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September 1, 2015

The Honorable Terence R. McAuliffe  
Governor of Virginia  
Post Office Box 1475  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable Walter A. Stosch  
Co-Chair, Senate Finance Committee  
4551 Cox Road, Suite 110  
Glen Allen, Virginia 23060

The Honorable S. Chris Jones  
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee  
Post Office Box 5059  
Suffolk, Virginia 23435

The Honorable Charles J. Colgan, Sr.  
Co-Chair, Senate Finance Committee  
10677 Aviation Drive  
Manassas, Virginia 20110

Dear Gentlemen:

As you are aware, language contained in Chapter 665 of the Acts of Assembly (2015) charged George Mason University with developing a comprehensive online degree completion initiative targeted at adult populations throughout the Commonwealth. The language also required George Mason to collaborate with other institutions of higher education in this proposal, and, given Old Dominion University's long history in the distance learning arena, it was logical that we work together on this initiative. Moreover, the proposal allows other institutions, should they wish, to participate. We've attached a copy of our collaborative partnership proposal to this letter.

The foundation of our work together has been the mutual agreement that, as public institutions of higher education, it is our obligation to fuel Virginia's economy by preparing highly skilled, highly qualified workers in high-demand areas. You will find that this report places a sharp focus on capturing those Virginians who have some college credit, but, for one reason or another, have not been able to complete their degrees. According to the National Student Clearinghouse over 1.1 million Virginians have some college credit but have not completed a degree coursework. Our proposal includes provisions to identify these students, including veterans, and provide them with a flexible and affordable option to degree attainment in a collaborative and efficient way.

Research shows that the differential in financial earnings between those who have attained a college degree versus those who have not is significant for both the individual and their community. This initiative provides a pathway to enhancing the quality of life for a substantial number of Virginians who have been unable to complete their degrees. I hope you will join us in strongly supporting this initiative with the resources necessary to establish it. In addition, we would be very amenable to meeting with you to discuss the details of this proposal further.

Sincerely,

John R. Broderick  
President  
Old Dominion University

Ángel Cabrera  
President  
George Mason University

Enclosure



Fall 2015

# Virginia Degree Completion Network: State Report and Proposal



Developed by  
George Mason University  
and Old Dominion University

# Virginia Degree Completion Network

## State Report

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# Virginia Degree Completion Network

## Executive Summary

Per language included in the 2016-2018 biennial state budget, the Commonwealth has charged George Mason University with developing a comprehensive online degree completion initiative targeted to adult populations throughout Virginia. The language also requires George Mason to collaborate with other institutions of higher education on this proposal, and as such, Old Dominion University, given its long history in the distance learning arena, has partnered with MASON on this initiative. Both MASON and ODU are hopeful that other institutions within the Commonwealth will express interest in participating, and it is anticipated that discussions will take place during the fall to advance additional partnership opportunities.

As public institutions located in the Commonwealth of Virginia, it is our obligation to fuel Virginia's economy by preparing a highly skilled, highly qualified workforce in a growing economy. Higher education institutions in Virginia have been rightfully focusing on enhancing enrollment, retention, and graduation rates in the pursuit of this goal. The same emphasis needs to be directed toward identifying those individuals with some college credit, but who have not attained a degree, and providing easier pathways to degree completion.

According to the National Student Clearinghouse, a nonprofit organization that works with colleges to verify students' enrollment and graduation status, approximately 29 percent of those who started college in 2007 are no longer taking classes toward a degree. Over 1.1 million Virginians fit into this category, a significant segment of the population who are potential "degree completers", and could be encouraged to finish the degree they started.

