at www.apass.uiuc.edu offering visitors comprehensive, state-by-state results of the 50-state inventory. Visitors accessing the web site learn about academic pathways by searching by “Stat” and by “Academic Pathway.” Hot links allow visitors to access web resources and publications. In addition, an electronic survey collects information from local organizations nominated by state officials because they are thought to have innovative programs and practices.

- **The online local program survey** posted on the APASS web site that collects the following data on an on-going basis:
 - Contact information
 - Program description
 - Students served
 - State support and funding
 - Program evaluation evidence
 - Challenges and successes in implementation
 - Recommendations for other academic pathway programs
 - Release of information for the publication on the APASS web site

- As data are received, **local program profiles are posted on the APASS web site** to provide state and local practitioners of the goals, features and outcomes.

Drawing on the literature, web sites, expert referrals (particularly information gathered from the project's advisory committee – *named later in this report*), the select group of academic pathway models featured in this project are:

- Advanced Placement (AP)
- Bridge programs
- College Level Examination Program (CLEP)
- Dual credit/Dual enrollment
- Distance learning/Virtual schools and colleges
- GED programs that bridge to college
- International Baccalaureate (IB)
- Middle/Early college high schools
- Tech Prep/College Tech Prep

The APASS project also sought information about other models and approaches utilized within states at either the state or local levels including GEAR UP; career academies; high school reforms including charter schools and High Schools That Work (HSTW); and other curriculum, assessment, and standards-related initiatives. In total, information was collected on more than 300 academic pathway models and programs in addition to the nine listed above. Information about these models is entered into

a comprehensive database that allows APASS staff to search and retrieve detailed information on students served and state policy support.

Throughout the project but particularly between February and August 2005, once the 50-state inventory was completed, APASS team members disseminated results of APASS to secondary and postsecondary education officials, policy makers and other stakeholders. The APASS web site is the primary vehicle for dissemination of information associated with this project now and into the foreseeable future. Current and future products located on the APASS web site include:

- The comprehensive 50-state inventory of academic pathway models (searchable by “State” and by “Academic Pathway”)
- Project abstract and brochure
- Project briefs
- Conference presentations – Power Point slides
- Scholarly papers

Progress Indicators and Accomplishments

Throughout the project, the APASS team (*named later in this report*) reviewed the stated goals and progress indicators to determine accomplishments. The following chart displays each of the project goals and accomplishments pertaining to them.

Goal 1. Produce a 50-state inventory of academic pathways/curricular models to provide a comprehensive picture of how, where, and why academic pathway models are being implemented in the 50 states.	
Progress Indicators	Accomplished
1. Development of survey instruments and methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accomplished January – May 2004 ▪ Pilot testing conducted June-July 2004
2. State-level survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preliminary results of the 50-state inventory reported to the advisory committee - August, 2004 ▪ Based on recommendations of the advisory committee, 50-state inventory extended and given more emphasis (focus, time)
3. Local-level survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The local survey was developed during winter/spring 2005, once the 50-state inventory was completed ▪ The instrument was piloted tested during summer 2005 ▪ Instrument posted on APASS web site summer 2005

4. Publication on 50-state inventory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> APASS 50-state inventory posted on web site March 2005; continuously updated (as resources permit)
5. Summary results published in research brief, papers, and presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publications in form of research brief and scholarly publications continue to be produced, with first products emerging in March 2005
6. Distribution of survey results via web site and other dissemination mechanisms nationally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> March 2005-present

Goal 2. To examine state and local implementation of academic pathways that show evidence of being effective in improving students access to college and their subsequent success.

Progress Indicators	Accomplished
1. Local-level data collection to gather in-depth information about promising models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on input from the advisory committee, we focused data collection at the state level, with visits to selected local sites within nominated states. The states visited were Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Oregon, Massachusetts, and Washington. All site visits were conducted between December 2004 and July 2005, with most conducted in June-July 2005.
2. Publication of a series of practitioner-oriented briefs about model programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on input from the advisory committee and the lack of evidence of effectiveness of local programs, we refocused this objective on in-depth examination of states via the 50-state inventory and site visits to the seven selected states.

Goal 3. To document federal, state and local policy environments including legislation and regulations that pertain to development and implementation of academic pathways and understanding how public policy influences implementation.

