

**COLUMBIA COLLEGE & LAKE TAHOE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
PROJECT ABSTRACT**

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Institutional Background: Columbia College (CC) and Lake Tahoe Community College (LTCC) are the partners of this Title III Cooperative application. Both colleges are small, public, two-year community colleges in Northern California. Columbia and LTCC are logical partners for a cooperative Title III arrangement based on their similarities – they serve similar populations, share similar strengths, weaknesses, and obstacles to achieving goals. They are the 7th (LTCC) and 9th (CC) smallest colleges among the 110 community colleges in California.

CC and LTCC both serve approximately 3,000 students annually, the majority of which are first-generation students. Located in mountainous areas with industries largely based on tourism, the colleges' surrounding communities suffer from a variety of socio-economic challenges, such as far lower than statewide average median household income levels and educational attainment among adults. Each college offers Associate's degrees in more than 40 disciplines and over 30 different certificates that prepare students for successful employment.

Title III Project: *Improving Institutional Effectiveness and Student Retention through Increased Engagement and Data-Informed Decision-Making.*

This Title III project will (1) increase retention rates for first-year students (2) develop comprehensive data warehouses and reporting capacity; (3) increase access to information for enhanced decision-making; (4) train staff, faculty and administrators to use new resources effectively; and (5) develop a culture of inquiry by integrating the use of data into all decision-making processes. This will be accomplished through a combination of hiring additional institutional research and information technology personnel, consulting with institutional effectiveness experts, professional development for faculty and staff, and utilizing available data storage, extraction, analysis, and reporting technologies. The project addresses tie-breaker priorities in response to: (1) student services (2) faculty development; (3) development and improvement of academic programs and (4) funds and administrative management.

This Cooperative Arrangement Development proposal addresses the **Competitive Preference Priority** (study is attached), modelling project activities based on the *Freshman Year Financial Aid Nudges* model that Castleman and Page studied in 2014.

Evidence of Moderate Effectiveness, Study Citation:

Castleman, B. L., & Page, L. C. (2014). Freshman year financial aid nudges: An experiment to increase FAFSA renewal and college persistence. EdPolicyWorks Working Paper Series No. 29. Charlottesville, VA: EdPolicyWorks.

Five-Year Project Budget: \$3,250,000

Competitive Preference Priority - Supporting Programs, Practices, or Strategies for Which There is Moderate Evidence of Effectiveness

This project will incorporate financial aid “nudges,” based on the success of a model, outlined in the Castleman and Page (2014) study: *Freshman Year Financial Aid Nudges: An Experiment to Increase FAFSA Renewal and College Persistence*.

Meets the What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards Without Reservations:

The research described in the report is a well-executed randomized controlled trial that meets the WWC group design standards without reservations.

Found a Statistically Significant Favorable Impact on a Relevant Outcome: The study found that there was no statistically significant effect on the rates of student persistence from the freshman to the sophomore year for students attending four-year institutions; however, for students attending two-year institutions, those in the intervention group persisted at a higher rate than those in the comparison group (75% compared to 64%). For the persistence domain, students at two-year institutions had a WWC improvement index of +11 with a p-value <0.05.

The Study Sample Overlaps With the Population Proposed to Receive the Treatment: The demographic of the full study sample was 62% female, 91% racial/ethnic minority, 83% Pell Grant eligible and 28% attending a two-year institution. The demographics of Columbia College (CC) and Lake Tahoe Community College (LTCC) overlap significantly with the study sample, with female students comprising 55% of CC’s population and 52% of LTCC’s, a 24% minority student population at CC, and 34% at LTCC, and 49% of CC students Pell Grant eligible and 37% of LTCC’s. One hundred (100) percent of students at both institutions attend a two-year institution. However, all participants in the treatment group had previously received services during high school from uAspire, who collaborated with the researchers to deliver the

treatment; this may have predisposed them to be receptive to messages from uAspire while in college.

Implement the Strategy from the Supporting Study as Closely as Possible: The research study was targeted to first year college students who were already receiving financial aid. Students were sent a series of 12 text message reminders, approximately two weeks apart, regarding renewing their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The reminders offered assistance with the financial aid process, reminded students of important deadlines and reminded students of the need to maintain satisfactory academic progress. The authors of the study included the actual text messages and dates of transmittal in the report, making this strategy simple to replicate or adapt.

CC and LTCC will select all freshmen students currently receiving federal student aid for whom it has a valid mobile phone number. Using Signal Vine communications technology, they will replicate the same (in some cases) or similar text message reminders and schedule as the Castleman and Page study and send them automatically to every student. Any responses to the text messages will be routed to student support staff and they will also be available to support students who are seeking assistance with completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The ability to automate all text communications makes this an affordable strategy (estimated at \$5/student by Castleman) that could be easily scaled to all financial aid recipients at CC and LTCC.

Castleman, B.L., Page, L.C. (2014). Freshman Year Financial Aid Nudges: An Experiment to Increase FAFSA Renewal and College Persistence. EdPolicyWorks Working Paper Series No. 29. June 2014. Retrieved from <http://curry.virginia.edu/edpolicyworks/wp>.