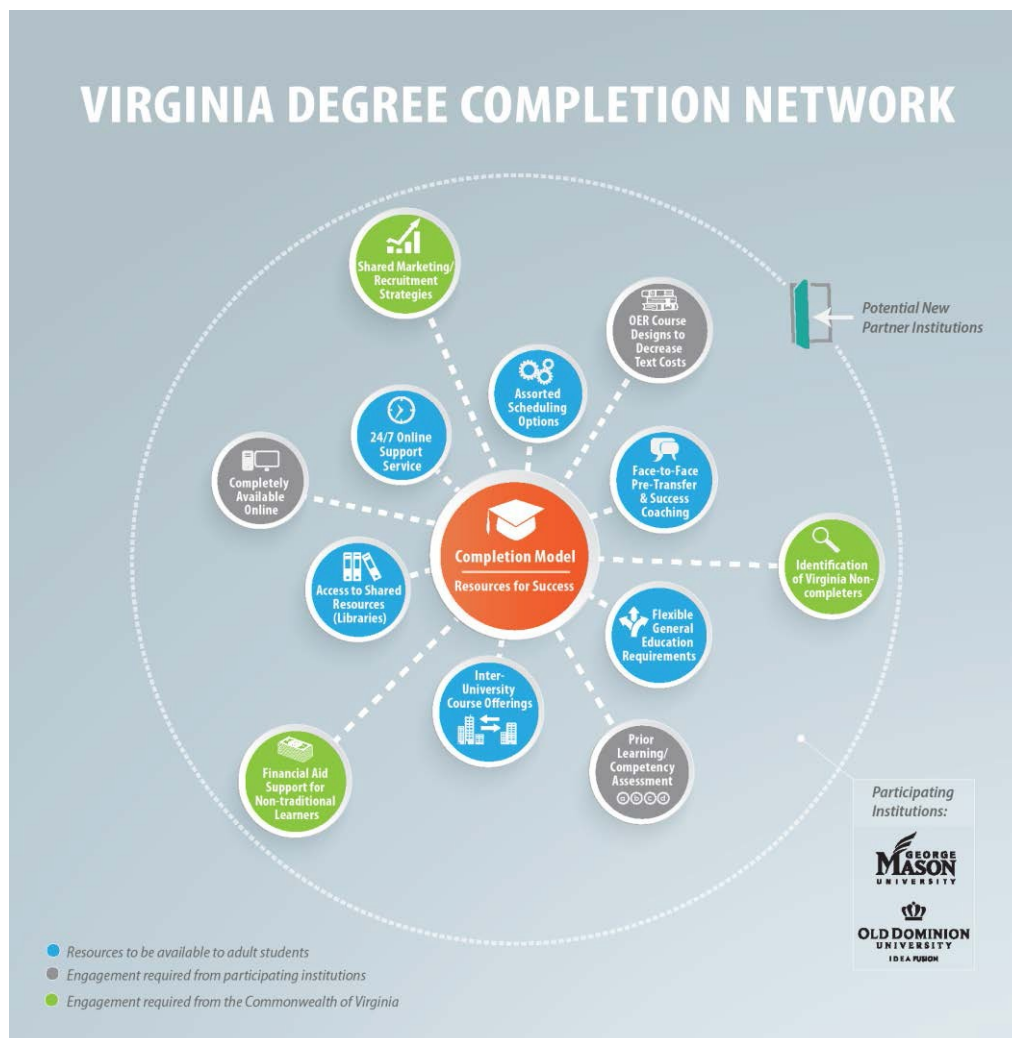
In general, students who stopped pursuing college degrees are typically working adults, often supporting a family, and unable to resume their education in a traditional classroom-style learning environment during conventional hours. Often they have competing needs for financial resources that make it challenging to continue their education. Completing their degrees through online course offerings is a viable and attractive solution for some of these individuals.

MASON and ODU propose a structure that can serve degree completers and students seeking an alternative path to degree attainment. The institutions have a long history of serving diverse populations, including non-traditional students such as transfer, adult, and military affiliated. The two public universities are strategically located in Virginia offering a wide array of online programs to satisfy the needs of degree completers. In doing so, the program will address demand for a highly educated workforce and increase economic opportunity in the state. Additionally, both institutions offer quality online programs in high demand areas such as business, computer science, engineering technology, human services, teacher preparation and nursing.

