



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## ESTABLISHING A CAMPUS-BASED GED TO COLLEGE TRANSITION CLASS

The challenge of educating adults lacking a GED is daunting. Classes offered through literacy centers/ community agencies tend to focus primarily on GED completion and not on helping adults make the transition to college. San Antonio College's *GED to College Transition Program* offers students the opportunity to earn their GED and transition to college.

### About the GED to College Transition Program

Students accepted into the GED to College Transition Program receive GED and college preparation instruction, supportive services, career counseling, vouchers to pay for the GED test, and assistance with the college enrollment process. To qualify, students must be over 18 and score at least a 10<sup>th</sup>-grade reading level on the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE). Only those students interested in college enrollment after GED completion are accepted into the program. Classes are held from 8:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. on MWF for one semester. Of the 135 participants who have enrolled in the GED to College Transition Program since its inception in 2009, 84% have passed the GED and 82% have gone on to enroll in college.

The following advice is offered for those interested in establishing a GED to College Transition Program:

- **Consider Utilizing Partners to Assist You.** Our partnerships have helped us increase program recruitment, enhance our financial resources, and meet and advance our program goals and objectives by helping us to do more with less. These partners include:
  - Local school districts. Through collaborative efforts with the San Antonio Independent School District Adult Basic Education Department, we have been able to provide a comprehensive GED program. Instructors assure timely GED test completion while aggressively preparing students for college. The school district also provides equipment, including a mobile computer lab that allows students to utilize laptops in class.

- City and county governments. A grant provided by the City of San Antonio allows our students to receive comprehensive counseling services, classroom materials, and supplies. The grant also pays for college transition services, such as vouchers for assessment/ placement testing and required vaccinations. We have also received funding from the county which we have utilized to pay for tuition.
- Community Groups. Community members are helpful in organizing fund-raising events. In addition to generating funds for program use, having community groups participate helps generate goodwill in the community and brings awareness of the problem of adults needing a GED in order to pursue a college education. F

### Important Aspects of the Program

- **Emphasizing and integrating a "college-going" culture into the program.** *"This GED class has made me so confident. Since the beginning of this program I've been told that I am a college student...now, I really believe it!"* (Maribel, age 32, single mom of three)

Many GED students have failed in traditional classroom settings. Our experience has been that the average participant has failed at least two community GED programs prior to starting our program. Therefore, they come to us with low self-esteem and low expectations. The majority are first-generation college students for whom college attendance is not the norm, so they find the process of enrolling in school confusing and overwhelming. Therefore, we focus on a culture that emphasizes college attendance and completion, and it is infused throughout the curriculum. For example, each student is provided with a "Journey to College" workbook that covers topics such as developing a mission statement, time management, learning styles, and career development. These topics are covered in workshops offered every week throughout the length of the semester. Students are also encouraged to participate in various extracurricular activities held on campus, which helps them to develop a sense of connection and belonging. At the conclusion of each semester students are assisted with admissions processing, financial aid application, and course selection.

• **Utilize former graduates of the program as role models and mentors.** *"The past student speakers motivated me to fight for what I want and not easily give up because they fought and are now enrolled in college."* (Jose, age 28, single dad of four)

Most nontraditional students, but in particular GED students, need to know that it is possible to accomplish their goals. The use of previous program participants who have been successful in getting their GED and going on to college is very important. As part of the "pay it forward" philosophy that we try to impart on all of our program participants, our GED graduates recognize the importance of sharing their story with current participants.

• **Offer intensive support.** *"The number one thing that I think is positive is the support that this program has to offer. It makes me want to keep coming back to class."* (Carlos, age 21)

Seventy percent of program participants are single parents. Many students struggle with multiple barriers including financial problems, problematic personal relationships, and homelessness. For this reason, one critical element in serving this population adequately is supportive services. Students in our program are provided with wrap-around/comprehensive services, including crisis intervention and assistance with social services (food stamps, child care, and housing). A case management approach is used to identify needs and barriers to program completion and to offer the necessary support.

• **Establish a sense of community.** *"One thing I love about the class is that we all are supportive of each other and work as a team helping one another."* (Brittany, age 27, single mom)

Students are in class together for six hours a day, three days out of the week, so they become a true learning community. They become friends very quickly, often choosing to have lunch together. Students are concerned when someone is absent in class and often call or text each other for encouragement. This is unlike their experience prior to coming to our program. Many describe that experience as isolating and state that one of the things they enjoy most about the program is the sense of camaraderie they experience. Class members brainstorm rules for their class at the beginning of each semester and the rule that always surfaces is to "be supportive of each other."

• **Celebrate victories.** A graduation ceremony is held at the conclusion of each semester and family members are invited to attend and celebrate with their loved ones. For most students, this is the first graduation ceremony they have had. Awards are given, such as the "peer recognition" award for the student who has been the most supportive of classmates, and the instructor is able to recognize those that have made outstanding progress. Finally, because one of the primary motivations that our

students have stated for being in the program is to make their family proud, they have the opportunity to show them what they have accomplished and to thank them for their support.

## Conclusion

With the ever-increasing dependence on technology to deliver assessment and instruction, and a new, more complicated GED system being implemented next year, it is possible more GED students will be left behind. We argue for the need to continue to provide programs that can provide the intensive support that is needed to help GED students make the transition to college. They can do it—they just need a little help getting there. While challenging, on-campus GED to College Transition programs can be the impetus that helps students make the leap. The reward that comes from seeing students who might not otherwise have the chance to finish their GED and start college is immensely satisfying. We hope others are encouraged to start such a journey with their students on their campuses, as well.

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