



# OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO GRADUATION

2015 PHILANTHROPY REPORT



**“A college education remains the most reliable ladder to a better life. That’s why our goal is to see more students leave college with a diploma or credential in hand.”**

**Richard D. George**  
President & Chief Executive Officer  
Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates



## OUR MISSION

# GETTING STUDENTS TO AND THROUGH COLLEGE

With over half of jobs now requiring a postsecondary degree or credential, college completion has never been more important. Yet it remains elusive for too many students—especially students from low-income backgrounds, students of color and first-generation students.

For this group, the path to college completion is often a difficult journey. Financial challenges, readiness for college-level coursework, even “fitting in” to college life are among the roadblocks that can impede progress and dash hopes of self-improvement.

For nearly 50 years, Great Lakes has focused on helping these underserved students.

We learned early on that finding answers to the issues they face—vexing in number and complexity—requires a broad approach. So we look to make progress on multiple fronts.

We make grants and sponsor research to not only learn from individual programs that are making a difference for today’s students, but to identify ways to bring the most successful of these programs to scale to help the greatest number of students.

That’s led us to develop distinct and purposeful funding approaches.

## THE THREE WAYS WE FUND

### EXPLORATION GRANTS

Limited-term grants that help us learn more about promising ideas and approaches.

### VALIDATION GRANTS

Grants awarded to support formal, independent evaluations of program impact.

### SCALING GRANTS

Transitional funding to help successful programs significantly grow number of students served.

In this report are examples of grants we made over the past year as part of \$28.5 million in new commitments. You’ll learn about the questions we’ve asked and the answers we hope to learn. Which, in turn, will inform the next questions we ask.

While there are many answers yet to find, we remain passionate in their pursuit and appreciative of our partners who demonstrate innovative thinking and tireless commitment to keeping the American Dream within reach of all students.



# EXPLORATION GRANTS

## IDENTIFYING BEST PRACTICES

We're driven by curiosity, and we constantly find issues we want to study—based on our own experiences or the research of others. We fund Exploration grants to learn more about ideas and approaches we think hold promise for helping more students complete college.

Throughout the process we ask a number of questions: Will the program improve completion rates? Will it impact a significant number of students? Does it have potential on a larger scale?

This year, one of the major issues Great Lakes explored was developmental education at community colleges and the toll it often takes on graduation rates.

Data strongly supports that starting out in dev ed courses leads to delays in completion, or worse, dropping out of college entirely. Most alarming, fewer than 15% of dev ed students graduate with an associate's degree within three years.

Whether it's the added expense, additional time sapping student resolve or the stigma attached to "not being ready for college," dev ed can create a quagmire that drags students down and keeps them from earning a degree. The two grants here explore ways to help students avoid dev ed in the first place, and ultimately improve completion rates.

### CURRENT PORTFOLIO

- College Ready Grant
- College Success Grant
- Multiple Measures Grant
- Wisconsin Covenant Scholars Grant

LEARN MORE:

[community.mygreatlakes.org](http://community.mygreatlakes.org)



## COLLEGE READY GRANT

ACT results for low-income students and students of color show that only 1 in 5 high school graduates are ready for college-level English. And for college-level math it's just 1 in 10\*. The sobering reality is that these students are then faced with starting college in developmental education—getting no credit toward a degree and incurring additional expense.

Our College Ready grants help tackle this problem head on. Working with colleges and community-based organizations over the past three years, our funding has provided additional academic support and instruction during senior year of high school to help get at-risk students up to speed in college math and English. Our goal: making sure students arrive on campus ready to succeed in college-level courses.

While the past interventions helped—students increased their math and English skills while moving test scores closer to college-level requirements—there's more to gain. Our grant partners told us that just one year of tutoring, skill building activities and extra attention is not enough.

\* ACT, *Catching Up to College and Career Readiness: The Challenge is Greater for At-Risk Students*, 2014

For 2015-2017, we've expanded our College Ready grant to fund two years of additional instruction, giving students more time to "catch up" in critical coursework. Additionally, we took steps to ensure qualified instructors work with students to make the most of the students' extra effort.

