

THE GREAT COLLEGES FOR THE NEW MAJORITY
Mission Statement
March, 2018

The Great Colleges For the New Majority is a network of colleges and baccalaureate programs dedicated not only to access and completion, but also to transformative and engaged learning for adult, nontraditional students. We know that many community colleges offer excellent opportunities for nontraditional students. We also know that myriad four-year institutions have developed innovative, engaged, effective educational practices—almost exclusively with traditional undergraduates in mind. The colleges in our Network have learned much from both sectors. Yet we represent a new venture in U.S. higher education: a community of practice dedicated not simply to degree attainment, but also to great teaching and learning for working adults who seek a bachelor’s education and beyond.

The colleges and programs in the Great Colleges Network are diverse in scale, setting, curricular design, and teaching practices. We are both public and private, free-standing and integrated within larger academic institutions. What brings us together is a shared set of values, practices, and aspirations for systemic change in higher education.

VISION AND VALUES

We believe that:

- ❖ Great education enables all students to transform themselves and their communities.
- ❖ Great education starts where the students are, but never ends there. It enables students to chart their own lives, to follow their interests and passions, and to better themselves.
- ❖ Great education always, but never solely, addresses students’ occupational, economic, and material needs and goals. It understands these as interwoven with students’ personal, family, civic, and spiritual needs and goals.
- ❖ Great colleges educate the whole adult student, holistically engaging their work, family, and community, integrating “liberal,” “vocational,” and “practical” learning.
- ❖ Learning is relational, collective, and collaborative: it is best pursued not in isolation, but in supportive learning communities that connect students with teachers, mentors, and peers.
- ❖ Students grow when they take responsibility for their education and are accountable to themselves and their learning community for it. Great education treats students as partners and colleagues in their own learning.

- ❖ Great faculty are committed to understanding the lives, needs, strengths, and challenges of their students and to offering relentless support for students' educational, work, and life aspirations.
- ❖ Great colleges and great faculty understand that adult students' previous experiences in higher education were often negative and harmful. They recognize the resilience and commitment of adult students in the face of such experiences, the complexity of such students' lives, and the barriers they confront to pursue their studies.
- ❖ Great colleges are committed to equity and inclusion, particularly for adult students from backgrounds that have historically been marginalized in higher education—among them, students of color, immigrant and undocumented students, and those who are low-income, working, parenting, and currently or formerly incarcerated.
- ❖ Great colleges succeed in sustaining and graduating high numbers of their students.
- ❖ Great colleges offer students an affordable—and to the extent possible, debt-free—path to education and graduation.
- ❖ A great education is at once rigorous and welcoming, adventurous and practical, challenging and joyful.

INTERNAL PRACTICES

Our programs are characterized by:

- ❖ Curricula that are transdisciplinary and that weave together theory, practice, and the personal experience of our students.
- ❖ Curricula that build foundational skills like writing, reading, numeracy, and digital literacy, not in preparation for students' core learning, but as integral to it.
- ❖ Curricula that offer adult students high-impact practices—such as learning communities, community-based research, and capstone projects—designed to fit their lives, needs, goals, and interests.
- ❖ Broad opportunities for experiential learning and credit-earning—including prior learning assessment, work-based learning, and community engagement—grounded in students' goals, planning and reflection.

- ❖ Advising and mentoring that enable students to be intentional about and accountable for their educational goals, often through a formal learning plan.
- ❖ Advising that integrates academic planning, career mentoring, and support for student well-being.
- ❖ Teaching and advising that consistently reference the mission, values, and design of the program, emphasizing why students are learning, what they are learning, and how they're learning.
- ❖ Educational experiences and teaching styles in which learning and life-experience mutually inform one another, braiding together study, work, family, community, and personal life.
- ❖ A strong culture of faculty, professional, and peer support, grounded in collaborative and community-building practices among students, teachers, staff, and mentors.
- ❖ An academic calendar designed around student lives, stressing flexibility and accommodation rather than acceleration.
- ❖ Policies and everyday practices that model the values and habits that the academic program aims to nurture in students.

SYSTEMIC CHANGE

We seek a higher-education system that:

- ❖ Makes the attainment of credentials a benchmark, not the goal, of good policy and practice.
- ❖ Supports authentic assessment and makes high assessment outcomes a benchmark, not the goal, of good policy and practice.
- ❖ Offers students education for a lifetime of meaningful work, not training for the next job.
- ❖ Fosters policies, practices, and a national conversation that integrate education for work, education for citizenship, and education of the whole person.
- ❖ Commits itself to extending the fullest educational opportunities and experiences to all students.
- ❖ Commits itself to changing policies and practices—concerning such issues as financial aid, student debt, credit-earning, transfer, and the academic

calendar--that negatively impact and marginalize nontraditional undergraduates, now the majority of U.S. college-goers.

- ❖ Does not simply accommodate adult learners, but publicly welcomes their presence as normative and typical.