More specifically, the program will offer flexible online course offerings, a web portal, advising services and financial aid support, seamless articulation, 24/7 support and a comprehensive outreach strategy targeting those in need.

This proposal is based on the research findings collected in the process of responding to the specific state request to: (1) research similar programs in other states; (2) evaluate the need for adult completion programs; (3) identify the academic programs to be included; (4) develop an appropriate scheduling model; and (5) recommend an appropriate pricing model (see detailed response in **Appendix A**).

Based on preliminary budget analysis, it is estimated that a biennial state investment of \$7m to \$10m, and likely continuing base support, will be needed to fund the degree completion program (see **Appendix B**). Although the exact number of Virginians who will benefit from the proposed program is difficult to project at this point in the analysis, the return to the Commonwealth promises to far outweigh the investment. In 2011, the median weekly earnings of individuals with some college but no degree were \$797 and their unemployment rate was 8.7%. Individuals with a bachelor's degree had median weekly earnings of \$1,053 and their unemployment rate was 4.9% (Bureau of Labor Statistics). This degree completion initiative will improve the Commonwealth's economy and its citizens' quality of life.



# Developing a Comprehensive Degree Completion Program for the Virginia Commonwealth

## Introduction

As public institutions located in the Commonwealth of Virginia, it is the obligation of higher education to fuel Virginia's economy by preparing a highly skilled, highly qualified workforce in a growing economy. Higher education institutions in Virginia have focused primarily on enhancing enrollment, retention, and graduation rates in the pursuit of this goal. The same emphasis needs to be directed toward identifying those individuals with some college credit, but who have not attained a degree, and providing easier pathways to degree completion. This focus represents an innovative approach to increasing the cumulative number of undergraduate degrees awarded in Virginia by concentrating on degree completers. Old Dominion University and George Mason University will lead a pilot in this effort. There will be opportunity for additional participation from other institutions and conversations will commence in the fall.

National Student Clearinghouse data reveal that approximately 29 percent of those who started college in 2007 are no longer taking classes toward a degree. Over 1.1 million Virginians fit into this category, a significant segment of the population who are potential "degree completers", and could be enticed back to finish the degree they started. While Virginia does have a relatively high number of working-age adults with bachelors' degrees, there are striking differences when approached regionally. Many rural regions and distressed urban areas have lower than average rates of degree attainment. Additionally, affordability and accessibility remain large barriers to degree completion (Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development Report, 2012).

To address the issue of adult completion, accessibility and affordability, the following proposal is offered:

*Create the Virginia Degree Completion Network (VDCN) to provide flexible online course offerings, a website portal, outreach services and financial aid support, seamless articulation, 24/7 response, and a comprehensive communication strategy targeting those in need of degree completion.*

It should be noted that the ODU and MASON accreditation body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), does not require documentation or additional review for this initiative as it is defined in this proposal. The length of the courses involved in the degree completion program and the number of credits a student can acquire in a given time frame factor into whether or not SACSCOC approval is required.

Detailed responses to the five major areas outlined in the state request can be found in **Appendix A**, which include: (1) similar programs in other states; (2) the need for adult completion programs; (3) academic programs of interest to non-traditional learners; (4) an appropriate scheduling model; and (5) an appropriate pricing model.

## Proposed Model

The model consists of 13 components. ODU and MASON will provide collaborative leadership on the first seven components listed below, the remaining five will be independently completed by each institution.

### Shared Responsibilities

#### **1) Design a web portal**

Development of the web portal will be a collaborative effort between ODU and MASON to produce an engaging, interactive, and personalized online experience for potential and current participants in the program.

The web portal will align with the communication objectives of the program utilizing best practices such as the inclusion of success stories, business cases for earning a degree, and information for specific populations to include rural populations, military and veterans. The web portal objectives will tell the story of a strong portfolio of flexible degree programs, the value of degree completion, and the resources available to support success.

The site will engage and guide individuals from initial interest through enrollment. The web portal in combination with coaching support will inform potential students of program requirements, costs, financial aid, and registration options. The site will be designed to integrate with institutional systems and will provide personalized content to the student based on their profile. See further details in **Appendix C**.