**1 YEAR**  
INTENSE STUDY  
FOR SENIORS

NOW

**2 YEARS**  
INTENSE STUDY FOR  
JUNIORS & SENIORS

Our \$4.2 million commitment provides aid to nine programs in three states: Wisconsin, Minnesota and Ohio. We're eager to learn how the additional year of preparation impacts the 800 students involved and look forward to using that information in our funding of future college readiness programs.

## MULTIPLE MEASURES GRANT

Are standardized tests incorrectly placing too many community college students into developmental education? Available data certainly suggests so. One study of a large urban system found that the COMPASS test severely misplaced 33% of entering students in English and 24% in math. Those students could have very likely succeeded in a regular college-level class and avoided the pitfalls dev ed presents\*.

With the ACT COMPASS placement test—long the standard for community college assessment—being discontinued, the time is right for exploring new approaches to evaluating college readiness.

**1 IN 3** STUDENTS PLACED IN  
DEV ED ENGLISH DON'T  
NEED TO BE THERE

Pioneering work in college placement strategy is focused on measures beyond test scores, such as high school GPA, class rank, computer literacy and even non-cognitive assessments of student motivation—multiple measures, if you will—that provide a more accurate determination of student ability.

In July 2015 we funded a landscape assessment conducted by MDRC, a leading social and education policy research organization. They are examining current placement policies across Wisconsin, Ohio, Minnesota and Iowa. By reviewing them from multiple vantage points, we hope to identify successful practices and alternative placement measures that can be adopted more widely.

We think the idea holds tremendous promise, and have taken this first step forward to help better understand its potential. We're expecting the results in late spring 2016, and will look to support an evaluation of the most promising programs identified.

\* Community College Research Center, *Do High-Stakes Placement Exams Predict College Success?*, 2012



# VALIDATION GRANTS

## CONFIRMING PROMISING IDEAS

Our goal is to take good ideas to scale, and we use Validation grants to determine which programs make the cut.

These grants are awarded to researchers who rigorously evaluate a program. Funding typically runs longer than a year, so we can answer one of two questions: Is the program as effective as preliminary data suggests? Or if already proven effective, can it be as successful in another location?

Think of it as a vetting process to see “if there’s a there there.”

The Validation grants discussed here replicate two separate programs—to find out what it will take to implement them in new locations.

The Summer Melt Texting initiative focuses on the strategies used by three high schools to design and implement a proven program to help more of their spring graduates enroll in college in the fall.

Our ASAP Replication demonstration is a randomized control study mirroring CUNY’s innovative program to dramatically boost community college graduation rates. Our funding in Ohio seeks to determine if ASAP can succeed outside of New York City.

### CURRENT PORTFOLIO

- ASAP Replication
- The Degree Project®
- STEM Pipeline Study
- Summer Melt Texting Initiative
- Wisconsin HOPE Lab

LEARN MORE:  
[community.mygreatlakes.org](http://community.mygreatlakes.org)

## SUMMER MELT TEXTING INITIATIVE

As many as 40% of high school graduates with college acceptance letters fail to show up for college classes in the fall. The phenomenon—known as “summer melt”—is due in large part to the lack of support once students leave high school.

Hi Zoe, this is your counselor Matt. Have you signed up for orientation? Last one is 8/3. Need to register? [Go here](#). Need help? Reply MTG to talk w/ me.

For underserved students and families, school counselors often played a key role in guiding them through the unfamiliar world of college admissions and financial aid. Without their assistance over the summer, many final college enrollment tasks go undone.

Research by Dr. Ben Castleman and Dr. Lindsay Page has confirmed that simply sending a handful of short text messages over the summer can substantially increase the number of students showing up in the fall.

Reminders to students focus on things like attending orientation, signing up for housing and completing financial aid paperwork.

