

**Recommendations from the Strategy Session  
on Raising College Completion Rates Among Working Adults**

*From discussions hosted at the St. Louis Regional Chamber, July 17, 2013*

**DRAFT FOR REVIEW**

**A. What must the St. Louis region do to break into a new trajectory?**

**Action is needed by:**

Economic Development Community, in Cooperation with Education

- Degree value... many graduating with degrees that are not relevant for today's employment. Need a detailed list from the chamber as to what jobs are in demand.
- Attract new businesses to St. Louis
- Piggy-back: economic case of region
- Meta-analysis: a few specific industries that we know are growing – provide career lattice information, “career coaches” for career advising in those sectors.
- Predict where the new jobs will be, and then match up with educational opportunities
- Success of economic development efforts

Employers

- Provide \$\$ for tuition, flex time, time away from work.
- Offer child care for employees
- Begin campaign for employers to offer flexible hours to accommodate school
- Get businesses to commit to tuition assistance, time for classes, or comp time. Employers should incentivize degree attainment.
- Tuition assistance is becoming less and less. Help employers see benefit to the company: what's my return?
- Pre-enrollment interest.
- Coach for plan → value → benefit
- Overarching theme: cultural adjustments. Companies → interest in a culture of learning. Invest in a legitimate assessment tool to identify the learning needs of the organization.
- Establish tuition benefit; promote and market the benefit. “Grow your own.” Go beyond ‘rewards’ to implement service agreement post-grad as well as a developmental plan related to an earned degree.
- Show companies the benefits of partnering with education to invest in their current work force. Review the benefits to the company when they invest in their education.
- Provide tuition benefits
- Give employees incentives to educate themselves. Help them get on an advancement track.
- Consortium of small businesses leveraging existing entities to collaborate in order to take advantage of partnerships in education
- Paid release time from work for school.

- Businesses – tuition assistance. Be more intentional about career pathways to give value to education.
- Information gap between higher ed and working adults. Responsibility to inform workers through businesses – is there one place where we can “post” this and businesses disseminate the information? Ensure HR professionals have info and feel comfortable giving information, community and faith centers, childrens’ schools.
- Creation of a ‘One Stop Shop’ for employees to get the info they need on higher ed options.
- Encourage employers to make degrees relevant to career advancement. Be specific and intentional.
- Ensure employers see the value of college education
- Active solicitation of local employers.
- Corporations should partner with educators
- Strategies and tactics must be customized to the size of the individual company or school.
- Create mentor groups that will support and cheer working adults during their journey to complete a degree.
- Employers should demonstrate that they value education, provide financial assistance, reward people for completing degrees. They should allow for flexibility in scheduling.

#### Higher Education Institutions

- Flexible degree format (online, night courses)
- Partner with YMCA for child care services
- Universities could provide more childcare services
- Transfer credit partnership agreements. Schools and statewide partnerships.
- Follow development of MOOCs, <http://class-central.com>
- Understand the disruption that is happening in higher education (Clay Christensen)
- Make transfers easier, get tuition costs under control, allow testing on core courses with relevant work experience
- Greater flexibility for specialized degrees
- Evaluate core curricula to allow more flexibility
- Provide opportunities for working adults to take ‘in-demand’ skills courses and degrees.
- Greater alliances to allow transfer of credits
- More MOOCs – create awareness of these
- Need to inform expectations: financial options, time management, childcare, credit by examination, benefit of liberal arts education, education about the realities of online education.
- University needs to be more focused on a program to be more flexible. Quality change and encouragement starts at the top of the organization.
- Blended programs → online, in classroom
- Facilitate credit transfer.
- University partnerships to lower costs

