

SHARED SUCCESS



Our 2016 grants reflect our belief that overcoming barriers to graduation requires **engaging both students and colleges**, with success being their shared goal.



It's easy to think that improving college graduation rates is simply a matter of "fixing the student." Make sure they have enough preparation, guidance and resources—and the rest will take care of itself, right?

While there are certainly many student-related issues that affect outcomes, there are also barriers to completion beyond students' control, rooted in the practices and policies of the colleges they attend.

So this past year, we've continued to focus our efforts on both student and institutional challenges. We've awarded over 50 grants that encourage fresh or proven approaches to resolving many long-standing issues.

We've been fortunate to have a variety of partners who are curious like we are, and who share our commitment to thorough investigation and rigorous evaluation of ideas. Together we'll produce evidence-based findings to share—and build upon—for the benefit of students nationwide.

It's required bold thinking and hard work, and for many of our college partners, a courageous step, as well. They've had to look inward and identify barriers they unintentionally put in front of their students and then act to change the status quo.

In this Report, you'll learn about seeds of hope we've planted with this year's grants, as well as discoveries we've reaped from past years' grants.

We hope to inform and inspire—reminding you why Great Lakes has spent the past 50 years committed to keeping the American Dream within reach of all students.

Richard D. George

President & Chief Executive Officer
Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates

With everything we do, we are always mindful that moving students toward greater opportunity in life benefits us all.

Our Guiding Belief: Higher Education Remains the Surest Path to Economic Prosperity

At Great Lakes we work to make postsecondary degrees, credentials and certificates available to as many students as possible. Specifically, we focus our philanthropy on those who traditionally have the most to gain from college, but have the least support in getting there:

- Students of color
- Students from low-income homes
- Students who are first in their families to attend college

Helping Students Get To and Through College

We've learned there are many barriers to program completion, but generally they fall into one of two categories. We focus our grantmaking on both.

First, we work to make sure high school students, as well as adult learners, show up on Day One of college—and that they arrive academically and financially prepared.

Second, we help students and colleges identify and navigate challenges that can derail an education, including academic, financial, social and cultural issues.

Learning and Sharing, Our Constant Goals

While our competitive funding is focused in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Ohio, Iowa, Arkansas and North Dakota, we view our grants as investments made for the benefit of all students.

As we explore issues we take what we learn and dig deeper, in pursuit of effective, proven and scalable solutions that we can share with fellow funders, colleges, policymakers and others. Our hope is that we can promote a good idea—whether nurtured by Great Lakes or proven successful by others—to spark large-scale change nationwide.

Our Commitment to Our Partners

We seek out like-minded partners eager to establish and evaluate programs, often brand-new ideas without history or a template to follow. We know that's hard work and a big request of our grant recipients. So we pride ourselves on taking extra measures to help set them up for success.

Our grants provide funding for expenses associated with starting a program, like personnel and administrative costs. Additionally, our experienced program staff routinely provides technical assistance to help shorten learning curves. Lastly, something priceless...we strive to give grant recipients the time needed to plan and implement a program, so it can be successful from the start.

FINDINGS FROM 2016

Over the last year we've had the privilege to share lessons from three grants we made in years prior:

Emergency Grant Program

Our partners shared how they used emergency grants to help at-risk students in danger of dropping out over unforeseen expenses of \$500 or less. Our report offers guidance on developing cross-campus collaboration needed for colleges to launch their own successful programs.

Career Ready Internship Program

With participating colleges reporting increases in graduation rates for low-income students who had paid internships, we issued a best practices guide to help other colleges learn what it takes to administer programs on their campuses.

ASAP Replication Demonstration

Findings from the first year of the replication of the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) developed by the City University of New York (CUNY) at three Ohio community colleges show students in developmental courses making better, faster progress on degree completion—with improved success rates on par with the original CUNY program.

 Read complete reports at community.mygreatlakes.org

EXPLORATION GRANTS

\$3,783,067

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



VALIDATION GRANTS

\$5,213,999

Grants to support formal, independent evaluations of program impact.

SCALING GRANTS

\$11,929,038

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

We continue to use a three-part approach to funding that we believe is distinct and purposeful, allowing us to identify and evaluate ideas in thoughtful and efficient ways.



Learn more about our education philanthropy: community.mygreatlakes.org



In 2016 we awarded over 50 grants. The ones highlighted here reflect the personal and institutional challenges we're addressing in our attempts to close the achievement gaps facing low-income students, students of color, and students who are first in their families to attend college.

