GEAR UP Wyoming Reaches More than 2,000 Students Statewide

GEAR UP Wyoming is a federally funded grant program which prepares 7th-12th grade low-income students for college. The goal of GEAR UP is to increase the number of eligible students who complete high school and who are prepared to enter and succeed in college. This year GEAR UP Wyoming served 2,252 students, including first-year college freshmen.

GEAR UP services are provided by outreach coordinators located at each of Wyoming’s seven community colleges and the University of Wyoming. Some of the activities include:

- Tutoring
- Mentoring
- Career exploration and advising
- ACT® preparation
- Financial aid and scholarship literacy
- Educational summer academies
- College visits

These activities emphasize the importance and value of education and are designed to help students see themselves as successful college students.

A+ Graduation Rates for High School Seniors

Recent research from the Department of Education shows that four-year, high school graduation rates are at their highest level since 1974. While low-income students tend to graduate at lower percentages than their peers, GEAR UP’s senior graduation rate shows that GEAR UP is making a difference. In the 2011-2012 school year, 94% of high school seniors in the GEAR UP Wyoming program graduated.

GEAR UP provides many programs throughout the state to encourage students to graduate. For example, the GEAR UP program at Laramie County Community College spotlights the successes of GEAR UP seniors while providing an opportunity for mentoring. During this activity, the seniors share inspirational stories with the younger GEAR UP students about their path to graduation and their time in GEAR UP. The other Wyoming community colleges have similar activities in their programs as well.

FAFSA Completion Rates Indicate Higher College Attendance

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) determines a student’s eligibility for financial aid. The FAFSA serves as a gateway to federal, state, and college sponsored aid such as grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study programs.

GEAR UP Wyoming provides a variety of statewide services to increase FAFSA completion with the goal of increasing financial access to college. In 2012, 72% of GEAR UP Wyoming students completed the FAFSA.

continued on the next page
Wyoming College Freshman Receive Support

For the first time in its history, GEAR UP WYOMING is able to provide services to college freshmen who were served by GEAR UP during high school or junior high school. These services include peer mentoring, tutoring, FAFSA assistance, scholarship information, and introductory level college courses which focus on college success. At the University of Wyoming, GEAR UP has instituted monthly meetings for GEAR UP students where they are able to learn résumé writing tips, utilize campus resources, and connect with other GEAR UP students. These opportunities help students feel invested on the college campus and increase the likelihood of students continuing from year one to year two of college.

GEAR UP for Higher College Enrollment

The 2010-2011 college enrollment rates of low-income Wyoming students who did not participate in GEAR UP was only 23.4 percent.¹ In 2012, GEAR UP WYOMING more than three tripled this rate with 74 percent of GEAR UP WYOMING students enrolling in college. The GEAR UP WYOMING enrollment is also significantly higher than the national average of all economic subgroups who attend at the rate of 68 percent.²

GEAR UP WYOMING offers a variety of services to engage high school students in college culture. Campus visits are one way that GEAR UP staff work to show students the particulars of college life. In 2012, GEAR UP students visited 22 colleges and universities, including Wyoming’s seven community colleges and the University of Wyoming. Additionally, every other summer, Camp GEAR UP is held at the University of Wyoming. It is a week long camp for entering 9th-12th grade students. The camp gives students a glimpse of college life and helps them explore careers and college interests. Camp GEAR UP will be held July 8-12, 2013.

“I had so much fun. Thank you GEAR UP. I can honestly say that I am going to college thanks to you!”
– Camp GEAR UP student

¹ Postsecondary Education OPPORTUNITY Newsletter. 2013.
College Readiness in the Era of Accountability

The Wyoming Accountability in Education Act was signed into law in March 2012 and provides the opportunity for all Wyoming high school juniors to take the ACT® for free. The ACT® is the state’s primary measure of college readiness.

GEAR UP Wyoming offers a wide range of professional development opportunities for teachers to improve college readiness for their students, including ACT® preparation and data interpretation workshops. The latest series of ACT® preparation workshops will be held in the end of July and the first part of August, 2013. The workshops, provided by current classroom teachers, emphasize teaching strategies in math, science, english, reading, and writing. Furthermore, GEAR UP Wyoming offers all GEAR UP students free access to PrepMe, an online ACT® preparation program. PrepMe provides easy-to-follow lessons targeted to specific academic areas to prepare students for the ACT® college admissions test.

Many sites offer ACT® preparation workshops as well. For example, Central Wyoming College has provided workshops which familiarize students with the ACT®, PLAN, and EXPLORE test series. Utilizing the ACT® website (www.actstudent.org), Central Wyoming College has students explore the vast information provided by ACT®. Details such as the number of questions, the time allowed, information about what test scores mean, and how they can use their results to better prepare for the next test in the series, helped the students realize the importance and relevance of testing. Students were also challenged to work on the practice questions provided by ACT® to prep themselves for their test. Aside from preparation measures, GEAR UP Wyoming is also able to offer participants the opportunity to retake the ACT® test up to two times at no cost through fee waivers. Through teacher professional development, student ACT® preparation, and ACT® fee waivers, GEAR UP aims to increase the number of students who are college ready.

Parental Engagement Matters to GEAR UP Wyoming

According to Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, students with involved parents derive an array of benefits. These students earn higher grades and test scores, are more likely to attend school regularly, have better social skills, and are more likely to graduate and pursue a postsecondary education.

GEAR UP Wyoming strives to inform parents about their students’ educational options, including college preparation and financing. All GEAR UP Wyoming sites provide financial aid literacy information to parents and students. Many sites are working to increase parental involvement in other areas as well. For example, the GEAR UP staff at Northern Wyoming Community College District hosted successful family events at the beginning of the school year. They covered tables with butcher paper and placed markers at each table. The GEAR UP students and parents were asked to either write down or draw their short and long-term goals. Afterwards, they discussed the goals with their family members. This activity helped open the lines of communication between students and their parents.
Wendy Martinez, a current student at University of Wyoming (UW), was one of 30 GEAR UP Alumni Leaders selected from across the country for the GEAR UP Alumni Leadership Academy (GUALA). Wendy participated in the Central Wyoming College GEAR UP program in high school and is currently a peer mentor for GEAR UP freshmen at UW.

GUALA is a new initiative launched by the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships with support from the national GEAR UP community and funding from The Kresge Foundation. GUALA is a 12-month program designed to train and engage GEAR UP alumni in advocacy and leadership and work toward creating positive change in education policy for their younger peers.

The goals of GUALA are to cultivate youth leadership opportunities at the national, community, and individual levels. Alumni Leaders will attend the Alumni Leadership Training held from June 22, 2013 to June 29, 2013 in Washington, D.C.