#### **2) Enhance Outreach/Communications**

Both schools will work together to introduce options for the online degree programs to prospective degree completers. A comprehensive communication plan will include outreach to a variety of constituents including adult students who have some college credit, community college graduates, veterans and those who stopped out from any college. Employers will be contacted to provide opportunities for employees to attend college. Regional Higher Education Centers will be included in the recruitment plan. High school and community professional school counselors will be informed of opportunities for students. Access programs, trade associations and community-based organizations will be resources for promoting completion programs.

The communications will cast a wide net with targeted messages to address specific audiences and offer solutions to their challenges with direction regarding available resources (financial aid, flexible start dates, technology, etc.). Service should be available on a 24/7 basis for immediate response. Outlets for promotion may include radio, TV, social media, online advertising, direct mail, and various visual identity locations such as subways, bus wraps, kiosks,

billboards, etc. Seamless communication between the two institutions will convey educational options to the candidates for degree completion.

### **3) Identify degree completers in collaboration with SCHEV**

The joint proposal for the completion initiative will begin by collaboratively identifying this potential population through a novel approach using big data strategies. The strategies will target the desired population by accessing state databases such as the Department of Motor Vehicles with matching data from the National Student Clearinghouse. In addition to big data opportunities, student enrollment information from the Virginia Community College System schools as well as stop-outs from MASON and ODU will be assessed.

### **4) Create MOUs for seamless enrollment**

Agreements will be developed between ODU and MASON for seamless articulation of programs for degree completion. Technology tools will provide guidance on course transferability at each university. Both institutions have similar general education requirements, so basic courses will be able to apply to either school.

Common platforms of technology for ODU and MASON (Hobsons, BB, Banner, SSC) offer the students familiarity and ease of use as they navigate the various systems. Similarly, advisors also have the opportunity to serve students at both institutions using the same analytical tools and advising technology. These tools can be leveraged in ways that benefit adult completers across the Commonwealth.

Areas that will need specific agreements include the following:

- a) Consortium agreement for financial aid: students who take classes at MASON and ODU simultaneously will need the flexibility to use financial aid and scholarships managed through institutional consortium agreements. This institutional collaboration requires staff support to meet campus, state and federal guidelines for compliance.
- b) Course transfer equivalency matrix to enable student to identify courses at both institutions which satisfy program requirements
- c) Standardized approval process for transfer credit
- d) Transcript transmission at no cost to the student
- e) Access to ODU-Mason facilities including library and computer laboratory space to the extent possible and reasonable
- f) How other institutions can participate in the Virginia Network.

### **5) Survey to assess student and employer demand**

This plan is informed by a deep understanding of adult learners as revealed through regional and national research. Despite a strong overall ranking in the number of adults with bachelor's degrees, there are regions of the state where the proportion of adults with undergraduate



degrees is far below the national average. A preliminary demand study conducted by Education Advisory Board shows large numbers of students in need of degree completion in the metropolitan areas of Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia. Adult students need relevant academic programs that are both affordable and accessible (Virginia Tech, 2012). We propose conducting a survey to identify the employment prospects and educational needs of employers as well as the interests and needs of students. This survey could be sent electronically to all state residents with some college as determined by census files.

#### **6) Establish financial aid fund through SCHEV for prospective completers with financial challenges**

Many adults seeking to return to college to earn a bachelor's degree have exhausted their federal financial aid funding or are ineligible because they are enrolled part-time. This proposal recommends working with SCHEV to create state-supported scholarships or incentive grants as well as funding sources for part-time students. Employers also should be educated on the benefits of providing tuition assistance to employees. This plan also calls for a study to examine debt restructuring plans for students who have financial holds on their accounts that must be paid before they can return to college. Students with outstanding balances face daunting financial barriers to degree completion.

#### **7) Assess competency based learning and plans for prior learning assessment**

This proposal invites an assessment of best practices related to awarding academic credit for prior learning. The prospect of efficiencies related to documenting competencies or evaluating portfolios or exams as part of a prior learning assessment evaluation are promising.