Mapping the Way to College Completion

Many community college students don't know what classes to take—and in what order to take them—to efficiently complete their degree or certificate. They're often left to piece together a plan with little guidance or direction.

This often leads to students dropping out, frustrated with the time and cost involved. Those who do complete their programs routinely accumulate far more credits—and debt—than they need to earn a degree. We're looking to fix both.

With funding from Great Lakes, the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University is working with all 23 Ohio community colleges to implement guided pathways that provide clearer program maps, set progress milestones tied to a future career, and develop more proactive student advising. Over the next two years, CCRC will document the implementation to produce a practitioners guide for use in Ohio and elsewhere.

Community College Research Center (NY)
\$1,500,000

Texting for Success

As many as 40% of high school graduates from underserved communities who leave high school with college acceptance letters in hand fail to show up for college in the fall. A phenomenon called Summer Melt.

The reason: over the course of the summer these students must finalize a number of college requirements, and they no longer have the support of high school counselors who previously guided them through the college admissions process. Left on their own, they are often unable to clear these final hurdles to college.

Sending a handful of short texts over the summer about steps students need to take, and offering follow-up assistance from a counselor, has been proving to substantially increase the number of students arriving at college.

This year we've continued our support of a texting program in three Wisconsin school districts. In 2017 we will share what it takes for individual districts to successfully launch a program of their own, with the goal of promoting statewide adoption.

Madison, Janesville and Stevens Point school districts (WI)
\$57,951

When Placement Exams Fail Students...

Two-thirds of students in developmental math and English courses at public two-year colleges never complete a degree. Even worse? One in three of those students was capable of college-level work and misplaced into non-credit bearing classes—based on a single placement exam. A barrier to completion they never saw coming.

1 IN 3

COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS IS MISPLACED INTO EITHER REMEDIAL OR COLLEGE-LEVEL COURSES

An emerging alternative that uses a placement test score combined with other measures of readiness interests us because it appears to place students with far greater accuracy. These "multiple measures assessments" (MMA) might include high school GPA, transcripts and writing samples, along with non-cognitive factors like tenacity and grit.

After funding an MMA landscape scan in 2015, we're now sponsoring a project conducted by MDRC and the Community College Research Center (CCRC) to implement state-specific MMA systems in Minnesota and Wisconsin. At its conclusion in 2018 we'll share what we learn, with the hope of helping other states build well-conceived, sustainable MMA systems.

MDRC and Community College Research Center (NY)
\$995,151



Providing a Fresh Start and a Second Chance

Dropping out of high school can lead to challenges for anyone, but especially for teens and young adults from low-income backgrounds. For more than 45 years, Operation Fresh Start (OFS) has worked to help thousands of disconnected youth in Madison, Wisconsin, earn a high school diploma through an innovative program that combines working on a construction crew (building affordable housing, no less) with taking classes toward high school graduation.

Great Lakes is pleased to make a grant to OFS to expand its programming to provide even more young men and women with enhanced job training—as well as a gateway to postsecondary education.

Operation Fresh Start (WI)
\$100,000



Planting the Seeds of College Success

Too often, middle and high school students from a low-income home or a family where no one has gone to college fail to see themselves as “college material.” But with the right encouragement and support, that can change. The key is getting college on a student’s radar early.

In Wisconsin we’ve supported two programs that actively take the message directly to students.

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College Access Advising

For nearly 10 years the Great Lakes team of College Access Advisors has gone into high schools with high percentages of low-income students. We provide free workshops, labs and one-on-one advising to engage students and their families in the college planning process.

The approach is “hands-on” with an emphasis on helping students actively take the steps they need to get into college. From starting the college conversation with ninth graders to helping twelfth graders complete applications and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®), students receive support at every step of their college journey.

Last year our team visited 246 high schools and helped more than 21,000 students and family members take steps toward a brighter future.

College Access Advising Program (WI)

\$1,796,846

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College Access Centers

Students in Milwaukee receive additional support and encouragement at two TEAM UP College Access Centers funded in part by Great Lakes.

College Access Centers are an extension of the college outreach efforts of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). Their goal is to engage students and families in grades six through twelve to get them excited about going to college and believing that they can (and should) go. They also provide insight and expertise to help students complete the critical steps needed to get to college.