Progress Indicators	Accomplished
1. Data collection on the policy environment through the survey and local data collection efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As mentioned previously, the 50-state inventory was extended into early 2005 and site visits to 7 selected states took place between December 2004 and July 2005; local sites were studied as part of state-level information gathering.
2. Analysis of policies and policy environment pertaining to the models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and analysis of selected academic pathway policies such as AP, dual credit, tech prep, middle/early college high schools continues.
3. Publication of a policy brief for policy makers and policy implementers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A synthesis of key policy issues pertaining to predominant academic pathways such as AP, dual credit, tech prep is being posted on the APASS web site - August 2005.

Goal 4. To disseminate results of all aspects of this project utilizing a variety of methods, media and approaches (project web site, targeted e-mails, conference presentations, journal publications, etc).

Progress Indicators	Accomplished
1. Web site announced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Web site online in March 2005; Postcards distributed; Press release prepared and distributed to Lumina in May 2005
2. Web site continuously updated with new info and materials on an on-going basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Since March 2005 the web site has been under continual development; APASS staff are committed to continuous updating of the web site.
3. 50-state inventory published via paper and on the Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Web site active March 2005; paper copy of inventory produced August 2005
4. Series of practitioner-oriented briefs published via paper and on the Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Practitioner series not produced per refocusing of the project on results more directly related to the 50-state inventory
5. Publication of policy brief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Targeted policy briefs on each academic pathway are being posted on the APASS web site – August 2005
6. Production of report and recommendations for future policy, practice and research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Summary results appear in a series of research briefs being posted on the APASS web site.
7. Presentation of project plans, results and recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conference including keynote presentations for the League for Innovation for Innovation in Community Colleges, the Council for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC), Boston, the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), and the American Educational Research Association (under review)

Budget Status

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) will submit an official budget reconciliation statement to the Lumina Foundation in accordance with requirements of the grant. From the perspective of project staff, funds were adequate to meet the paramount goal of the project, which was to conduct the 50-state inventory. Most of the grant’s resources were dedicated to collecting valid and reliable information from the 50 states. We had adequate funds to employ researchers to conduct the 50-state inventory and secure the advice of seven nationally recognized experts. If funds were too limited in any one area it was in the last phase when additional staff would have been helpful to analyze, synthesize, and summarize the extensive data, a concern mentioned in the next section.

Project Director’s Critical Analysis, including Changes to Goals

This section offers a critical analysis of the project according to the following themes:

comprehensiveness, limited expertise and data sources, and inadequate evidence of effectiveness.

Comprehensiveness

The comprehensiveness of this project created a paradox. The positive side of our comprehensive approach was in recognizing that most of the extant literature on college access, specifically high school-to-college transition, takes a *narrow* perspective. For example, the literature treats college access as being about transition from high school to 4-year college (without recognizing a majority of high school students enter 2-year college); it fails to consider access to college for the purposes of career preparation (many students attend college to prepare for a career), and it gives scant attention to college preparation except in the most traditional sense. Unfortunately, few scholars, policy makers or practitioners have a clear or complete understanding of the emerging models – “academic pathways” – implemented by high schools, 2-year and 4-year colleges or the public policies associated with them. Recognizing that this comprehensive perspective was missing, the APASS team made a deliberate decision to address this need, casting a wide net to document academic pathways as well as the student groups served. Though difficult and frustrating, we believe this comprehensive approach was an extremely positive feature of the project.

The negative side of taking a comprehensive approach was in determining where to limit the project, particularly during the data collection phase that ultimately extended into early 2005. The project grew to an enormous scope – well beyond what we anticipated when the grant proposal was written. Activities surrounding data collection, verification and synthesis took on a much larger aspect of the project than we anticipated initially, calling for an extension of the project to August 15, 2005 (approved December 2004) to accommodate the 50-state inventory as the project’s paramount goal.

Limited Expertise and Data Sources

The project experienced difficulties with expertise and data quality on several levels. We quickly learned (confirmed) that few individuals have substantive knowledge of policies and practices associated with all of academic pathways on any level (federal, state or local). This problem became acute when we attempted to collect data from state education officials. Anticipating gaps in the inventory if we relied on one source only per state, we made a deliberate decision to interview multiple K-12 and higher education officials in each state, and we accomplished this goal in all but a few. Even so, we found disparities in what officials knew about academic pathways implemented within their own states; often, they knew about only one or two models and had limited understanding of larger “mega” policies (college access, P-16, etc.). Also, some state officials had few details about local programs within their own states, stating that capacity (mostly funding) and “local control” prevented them from knowing much about local implementation. Turf (especially between K-12 and higher education agencies), staff turnover and complacency were other barriers that made data collection difficult.