- Online education may overcome barriers
- Provide credit for work or training done on the job.
- Educational institutions should offer corporate discounts for working professionals
- Perhaps have a centralized clearinghouse to go to one spot to find information on equivalency of courses.
- College / university fairs for working adults. Must find a way to communicate without barrier, ability to dialogue.
- Core courses: How can we make these more appealing without decreasing the rigor within the degree. Veggie with cheese sauce or soy sauce metaphor. ( ? )
- Module-based online courses or lessons as supplement to instructor. Kumon. ALEX.
- Better information about career fields, especially for those who have no idea of career possibilities.
- Create a network of career mentors.
- Higher education affordability
- More technology-gearred education.
- Better articulation agreements. Cost-benefit analysis → BA costs about the same amount as a house.
- Articulation / transferrable credits from 2 - to - 4 year schools, both for professional courses and gen ed.
- Identify and disseminate best practices for credit for prior learning, and make it transportable across institutions (certifications, work experience, military, prior learning assessments)
- Make better use of technology-enable instruction: high-tech, high-touch.
- Intrusive advising for pathways – career coach – labor market information.
- Develop educational resource directory, with best practices identified. Address obstacles already identified in research.
- Higher ed must make courses convenient in terms of time (more accelerated). Should adopt better ways to assess prior learning. Make it easier to transfer credits to other schools within the region.
- Target specific segments of the working population with greater likelihood of success.
  - Flexibility on the part of educational institutions and commitment to this specific segment of the prospective student population.

### Human Services

- Start now to improve the quality of child care facilities, especially those serving low-income families.
  - Encourage education for the childcare workforce, including college degrees. Leverage the existing T.E.A.C.H. MISSOURI program.
  - Employers should partner with existing high-quality childcare centers to ensure 'odd hour' care (evenings, week-ends) during times employees are in college courses.
  - Institutions of higher ed also partner with existing high quality childcare programs for provision of evening and week-end care.

## Partnerships

- Partnerships with universities and businesses (tuition reduction for employees)
- Partnerships between schools, schools and businesses (for convenience, offered onsite)
- Increase partnerships at the undergraduate level between educational institutions and business. Focus on more targeted programs.
- Colleges can partner with employers to conduct degree audits of their employees, so that they will know how many credit hours they have left before they are eligible for a degree.
- Work with universities / businesses to attract more people outside of Missouri
- Make the city more inviting to younger generations, a more vibrant city
- Partnerships between universities and organizations. Make sure programs meet the needs of organizations. More programs onsite.
- Overarching theme: collaborative action. Collaboration → conversations from this initiative between higher education and business
- Partner with childcare facilities while in class?
- Can schools develop partnerships with non-profit childcare programs or activities?
- Organizations need to partner with employees – reimbursement, time allotment
- Business and higher ed work closer together to design classes for each industry's needs and their employees.
- Facilitate a three-way collaboration between / among employers, employees, and educational institutions, emphasizing / demonstrating value add from the perspectives of each. Obtain commitments from each.

## Policymakers

- More tax benefits to employers and students
- Incentives – from employers and from universities
- Petition Washington for tax breaks

## Regional Collaborators

- Create a culture of learning.
- Understand the metrics and where we need to focus energies.
- Develop metrics: measure / evaluate strategies, continuous improvement.
- Segment the working adults. Focus more on segments that have a higher likelihood to complete.

## Regional Messengers

- Generate campaigns to steer prospective students towards fields that are in demand – this will improve unemployment and the image of St. Louis.
- Chamber to spearhead marketing campaign to the public
  - Partner with politicians
  - Billboards
  - Social media
  - News stories

- Workplace posters
- Change perception and reality that debt is overwhelming
- Chamber marketing approach – website and billboard and storefronts (e.g., Kentucky’s “Know How to Go” and Graduate Philadelphia.)
- Chamber can create information on cost / benefit analysis that working adults go through
- Create an information campaign to spread the word about the benefits of increasing the level of undergraduate education in the region. Loud, boring, consistent message!
- Perhaps more shading in the message that goes out about the need for an increased number of students that complete the BA degree. Who will need to make concessions / sacrifices?
- Information gap = who are the providers and what are the options: HR, employers, schools? School options fair for business? One Stop Shop
- Brand college completion for working adults / reach out and invite adults
- Educate everyone on the value of college education, including grade school and high school students, who need to know what degrees are beneficial
- Make the economic case
- Public relations campaign; communicate this initiative to the region
- Marketing, educate high school and college students on value of college degree
- Emphasize ‘lifelong advantage’ versus just initial salary advantage
- Work with media to show benefits of college completion – show success stories.
- We need executive level interest: form a council to push the message, top down and bottom up.