MPS College Access Centers (WI)

\$100,000

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Putting Summer Vacation on ICE

Many community college students enroll part time or inconsistently, and the more time they spend out of school, the less likely they are to graduate. That’s why we’re learning whether attending summer school can help more students graduate and graduate faster.

With a grant from Great Lakes, MDRC, a leading social policy and education research organization, will conduct a rigorous study called “Incentivizing Continual Enrollment” (ICE) in several Ohio community colleges over the summers of 2017 and 2018. A key component of the study will be a randomized controlled trial of several targeted messages to students—based in behavioral science—designed to encourage summer enrollment.

In the end we hope to answer two questions: Does summer enrollment improve outcomes and, if so, what’s the most effective way to motivate students to take summer classes?

MDRC (NY)

\$3,295,000

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Rewarding Ambition

College graduates with STEM (science, technology, engineering or mathematics) degrees are in high demand, with good jobs waiting for them. Great Lakes has committed financial support to students willing to undertake these challenging programs through our National STEM Scholarship Program.

The program provides \$2,500 scholarships to deserving students, including 800 scholarships awarded in 2016. Since its inception in 2012 the program has provided \$9.5 million to some 4,000 STEM students.

Great Lakes National STEM Scholarship Program

\$2,062,500

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Changing the Algebraic Formula

Nearly all college students are funneled into algebra by default, despite two eye-opening facts: It has a documented fail rate of 50%. And only 5% of graduates need algebra for their jobs.

ONLY 5%

**OF ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS
REQUIRE ALGEBRA**

It’s time to rethink the *status quo* and remove this roadblock to college completion.

That’s why we’ve made a three-year grant to The Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin to help scale their proven New Mathways Project at public colleges in Arkansas. Through the project colleges help students succeed by aligning math courses with their academic and career goals: quantitative reasoning for fine arts and liberal arts majors, statistical reasoning for social science majors, and algebraic reasoning for STEM or math-intensive majors.

The Dana Center is supporting efforts to mobilize statewide adoption of pathways, including technical assistance for capacity building, planning support, and policy guidance.

The Charles A. Dana Center (TX)

\$600,000

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Reducing Colleges Expenses by 1/3

For low-income students paying their way through community college, textbooks routinely represent one-third of their annual college costs. With already stretched budgets, students too often have no choice but to do without books, significantly increasing their chances of falling behind and ultimately dropping out.

**BETWEEN 2002 AND 2012,
TEXTBOOKS COSTS
INCREASED BY**

82%

Swapping textbooks for Open Educational Resources (OER) could be a game-changer.

We're partnering with Achieving the Dream™, OER experts, and a number of funders to determine if community college degree programs using free online materials—like textbooks, videos and tests in the public domain—can increase students' academic performance and lead to higher graduation rates. Hopes are high that OER can help students graduate faster and with less student loan debt.

Achieving the Dream (MD)
\$800,000



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Micro-Grants Solve a Big Problem

Low-income and first-generation students who are just a semester or two away from earning degrees are routinely unable to re-enroll in classes due to an unpaid college balance of as little as \$300. If they've used up all sources of aid and there's nowhere else to turn for help, they may have no choice but to abandon their programs.

With funding from Great Lakes and others, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) explored how micro-grant programs at urban-serving universities with diverse student populations are being used to help students graduate. The result? A best practices guide for universities to use when creating or expanding a student retention/degree completion grant program.

Based on the encouraging results of this research, Great Lakes has made a second grant to support four APLU colleges in implementing their own micro-grant programs.

APLU (D.C.)
\$200,000

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Great Lakes Employees: Walking the Talk

At Great Lakes, promoting educational success is in our DNA, starting with our employees. Each of our offices has "adopted" a nearby public elementary or middle school that serves a large number of low-income students, and every year Great Lakes employees support the needs of those students by donating books, supplies, snacks and more.

The largest of these events is our annual United Way campaign. For the past three years, Great Lakes has matched employee donations to the United Way dollar-for-dollar in the form of a grant to each adopted school. Last year a combined \$118,090 went to our nine adopted schools to help improve learning opportunities, with the goal, ultimately, of helping put more students on the road to a college degree.

**Nine elementary and middle schools
(CT, MN, SD, TX & WI)**
\$118,090

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Leveling the Playing Field with Paid Internships

The benefits of internships are many for students. They gain relevant workplace skills. They're more likely to earn a degree. And they have a competitive advantage when they enter the job market. Unfortunately, not all internships are paid—and that often means low-income students who need to earn a paycheck for the work they do outside of school are excluded.

