

OU to participate in statewide initiative to improve student outcomes in high-risk courses

Oakland University is among eight postsecondary institutions that will participate in the Michigan Gateways to Completion (Michigan G2C) project. The three-year initiative is in partnership with the nonprofit John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education (JNGI), with the goal of improving student outcomes in high-risk courses.

Along with Oakland University, participating institutions include Eastern Michigan University, Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Lansing Community College, University of Michigan – Dearborn, Washtenaw Community College, Wayne State University and Western Michigan University.

Michigan G2C will help the institutions' faculty create and implement evidence-based plans to continuously improve teaching, learning and outcomes in courses with historically high rates of failure, sometimes called "gateway courses." Gateway courses are often survey courses that all students must take as they begin a desired major.



In partnership with the John N. Gardner Institute, OU will take part in the Michigan Gateways to Completion initiative to improve student outcomes in high-risk courses.

Failure in these courses is directly tied to lack of degree completion – especially for low-income and first-generation students and students from historically underrepresented background. For example, G2C pilot data from 13 institutions show that on average 43.4 percent of all students enrolled in Introductory Accounting received a D or worse. For African-American students, nearly two-thirds received a D, F, W (withdrawal) or I (incomplete), and for Latino students, the number was nearly three-fourths.

"We know that research supports that the kinds of assessment, active learning and in-class and out-of-class strategies that are a part of () are directly connected to improvements in retention and graduation rates," said Drew Koch, JNGI Chief Operating Officer. "This is especially true for historically underserved and underrepresented students. So this project is equally about advancing social justice as it is about improving teaching, learning and success."

Made possible with grant support from The Kresge Foundation, the project is based on JNGI's Gateways to Completion® process. Launched in 2013, G2C is being used by more than 40 colleges and universities in the United States to help faculty and staff make meaningful and measurable changes in the ways that they facilitate teaching, learning and success. Through this initiative, each participating institution will rework at least two of its gateway courses, with a potential of reaching up to 23,500 students each year after implementation.

"It has become quite obvious that success in gateway courses is critical to a student's ability to continue progressing in their chosen major," said James Lentini, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost at Oakland University. "The G2C initiative will allow us to find solutions that go beyond the notion that students must simply be better prepared. It is showing us that instructional delivery methods can be thoughtfully retooled to achieve both teaching goals for instructors and successful learning outcomes for students."

Michigan is a focus state for Kresge's Education program, and Michigan G2C will be connected with other postsecondary projects underway in the state that receive Kresge support, including the Michigan Guided Pathways Institute and Oakland University's Great Lakes Regional Student Success Conference and Institutional Learning Communities.

"Together these initiatives are creating a network and forum for higher education institutions to share best practices for persistence and completion," said Susan Awbrey, Senior Associate Provost at Oakland University.

More than 80 faculty and staff from the eight participating Michigan G2C institutions recently came together for the daylong Michigan G2C Launch Meeting hosted by Lansing Community College. Future project meetings will be hosted by the two-year and four-year institutions participating in the effort.

"The gateway course experience is, regrettably, an under-analyzed and under-addressed aspect of college success," said John N. Gardner, JNGI's President. "During my more than four decades of work with the student movement in the United States, I have seen thousands of institutions implement all kinds of programs to help first-year students, but very few have given attention to gateway courses. This is where the 'real first-year experience' occurs. It is the most important work that we can be doing right now."

"A unique aspect of this project is how it will unite both two-year and four-year institutions to address a common issue," said William Moser, Kresge's managing director for the Education Program. "Often, these institutions compete for students and limited resources. In the Michigan G2C initiative, they are working together to improve student outcomes in high-risk courses."

The project will last through the 2018-19 academic year. The first year of the effort will be focused on helping faculty and staff gather and analyze evidence to create course transformation plans. The redesigned courses will be taught and refined in the second and third years of the project.