

Meeting the Higher Education Challenge: A Strategy for Success

The Hathaway Scholarship Program, created by the Wyoming Legislature in 2006, has come of age. This fall the first Wyoming high school graduates who have completed the entire Hathaway "success curriculum" have entered college.

The Hathaway program is a remarkable testament to Wyoming's commitment to education. Through it, the state provides the financial means for K-12 students to continue their education at Wyoming community colleges and the University of Wyoming. Importantly, the value of Hathaway scholarships is linked to students' record of academic accomplishment in high school. It provides a powerful incentive to students to take the Hathaway success curriculum, a first step to prepare for success in college.

In August, the University of Wyoming welcomed 859 Wyoming high school graduates, 90 percent of whom have completed the Hathaway success curriculum. And over the past three years, as the success curriculum has been phased in, the average ACT scores of Wyoming's 11th-graders have risen steadily. As increasing numbers of high school students take rigorous coursework and achieve high GPA and ACT scores, we have every reason to expect higher levels of college completion in our state.

We should be very proud of these investments in Wyoming's future, our students. But our task is challenging. Only 36 percent of Wyoming's residents hold an associates degree or higher, yet the percentage of Wyoming jobs requiring postsecondary education continues to rise and is expected to reach 63 percent by 2018. Wyoming's population is projected to continue to lag the nation in proportion of adults with postsecondary education. We must change this trend.

Wyoming faces two challenges in preparing its young people for an increasingly knowledge-based economy. First, more K-12 students need to prepare for and enter college. Only 44 of every 100 Wyoming ninth-graders enter college anywhere in the U.S. upon graduation from high school. Second, students who enter Wyoming's colleges and university need to persist and graduate. Of the students who enter UW, only 53 percent complete baccalaureate degrees within six years. UW is committed to improving this record and helping Wyoming residents reach their higher education goals.

The legislators who designed the Hathaway success curriculum knew that the single most important factor in college success is high school preparation. It is time for UW to adopt the Hathaway success curriculum as part of our standard for assured admission. Ninety percent of our entering students from Wyoming already meet this standard, and our research shows that our well-prepared students persist and graduate at significantly higher rates.

At the same time, we will offer "admission with support" (formerly "conditional admission") to students whose high school transcripts, GPA and ACT scores suggest that they may require additional support to succeed in college. Our award-winning Synergy program will be expanded to include all those students who will benefit from this intensive course-based learning community that promotes social and academic integration.

We stress that all students who would be admitted under the current admissions standards will continue to be admitted under the proposed standards. The change is that UW will identify those students who will benefit from additional support and provide it to them. UW will step up its commitment, at the same time we signal realistic expectations to our incoming students for success in college. This should improve student retention and graduation rates. We anticipate that our new admission standards will communicate to Wyoming families the courses that their students should take to succeed in college, whether at UW, a community college or elsewhere.

This fall UW will hold a series of town hall meetings around the state to discuss the proposed changes in our admissions standards. We will share your feedback, suggestions and opinions with members of our Board of Trustees so they can make an informed decision about these proposals. In the meantime, further information and data that led to the definition of proposed admission standards is available at <http://www.uwyo.edu/acadaffairs/resources/index.html> under “College readiness and completion.”

We in Wyoming want the best possible future for our young people. We know that well-educated citizens have the talents and skills to thrive in an increasingly knowledge-based economy. We want them to have all the benefits of higher education, including career opportunities, economic stability, and a richer, deeper quality of life. UW looks forward to joining with all of you across the state in accomplishing this goal.