To help close that equity gap, we began making internship grants in 2013 to four-year colleges so they could work with local employers to create paid internships solely for students with financial need. Results have been very encouraging and to date we've invested over \$22 million in the program to cover student wages and transportation, as well as offset expenses incurred by the colleges during the start-up phase.

65%

**OF STUDENTS WHO TAKE PART
IN PAID INTERNSHIPS ARE
OFFERED FULL-TIME JOBS**

With our 2017-2018 Career Ready Internship Grant we're pleased to expand the opportunity to students at two-year colleges. We look forward to sharing our partners' results, along with documenting differences in establishing successful internship programs on two- and four-year campuses.

**Sixteen community colleges
(AR, IA, MN, ND, OH & WI)**
\$2,102,648



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A How-To Guide to Internship Programs

Since we started making grants to provide paid internships to low-income students in 2013, we've learned a lot. We've learned they work, and, perhaps most importantly, we've learned that establishing a successful program is a carefully orchestrated process for colleges. Something we'd like to share with others looking to launch their own internship programs.

To do so we've awarded a grant to MDRC to conduct an extensive evaluation of our 2015-2018 Career Ready Internship Grant. The study will cover a number of topics in detail: student retention and persistence, college-employer relationships, program implementation, as well as scalability and sustainability. When the study is complete, MDRC will create a policy brief providing a blueprint for colleges to follow to create their own successful internship programs.

MDRC (NY)
\$422,999

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Helping Part-Time Faculty Fully Connect to Students—For Greater Academic Success

More than half of community college instructors today are part-time adjunct faculty. While students benefit from their “real world” experience and industry knowledge, adjuncts often have limited exposure to professional development, campus resources, data on student performance, and other informal knowledge available to their full-time peers. These limitations can negatively affect students’ academic success, especially for at-risk students.

To address this issue, we’re supporting the evaluation of a new Achieving the Dream™ initiative at six colleges across the country that seeks to develop or strengthen college policies and practices to build leadership opportunities for adjunct faculty, improve teaching skills and engage all faculty in student-focused reform efforts.

Achieving the Dream (MD)
\$696,000



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Breaking the Cycle of Incarceration

We’re always looking for ways higher education can improve lives for the most marginalized students. A growing body of evidence suggests there may be great opportunity working with incarcerated men and women. Recent reporting from the Rand Corporation says that involving these individuals in postsecondary programs can reduce by half the likelihood they’ll return to prison within three years of being released.

To learn more, and inform future funding, we’ve made a grant to the Rand Corporation to conduct a landscape assessment of correctional education on our behalf. It will help us better understand work currently underway, as well as the potential for individual and societal impact of future grantmaking.

Rand Corporation (CA)
\$171,429

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College Possible: Succeeding Against the Odds

Every year College Possible coaches thousands of the most at-risk, low-income students to success, from college prep through college graduation. We’ve funded their programs for years, and they’ve consistently ranked among our top performers based on student outcomes.

What makes them unique: using AmeriCorps members as mentors. In high schools, they coach students for two hours twice a week, helping them prepare for ACT exams, apply for colleges and assist with financial aid paperwork. In colleges, they prepare students to be financially literate, develop great study skills and successfully navigate the world of college on their own.

Great Lakes is proud to extend continued support to their Minnesota and Milwaukee programs. Over the next three years, Great Lakes grants will support 1,300 low-income juniors at 36 high schools and 2,500 college students.

College Possible (WI & MN)
\$972,000



Improving Latino Student Success: a Two-Part Strategy

While completion rates for students of color continue to trail white students, the issue is most acute for Latino students who lag furthest behind—despite going to college in increasing numbers. The Census Bureau reports that only 22% of Latino adults have earned an associate’s degree or higher, versus 46% of white adults.

In response, Great Lakes has targeted two grants this year to specifically address Latino student completion rates.

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One Focus National

With 80% of Latino undergraduates attending Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), we decided to make our first-ever grant to *Excelencia in Education*, a nonprofit dedicated to improving Latino success in higher education since 2004.