In 2015, we made a grant to fund an evaluation of what it took for three Wisconsin schools to design and implement their own summer texting programs. The districts serve a broad mix of students across urban, suburban and rural areas.

Our goals are to identify internal costs the schools incurred and learn how they addressed a number of administrative tasks: getting cell numbers from students, writing the text messages, recruiting (and paying for) counselors and more.

We expect to share results in fall 2016.

## ASAP REPLICATION DEMONSTRATION

Can a successful New York City program addressing the needs of low-income developmental education students work in other parts of the country? Our ASAP Replication demonstration seeks that answer in response to a White House call for innovative solutions to troubling community college graduation rates.

Proven to graduate thousands of students at more than twice the rate of their peers, the City University of New York (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) provides a variety of interventions including counseling, tutoring, tuition waivers, blocked schedules, textbook assistance and even MetroCards to defray transportation costs.

Students accepted into the program commit to enrolling full time, completing any developmental coursework in the first year and meeting regularly with advisors and career counselors.

With a \$5 million commitment, we’re supporting MDRC, a social education policy research organization, in a replication demonstration of CUNY’s highly successful program in Ohio.

Through a three-year randomized control study at three community colleges—Lorain County Community College, Cuyahoga Community College and Cincinnati State Technical and Community College—MDRC will evaluate graduation rates and other metrics between students in test and control groups.



With its bundled strategies addressing specific barriers to low-income, minority and underprepared student success, we look forward to learning how to fine-tune the ASAP model to develop an approach that will work in Ohio—and elsewhere.



# SCALING GRANTS

## CREATING LASTING SOLUTIONS

### CURRENT PORTFOLIO

- Career Ready Internship Grant
- Carnegie Math Pathways
- CIRTL Network
- College Access Advising
- College Possible
- Dash Emergency Grant
- Ohio Leadership Institute
- Single Stop
- Teens of Promise (TOPS)
- Tools of the Trade Apprenticeship Scholarships

LEARN MORE:  
[community.mygreatlakes.org](http://community.mygreatlakes.org)

Our ultimate goal is to scale programs that we know work, moving from serving hundreds of students to thousands—if not tens of thousands. Scaling grants pave the way to lasting change.

These grants typically run for multiple years—with step-down funding—and are designed to give our partners time to institutionalize financial support without disrupting the services they provide.

Two of our Scaling grants address unique needs facing low-income students. One delivers an added boost for those on the verge of completion. The other provides a lifeline to students with pressing money issues.

Career Ready Internship grants offer college juniors and seniors with financial need “real-world” job experience through paid internships. In addition to improving student graduation rates and job prospects, we see stronger bonds developing between colleges and local businesses.

Dash grants come to the rescue when students are faced with financial emergencies. By providing quick micro-grants of up to \$500, students don’t have to make a choice between paying a bill or continuing their education.



## CAREER READY INTERNSHIP GRANT

A meaningful internship experience provides college students with valuable workplace skills and networking opportunities that can put career goals in reach. The problem: many internships are unpaid and simply not an option for low-income students who need a paycheck.

Career Ready Internship grants level the playing field. Colleges receiving our grants work collaboratively with local businesses and nonprofits to develop paid internships offered exclusively to low-income juniors and seniors. And by making internships more equitable, these students not only gain valuable on-the-job experience in their field of study, they also improve their job prospects and graduation rates.

# \$20 MILLION 10,300 INTERNSHIPS

SINCE 2012

Prior to our current grant, we committed \$7.7 million to fund two grant programs, creating some 3,300 internships in the process. Partner colleges reported that 98% of students taking part in an internship either graduated or returned to school the following semester.

Buoyed by that success, we made \$12.2 million in grants—our largest commitment ever—to scale the Career Ready Internship program to 33 colleges

and universities in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and Ohio in 2015. This three-year grant, along with matching funds from the participating colleges, will create an estimated 7,000 new paid internships.

What's more, our new grant builds on promising practices we've learned from earlier grants. We're able to offer grantees informed guidance on a range of issues, from employer outreach, payroll practices, internship scheduling, cross-campus collaboration and more—to assure programs run smoothly and participating students maximize their internship experiences.