The lack of knowledge among state officials was particularly problematic when it came to state staff communicating accurate information about public policy. We found some state officials did not know whether their own states had formal legislation (confusion about state versus federal legislation occurred routinely) or if state funding was available (confusion of state funds with federal flow-through dollars was prevalent). (*Dr. Kevin Dougherty of Teachers College made a similar observation concerning his state-level Lumina-funded policy study during my meeting with him March 2005*). Due to the inaccuracy of information given by state officials, we took two steps not planned in the original 50-state inventory. First, we used the qualitative research technique of “triangulation” to determine the consistency of information given by state officials with other independent sources by making telephone calls and e-mail contacts, plus searching additional web sites. Second, we used two additional qualitative research techniques of “member checking” and “peer debriefing” by asking state officials and experts to verify that our final summary of each state’s results (i.e., the state profile) was accurate. These two steps

extended the data collection phase of the project for a period of 4 months, with this phase beginning in October 2004 and extending through January 2005. Finally, it should be noted that, while most state staff were exceedingly helpful, personnel in a few states refused to participate or they participated initially but later refused to contribute to the verification phase. (To protect anonymity, the names of these states are not included in this report but can be provided to Lumina, upon request.)

Inadequate Evidence of Effectiveness

We found very limited evaluation results (i.e., evidence of effectiveness) to support implementation of any of the nine selected academic pathway models or additional models and programs volunteered by informants. We know this finding is not unique to this project, but we state it here because of its important ramifications. The pervasive lack of adequate research and evaluation data to support the implementation of academic pathways is distressing. Extensive literature searches reveal only a handful of evaluations pertaining to the various academic pathways, and many of these evaluation studies are case studies of only one or a few selected sites, or they are results of large-scale national survey studies that cannot be generalized to particular states or localities. We found very few examples of credible evaluations sponsored by states, and state officials usually attribute this void to problems with capacity (funding and expertise), concerns about inadequate and incompatible data systems between K-12 and higher education, and issues in complying with FERPA. A few evaluation studies of AP, Tech Prep and GEAR UP do exist, partly because federal accountability prioritizes and funds evaluations of these initiatives. *(Note, in my meeting with Ms. Betsy Brand, Director of the American Youth Policy Forum, in February 2005, Ms. Brand reported similar results for her Lumina-funded project.)*

Reflecting on the overall project's design and accomplishments, the APASS team takes pride in what we've accomplished and in successfully fulfilling the project's core objectives and overcoming the challenges we faced. Because of what we've learned, both in terms of what we now know about academic pathways and in how to study them, we plan to pursue opportunities to research and support state-level initiatives involving academic pathways. We will seek opportunities to develop information (materials,

strategies) that assist states in promulgating academic pathways for their diverse student populations, building on the productive relationships that we've developed with states and local practitioners, both as part of this project and as part of complimentary research and development work conducted by members of our team. Finally, the APASS team looks forward to continuing its analysis and dissemination of results of the APASS data base and expanding technical assistance to encourage and support states and localities to implement and evaluate academic pathways that have the potential to enhance college access and success.

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ACADEMIC PATHWAYS TO ACCESS AND STUDENT SUCCESS

**A Lumina Foundation for Education
Grantee Report**

Academic Pathways to Access and Student Success

A Lumina Foundation for Education Grantee Report

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August 15, 2005

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The Office of Community College Research and Leadership was established in 1989 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The Office was started with funding from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), utilizing leadership funds associated with federal vocational education legislation. Over the years, OCCRL has conducted its work in close association with both the ISBE and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), and in 2003 the ICCB assumed leadership for new initiatives with OCCRL. Our mission is to provide research, leadership, and service to community college educators and assist in improving community college education policy and practice, particularly in the Illinois community college system. Current initiatives focus on partnerships between community colleges and high schools, including studies of academic pathways, curricular models, dual credit, and Tech Prep. In addition, OCCRL publishes a biannual electronic newsletter devoted to timely and critical topics of interest to community college administrators and faculty.

We appreciate receiving feedback on the quality and utility of reports and materials produced by OCCRL staff. If you have comments or suggestions for this or other OCCRL products, we would appreciate hearing from you. Please direct your comments to:

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Additional copies of this report, *Academic Pathways to Access and Student Success: A Lumina Foundation Grantee Report*, can be ordered by contacting OCCRL at occr@uiuc.edu or may be downloaded from the OCCRL website at <http://occr.ed.uiuc.edu>.

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