### Working Adults

- Working adults need to do their homework and realize education is a privilege, not a right.
- Working adults need to take advantage of benefits that are available. Be smart consumers; do their homework; ask questions.

### **B. What are the underlying trends and issues that hold us back?**

- St. Louis is seen as a “blue collar” town.
- Limited airport travel and options to fly
- Not enough jobs for graduates
- Attract more businesses to the area
- Universities lacking flexibility to design programs to attract students to where we have labor shortages (IT, medical)
- Ensure professors have good communication skills and teaching ability – this is very discouraging to students
- Companies to offer incentive pay for completion of relevant degrees
- Control or lower tuition rates. Keep costs affordable – don’t build up universities to be country club environments

- Eliminate concept of tenure for professors (can help to bring down costs and poor educators)
- Large employers are reducing tuition reimbursement programs
- Increased economic stability reduces need for BA+ degrees
- Cost vs. outcome = is it really worth it?
- Lack of loyalty of workers toward their employers, and, significantly, employers toward their employees
  - Will businesses support employees' education?
  - Why should employers expect employees to care?
  - Do businesses value talent development?
- Lack of awareness with regard to benefits of priority
- Tuition reimbursement, especially for smaller employers, in the near term
- Younger generation has a mentality of "I want it now."
- Devaluation of bachelors' degree
- Other cities are probably doing the same thing
- There is not enough immigration to the region
- City and county divide
- Western Governors Association and the Governor's financial support of same, in the face of state de-funding of education.
- Corporate sponsored tuition assistance programs on the decline affects certain industries
- Shrinking state resources for education
- Mindset about worth / value of higher ed.
- Gap of information between higher ed, employers, and working adults
- Dated processes on both sides
- Organizational culture and mind-set of decision-makers
- Using a self-reference criteria to decide about implementing education programs vs a data-driven point of view
- Set-up direct billing with school for employee tuition
- Higher ed institutions: build the business case, show impact to their bottom line
- Structure tuition so that it fits within tuition benefit allotment
- Designate point person and make it a turnkey operation
- Working adult: embrace learning and apply value to it just like everything else
- Keep it real! Education is not easy. You *earn* a degree;; you don't *receive* it.
- High price of tuition. Student loan debt. Lower tuition assistance.
- Poor career counseling that doesn't empower the student. (High school and on...)
- Low college participation in prior learning credit
- Rigid curriculum in higher education and the accrediting body that makes their requirements.
- Need certificates of learning below the associate's level.
- Scheduling of classes that don't hinder academic progress.
- Economy.
- High tuition and rising tuition costs

- The economy, income inequality, education – financial
- Economics of education, class size, critical mass to offer courses.
- Accreditation requirements
- Pell grant regulations
- Transferability of credit
- Need to attract more companies to StL – lose out to bigger cities with more opportunities, corporate headquarters, lack of flights
- Can organizations get additional tax cuts for providing more financial assistance?
- Pricing / cost of programs
- Lack of information about the educational process
- Surplus of talent in many areas; employers' market
- Fiscal restraint
- Short-term thinking vs. long range planning
- Cost of education, too expensive
- Colleges and universities offering courses that have no relevance to 'industry needs'
- Knowledge and skills are not tied to a college degree anymore. Highly motivated and passionate individuals have an opportunity to outshine college graduates by using free / cheap resources online.
- Lack of success in innovation / entrepreneurial efforts
- Economics of educational institutions. Cost increases are outpacing wages
- Lack of collaboration / coordination
- Relevance of skills learned in undergraduate education to workforce development
- Direct line of sight between graduate attainment and opportunity
- "Selling" legitimacy of online offerings
- Financial aid requirements – federal requirements for aid qualifications don't fit for employed students.