



COVID-19's Effect on Transfer: Toward a Clearer Picture

As the COVID-19 pandemic injects profound uncertainty into postsecondary education enrollments this fall, the risk of drastic upheaval is real. Some reports suggest large numbers of students are considering transferring from four-year institutions to two-year community colleges to earn cheaper credits and be closer to family. There's also valid concern that such changes will fall disproportionately on learners from low-income backgrounds, communities of color and rural communities.

That's why Ascendium is co-funding a two-year research project by the [National Student Clearinghouse](#) Research Center to document, in near real time, how the pandemic is affecting higher education transfer patterns. Ascendium is contributing \$545,500 to the project from its COVID-19 Impact Response Fund. ECMC Foundation joins us in supporting this effort, which will produce nine reports that provide institutions, systems, legislators and more with accurate data and critical insight on emerging patterns. Now more than ever, we all need to keep reforms rolling and deliver the promise of postsecondary education to those who need it most.

[Read more about Ascendium's interest in this project.](#)



Districts Take Next Steps After Text Steps

Even with their typical school year disrupted by COVID-19, all 13 Wisconsin school districts that participated in the Ascendium-funded [Text Steps project](#) remained committed to the goal of reducing summer melt and are in the final stages of their summer texting campaigns as graduated seniors solidify plans to further their education this fall.

"Even though recruitment of students was more difficult this spring, districts are reporting increased buy-in from staff as it relates to their role in supporting students between graduation and college enrollment," said Carolynn Lee, program officer at Ascendium.

Lee added that tools and technology provided by Ascendium through the Text Steps project have also proven valuable to districts, with staff commenting that they feel comfortable using the tools and have found them useful in connecting with students. A handful of districts that participated are actively preparing requests to district leadership to enable continued use of the texting platform.

In September at the [National College Attainment Network's annual conference](#), Lee will be facilitating a session about using data to achieve equitable postsecondary outcomes with Text Steps grantee Sheboygan Area School District and a representative of the National Student Clearinghouse. While NSC will share expertise about the effective use of data gleaned from working with thousands of education partners nationwide, Sheboygan will discuss how their use of disaggregated data, as a result of Text Steps, has improved their ability to help students reach their postsecondary goals.

New Resources

Strategies for Encouraging Enrollment

MDRC's Center for Applied Behavioral Science has produced the Issue Focus paper "[Using Insights from Behavioral Science to Help College Students Stay Enrolled](#)" for institutions facing a host of concerns about the upcoming fall semester in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper offers tailored insights and context from the [Encouraging Additional Summer Enrollment](#) project, which is funded by Ascendium.



Caring Campus Webinars a Hit

The Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC) held two widely attended webinars this summer on how college campuses can provide student support services in extraordinary times. The first [webinar](#) had more than 300 attendees and was based on the IEBC [report](#) "Connecting With Students in a Virtual Environment." Guest presenter Christina Horton of San Antonio College spoke on the college's strategy for proactively reaching out to each of the college's over 20,000 students. The second webinar was attended by more than 400, and IEBC leadership presented the [report](#) "Supporting Community College Professional Staff." Guest Julianna Barnes of Cuyamaca College (Rancho San Diego, CA) presented strategies for keeping staff informed of their college's policies, practices and other updates. This work is part of two multi-year Ascendium grants in support of IEBC's Caring Campus programming.



UIA: Lessons Learned

University Innovation Alliance (UIA) has issued [What We've Learned About Just-in-Time Aid from 3 Years of Completion Grants](#), a set of timely recommendations to institutions. They include streamlining information and requirements for students, clarifying which costs the emergency aid will cover, surveying students about their needs to help target aid most effectively, and considering local and regional context when shaping aid policies. UIA also hosted a [webinar](#) (July 30), "Timely Considerations for Emergency Aid Based on 3 Years of UIA Completion Grants," featuring insights and suggestions from UIA institutional leaders. This work is funded under Ascendium's [Remove Structural Barriers to Success](#) portfolio.



Recent Grants

Field Support and Development

Digital Learning Task Force and Policy Recommendations Scaling

[State Higher Education Executive Officers Association](#) | \$250,000 | 08/2020 - 06/2021

As part of Ascendium's COVID-19 Impact Response Fund initiative, this grant supports the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association in developing an understanding of the nationwide shift to remote teaching and learning, what is working and what isn't - particularly for marginalized students - and using the information to make policy recommendations to both reduce inequitable impacts of online learning and promote quality.

Student-Centered Credit Mobility Prototype and Policies Scaling

[Aspen Institute Inc](#) | \$100,000 | 07/2020 - 12/2020

As part of Ascendium's COVID-19 Impact Response Fund initiative, this grant supports the Aspen Institute in developing pragmatic guidance for postsecondary institutions on student-centered credit mobility, and developing timely, COVID-context-specific content emphasizing evidence-based practices colleges and universities can adopt that enable seamless transitions between institutions.

On the Go: Find Ascendium Staff in the Field — Virtually

Ascendium Education Group has cancelled all staff travel plans until further notice due to COVID-19 concerns, but we are supporting and attending virtual events. We hope everyone stays safe and we look forward to participating in live events in the coming months. We will continue to share event recording and resource links and future opportunities to connect with Ascendium staff.

[Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness: 2020 Conference Series](#)

August 12 (recorded)
(Rebecca Villarreal, panelist): "Meet the Funders: Perspectives from Foundations"

[NCAN 25th Anniversary Conference](#): Marching Toward Equity

September 14-16
(Carolynn Lee, presenting: "Data, Who Knew? Using Data to Inform Effective, Equitable Postsecondary Supports")

Ascendium is a proud sponsor of this event

[Graduate Network! Learnx](#)

September 9-11 **DATE CORRECTED**

[ASU+GSV 2020 Virtual Summit](#)

September 29-October 1
Ascendium is a proud sponsor of this event

[Grantmakers for Education Conference Week](#): Keeping Our Promises to the Next

October 12-16
Ascendium is a proud sponsor of this event

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