"Benefits of this program extend beyond students. Participating colleges report increases in placement rates for their graduates, and businesses providing internships discover new pipelines for talented recruits. It's a win-win-win for all involved."

*Richard D. George, President & Chief Executive Officer,  
Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates*

## DASH EMERGENCY GRANT

For many low-income students, an unexpected car repair or a medical bill can mean the end of their college hopes. While typically not large expenses, they can be enough to put low-income students in a serious bind: stay in college or pay the bill.

Through our first Emergency Grant Assistance program in 2012, over 2,600 students at 16 colleges in the Wisconsin Technical College System received grants averaging around \$500 each for unforeseen expenses.

"By complementing the existing financial aid system, and helping to compensate for some of its key weaknesses, emergency grants can help ensure that students have their basic needs met so they can focus on their education."

*Sara Goldrick-Rab, Professor of Education Policy  
Studies and Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Founding Director, Wisconsin HOPE Lab*

College-reported data stated that 73% of these recipients either graduated or remained enrolled—considerably higher than the 59% retention rate average for all two-year public institution students reported by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Based on that promising data, we developed our 2016-2018 Dash emergency grant, providing \$1.5 million to 31 colleges in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and Ohio. These colleges have shown extraordinary commitment to their students, pledging to quickly address financial emergencies and contributing their own funds to aid students during the grant period. Thanks to their efforts, an estimated 4,000 low-income students can count on assistance so they can stay on track to graduation.

## LOOKING FORWARD

# A CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

At Great Lakes we view success in increments.

We ask a lot of questions. We learn. And then we ask even more questions. Building knowledge as we go.

In the coming year, we'll remain committed to supporting innovative and promising ideas through our Exploration, Validation and Scaling grants—with the goal of amplifying great work happening in the field of college access and completion. But we'll be eagerly learning in new ways, too.

Look for us to forge more partnerships with fellow funders, to collaborate and expand upon what others have already learned. Working together brings efficiency and magnitude, as well as shared accountability. We believe this is the formula for large-scale and lasting success in addressing the greatest challenges facing students.

We also look forward to new ways of learning from our grantees.

First, as several of our grants close we'll issue reports to share results and promising practices others can use. Second, and perhaps most importantly, we'll seek to understand what our grantees need—beyond funding—to do more and do it better. We're ready to make investments in coaching, learning communities, data analysis and other services that will allow partner colleges and organizations to produce the best possible results.

## FOLLOW IT ALL ON OUR NEWLY EXPANDED WEBSITE

In the fall of 2015 we launched a new education philanthropy website designed to benefit the diverse audience visiting it—from grant seekers and recipients to other funders and the media.

For updates on the latest news and findings and to subscribe to our newsletter visit:

[community.mygreatlakes.org](http://community.mygreatlakes.org)

**Our grants focus on college preparation and success, because students who are well-equipped to face the academic, financial and personal challenges of college are the most likely to graduate.**





# 2015 GRANTMAKING

## NEW COMMITMENTS

### GRANT RECIPIENTS

#### IOWA

Hawkeye Community College.....	\$59,500
Iowa Western Community College .....	\$59,500
Loras College.....	\$410,540

Northeast Iowa Community College .....	\$57,200
Simpson College .....	\$205,200
William Penn University .....	\$298,431

#### MINNESOTA

Augsburg College .....	\$447,986
Central Lakes College .....	\$39,700
College Possible - Minnesota.....	\$1,565,000
Hamline University.....	\$330,048
Hennepin Technical College.....	\$54,500
Metropolitan State University .....	\$444,429
Normandale Community College .....	\$79,300
Pine Technical and Community College .....	\$39,700
Riverland Community College.....	\$39,700