With our grant, *Excelencia in Education* will:

- Work with eight HSIs in Florida and Texas for two years to develop and implement plans to increase Latino student graduation rates
- Improve and increase the reach of their evidence-based best practices
- Promote data tracking of Latino students’ persistence and completion rates to advance their research

***Excelencia in Education* (D.C.)**
\$750,000

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The Other Focus Local

Great Lakes continues to support *Abriendo Puertas*, an emerging program of Milwaukee’s United Community Center (UCC) that provides free, professional preparation and mentorship for Hispanic and minority college students.

The “Opening Doors” program provides specialized help to address barriers to job success in a culturally relevant way. Latino students are coached on overcoming educational obstacles and developing a network of professionals that can aid in starting a career.

Over the next three years, our funds support UCC as they increase programming to help even more low-income Latino students get to and through college.

United Community Center (WI)
\$447,753

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Keeping At-Risk College Seniors on Track to Graduation

Every year countless students who are nearing graduation drop out, often with as little as a semester to go. While the reasons are many, the result is uniformly tragic. These near-completers have often amassed a degree's worth of student loan debt but leave without the earning power a degree can provide to repay it.

That loss is compounded when students abandon degrees in high-demand fields. Not only do they miss out on well-paying jobs, but employers are left with unfilled positions needed to help them grow.

Our 2017-2019 College Completion Grant asks colleges to look inward to find barriers they may be putting in the way of near-completers in high-demand areas like nursing, IT and business. It's a courageous and ambitious undertaking. Colleges will work to remove obstacles within their policies, pathways and practices that are preventing students from finishing, with particular attention paid to issues affecting low-income students and students of color.

Recognizing that students share responsibility for their academic success, grant funds will also help colleges identify and address students' personal barriers to completion.

**Fourteen two- and four-year colleges
(AR, MN, ND, OH & WI)**
\$2,616,487

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Joining the "Free College" Conversation

There's healthy debate over free community college. And Great Lakes is honored to be part of this important dialog.

We're lending financial support and industry expertise to Civic Nation's *College Promise Campaign* as they build support for investing in students at our nation's community colleges. The campaign's ultimate goal is to expand College Promise programs that provide tuition and fees for the first two years of a community college education for all responsible students.

Civic Nation (D.C.)
\$100,000

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Coaching Community Colleges to Success

Achieving the Dream™ (ATD) is a national community college reform network dedicated to helping its 200+ member colleges improve academic performance and graduation rates, especially for low-income students and students of color.

One of the ways ATD supports its members is by coaching them on institutional best practices: identifying policies, procedures and institutional culture that may inhibit student success and then helping them remove those barriers.

A three-year grant from Great Lakes will allow ATD to implement a new and enhanced coaching model to help them better understand where colleges are in their reform work so they can better address specific areas for improvement. A key component will be a new assessment tool each college will use to evaluate their performance on several measures deemed critical to student success—all with an eye toward addressing student need more efficiently and effectively.

Achieving the Dream (MD)
\$1,000,000

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Other Commitments

Smaller, locally focused grants representing our commitment to community improvement efforts.
\$995,371

Subscribe to our education philanthropy newsletter at:
community.mygreatlakes.org



\$21.9 Million
Grants Awarded

\$30.4 Million
Grant Payments

Over \$179 Million
Total Grants
Since 2006

Our First 50 Years, and Beyond...

2017 marks Great Lakes' golden anniversary. From the beginning we've been a nonprofit with a single goal: helping students get to and through college so they can build brighter futures.

We look forward to this milestone year because it brings great promise of discovery and learning. From expanding current grant programs and launching new initiatives, to sharing updates and results, we'll seek to make meaningful contributions to the national dialog surrounding college completion.

Our objectives will include:

- Expanding our Dash Emergency Grant program beyond two-year colleges, to include four-year colleges as well.
- Sharing an initial report on The Degree Project[®], a research program started in the fall of 2011 to see if the promise of providing up to \$12,000 in college tuition to Milwaukee Public Schools students can affect college-going and completion rates.
- Providing updates on current Career Ready Internship Grants at two-year and four-year colleges.
- Using findings from the Correctional Education Landscape Scan to inform our next steps exploring this important area of work.
- Scaling our Tools of the Trade apprenticeship program beyond Wisconsin to provide \$1,000 scholarships to 200 construction and industrial trade apprentices in Ohio.



Thanks as always to our partners and supporters. You inspire us to help even more students realize the dream of higher education—and a path to economic prosperity.

Dedicated to making college education a reality for 50 years.



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 \$179 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

