



Final Ohio ASAP Report Shows Increased Graduation and Transfer Rates

The Accelerated Study in Associate Program (ASAP) is a comprehensive program that provides students with up to three years of financial and academic support and other support services to address multiple barriers to student success, with the goal of helping more students graduate within three years.

Partnering with MDRC, the Ohio Department of Higher Education, and City University of New York (CUNY), Ascendium provided \$5 million in anchor funding, supplemented by grants from a consortium of other philanthropies, to implement and evaluate a program modeled on the CUNY ASAP.

Newly published results show that Lorain County Community College, Cuyahoga Community College District (Tri-C) and Cincinnati State Technical and Community College have successfully adapted the CUNY ASAP model in Ohio, nearly doubling three-year graduation rates and increasing transfers to four-year colleges by 50 percent. The magnitude of these results mirrors impacts achieved by the original CUNY program.

The Ohio colleges targeted students who were from low-income families, willing to attend full-time, and in majors where degrees could be completed within three years. Students could be new to college or could be continuing students with up to 24 credits. The study compares the Ohio demonstration of ASAP with regular services and classes at the colleges.

“These new results from MDRC’s evaluation continue to validate both the adaptability of the ASAP strategy and the commitment of our Ohio partners to help more underserved students realize their goal of a postsecondary credential,” said Amy Kerwin, Vice President of Education Philanthropy at Ascendium Education Group.

Meet Ascendium’s New Deputy Director of Grantmaking Miles Wilson

Ascendium is excited to welcome E. Miles Wilson as our new Deputy Director for Education Grantmaking. Miles will be providing day-to-day supervision and support to program officers working to advance Ascendium’s **four focus areas** and our mission to elevate opportunities for learners from low-income backgrounds to better achieve their postsecondary educational and career goals.



“We are thrilled to have Miles join our team,” said Director of Education Grantmaking Rebecca Villarreal. “His deep background in this field brings a well-rounded perspective to our team.”

Previously, Miles served as a Senior Fellow with the **Aspen Institute** headquartered in Washington, DC. He has also held positions with the Marguerite Casey Foundation, Omidyar Foundation/Network, Greater Cincinnati Foundation, Johnson Center for Philanthropy, Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement and Nonprofit Development, and was a member of the startup team at the Corporation for National and Community Service.

“I’m very excited about my new role with Ascendium. Ascendium is well positioned for substantial growth and national leadership in postsecondary education grantmaking. I look forward to bringing my experience working with numerous philanthropy sector organizations in the midst of positive change and helping design change for both leadership and impact.”



Promising Early Findings from an Experimental Study of Multiple Measures Assessment and Placement

There is no single, correct way to design and implement multiple measures assessment (MMA) to improve placement into developmental education or credit-bearing courses. However, MDRC, in partnership with the Community College Research Center, worked with several colleges in Minnesota and Wisconsin to create and pilot MMA placement systems using decision rules that were developed based on prior research and local knowledge.

A new report funded by Ascendium, **Expanding Access to College-Level Courses**, details the second phase of the project, in which five colleges are engaged in a randomized controlled trial comparing student placement (using MMA and using a college’s existing procedures).

The findings suggest that while MMA implementation is not easy, it is possible. The report also highlights several positive quantitative findings for the students placed using MMA. For example, “[s]tudents... who placed into college-level English because they were in the program group were 28 percentage points more likely to have completed the gatekeeper English course by the end of their first college semester than their control group counterparts.”

We are excited about these early findings and what we are learning about the power of MMA. We look forward to the next and final report which will present an analysis of transcript outcomes from three semesters of follow up and will add two more cohorts to the research sample as well as implementation and cost research at the participating institutions.



ATD’s Open Education Resource Initiative Succeeds in Scaling up Courses

Achieving the Dream (ATD) launched the Open Education Resource (OER) degree initiative with 38 colleges across the U.S. to enable pathways of courses using entirely OER, with the goal of increasing college affordability and student success. The initiative was supported by Ascendium, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Shelter Hill Foundation and the Speedwell Foundation. In addition, ATD partnered with Lumen Learning to provide technical assistance and the Community College Consortium for OER to provide a community of practice. SRI Education, with rpk GROUP, led the research and evaluation.

The initiative evaluation found that students benefitted from unrestricted access to course content and improved course experience, and evidence suggests that “students who took multiple OER courses on average earned more credits towards their degrees over time than similar students who took no OER courses.”

Other major findings of the OER evaluation showed that the initiative succeeded in dramatically scaling up OER courses, with nearly 2,000 instructors offering over 6,600 OER courses reaching 160,000 students. Developing OER courses is a strategic institutional effort requiring high-level administrative support, as it requires substantial collaboration across academic departments and service units.

While converting courses to OER could reinvigorate curriculum and pedagogy and lead to improved quality of instruction, redesigning courses with OER can be time-consuming and expensive, demanding new skills and support for instructors. However, scaling OER course development across a substantial number of institutions is expected to increase the supply of vetted OER course content and in turn, lower barriers to adoption by participating colleges. We look forward to seeing OER take root and expand college affordability and student success.



Ascendium Wrapping Up Two Grant Initiatives

Two of Ascendium’s long running grant projects came to a close at the end of 2019. Both the **Dash Emergency Grant** and the **College Completion Grant** helped colleges implement new success strategies for learners facing barriers to staying enrolled. Dash provided the tools for colleges to help students overcome unexpected financial setbacks, such as housing or transportation emergencies, with quick-turnaround support. College Completion helped institutions identify students near completion and proactively offer interventions to address scheduling conflicts, academic performance issues and gaps between financial aid and college costs that may impact their ability to cross the finish line.

Practitioners at our partner colleges worked hard to implement these programs, and we thank them for their dedication over the years. In addition to helping more students from low-income backgrounds overcome financial, academic and logistical hurdles, both projects provided valuable data and insights that continue to inform our grantmaking strategy today.

Congratulations to NCAN on their 25th anniversary rebrand!

Check out their new name and logo live at www.ncan.org.

Recent Grants

Recipient	Grant	Amount
American Association of State Colleges and Universities	Provosts’ Student Success Network	\$1.6 million
Campaign for College Promise	Expansion of the Promise Ecosystem Initiative and Employer Symposiums	\$250,000
Social Finance	Improving Workforce Outcomes for Community College Students	\$180,000

On the Go: Find Ascendium Staff in the Field

Achieving the Dream: DREAM 2020 National Convening*

February 18-21, National Harbor, MD

Strong Start to Finish Learning Network Convening

March 2-5, Miami, FL

SXSW EDU 2020

March 9-12, Austin, TX

PEAK Grantmaking 2020

March 9-11, Seattle, WA

Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness (SREE)*

March 11-14, Arlington, VA

American Association of Community Colleges Annual Convention

March 28-30, National Harbor, MD

Arizona State University and Global Silicon Valley Summit*

March 30-April 1, San Diego, CA

The Association for Non-Traditional Students in Higher Education

April 2-4, Indianapolis, IN

Rural College Access & Success Summit

April 26-28, Scottsdale, AZ

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO)

April 27-29, Boston, MA

*In addition to Ascendium staff being on hand, we’re helping practitioners attend through the Ascendium Fellows program.

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