Rochester Community and Technical College .....	\$59,500
Saint Paul College .....	\$311,642
South Central College - North Mankato .....	\$39,700
St. Catherine University.....	\$397,793
University of Minnesota - Twin Cities.....	\$901,892
University of Minnesota - Morris .....	\$360,830
University of Northwestern - St. Paul.....	\$412,238
Vermilion Community College .....	\$27,000

#### OHIO

Ashland University .....	\$444,015
Central Ohio Technical College .....	\$39,770
Clark State Community College .....	\$59,500

College Now Greater Cleveland .....	\$600,000
Defiance College.....	\$221,529
Denison University.....	\$300,770



## GRANT RECIPIENTS (continued)

### OHIO (continued)

Eastern Gateway Community College .....	\$34,700
Edison State Community College .....	\$17,500
Heidelberg University .....	\$261,756
Hiram College .....	\$405,700
John Carroll University .....	\$349,203
Kent State University .....	\$923,743
Lakeland Community College .....	\$39,700
Lorain County Community College .....	\$79,300

Marietta College .....	\$321,687
North Central State College .....	\$39,700
Ohio Association of Community Colleges .....	\$177,100
Ohio University .....	\$448,478
Stark State College .....	\$547,482
Tiffin University .....	\$304,950
University of Findlay .....	\$356,312
Zane State College .....	\$39,700

### WISCONSIN

Alverno College .....	\$269,626
Blackhawk Technical College .....	\$41,200
Boys & Girls Club of Dane County.....	\$1,257,174
Cardinal Stritch University .....	\$366,391
Carthage College .....	\$349,146
Chippewa Valley Technical College .....	\$62,000
College Possible - Milwaukee .....	\$725,000
Lakeland College.....	\$446,706
Madison College.....	\$79,300
Marquette University .....	\$353,997
Mid-State Technical College.....	\$39,700
Milwaukee Area Technical College .....	\$645,657
Nicolet Area Technical College .....	\$2,500
Northcentral Technical College.....	\$39,700

Northeast Wisconsin Technical College.....	\$59,500
Silver Lake College of the Holy Family.....	\$401,767
Southwest Wisconsin Technical College .....	\$39,700
University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire.....	\$326,028
University of Wisconsin - Green Bay.....	\$441,324
University of Wisconsin - Madison.....	\$600,000
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee.....	\$17,500
University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh .....	\$448,500
University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point.....	\$381,225
University of Wisconsin - Superior .....	\$317,454
University of Wisconsin System .....	\$360,501
Viterbo University .....	\$441,758
Waukesha County Technical College.....	\$62,000
Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College .....	\$37,200

## RESEARCH AND SCALING SUPPORT

Summer Melt Texting initiative.....	\$174,192
APLU/USU innovation challenge.....	\$113,500
Statway and Quantway scaling initiative .....	\$1,500,000
College Access Advising services at high schools across Wisconsin and South Dakota .....	\$1,754,335
GradReady scaling initiative .....	\$571,350

MDRC Multiple Measures landscape assessment.....	\$150,000
Single Stop USA scaling initiative.....	\$500,000
Great Lakes National Scholarship Program for STEM students .....	\$1,875,000
Other commitments.....	\$572,298

NEW COMMITMENTS

**\$28.5 Million**

PAYMENTS ON NEW AND OUTSTANDING COMMITMENTS

**\$25.4 Million**

TOTAL COMMITMENTS SINCE 2006

**\$160.4 Million**



## Dedicated to making college education a reality since 1967.

Knowing that education has the power to change lives for the better, Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates was established as a nonprofit group focused on a single objective: helping students nationwide prepare for and succeed in postsecondary education and student loan repayment.

As a leading student loan guarantor and servicer, we have been selected by the U.S. Department of Education to provide assistance and repayment planning to more than 8 million borrowers—as well as assistance to colleges and lenders nationwide.

Our group's earnings support one of the largest and most respected education philanthropy programs in the country. Since 2006, we have committed over \$160 million in grant funding to promote higher education access and completion for students of color, low-income students, and first-generation students.

**Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates**  
**[community.mygreatlakes.org](http://community.mygreatlakes.org)**