#### Responsibilities of each institution

##### **1) Offer flexible course scheduling option with multiple start dates and year round offerings with 24/7 support.**

Accessibility is a common barrier for adult learners who must balance work and life responsibilities with attaining a college degree.

##### **2) List online programs available at each schools.**

Included in **Appendix D** is a current list of programs available at each institution. Other programs are under development and will be listed over time.

##### **3) Develop adult-centered advising and coaching models**

Part of creating this infrastructure will be training staff to coach students through the admissions, financial aid, credit evaluation, program fit, and transition process and to expand academic advising capacity to provide intrusive support aimed at degree planning, retention, and reaching graduation.

#### **4) Establish a way to manage prior learning assessment**

Whether through community college collaboration or in-house assessment, mechanisms will be developed to manage this process.

#### **5) Build academic support for adult learners**

Additional faculty will be needed for scalability of programs and to support the influx of degree completers. Other forms of academic support will include tutoring, supplemental instruction, teaching assistants, etc.

### **Time-line**

The development of the Virginia Degree Completion Network takes place in three phases:

Phase one (prior to State funding) – Fall 2015-Spring 2016

- Create a detailed work plan
- Develop cross-institutional agreements
- Provide full budget model and governance design

Phase two (once funded) – Summer 2016-Summer 2017

- Select program managers
- Portal development
- Research and outreach
- Develop marketing plan
- Plan for a Virginia Degree Completion Network Kick-Off campaign

Phase three – Fall 2017-Fall 2018

- Updates based on data collection
- Test seamless infrastructure
- Begin accepting students into the Network

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the potential of the Virginia Degree Completion Network is significant on several levels. It provides an important service to the Commonwealth in helping to make higher education accessible for students who desire to complete their college degrees. It creates efficiencies by enabling institutions to work together to help these students navigate degree requirements and course schedules. Finally, it enhances the quality of life for a substantial number of Virginia citizens who, for various reasons, have met roadblocks in previous attempts to complete college. Collaborating on this proposal has demonstrated that institutions can work together for the greater good of educating our citizens and the hope is that we can move forward with enthusiastic legislative support.

### Appendix A

#### Response to the State

Detailed response to the Governor and the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees: (1) other state models, (2) need for adult completion programs, (3) potential academic programs based on market research, (4) scheduling model, and (5) pricing model.

##### 1) Other State Models

As costs for higher education and the number of students continue to increase, there is considerable interest in collaborations, partnerships and resource sharing to restrict duplicity, maximize efficiency and achieve affordable costs for students.

Notable collaborations related to distance learning and adult degree completion within other states and regions include:

- “Interstate Passport Initiative,” a Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education collaborative partnership of course sharing amongst two- and four-year institutions from multiple western states. The proof of concept phase of the initiative began in October 2011. The two year development phase began in 2014 and will be completed in early 2016 with common learning outcomes and a central data repository. The transfer process will be based on learning outcomes rather than courses.
- “2NAU Program” at Northern Arizona University, a joint admission collaboration between NAU and the nineteen Arizona Community Colleges. Students admitted to 2NAU become non-degree students at NAU and take courses at their local community college until they complete an Associate’s degree. During this period, they have access to NAU advising and other resources. 2NAU also provides transition coordinators. The program is designed for students in their first or second semester at community college. NAU has extended campuses throughout the state with online and face-to-face programs.
- “Grad TX,” a collaboration among thirteen universities in Texas. Eleven offer both online and on-campus classes and two online classes only. Degree programs are available in Applied Arts and Sciences, General Studies, Nursing, Business, Criminal Justice, and Medical Information Systems. Grad TX has a web portal with success stories, the case for earning a degree, pages with the degree programs available at participating universities and their admissions requirements, and a common application process and contact information (phone, email, skype) for advisors and veterans services at each participating university.

- “Complete Florida,” a collaboration among eleven universities in Florida with degree programs in Business and Management, Education, Health Care, Information Technology, and General Studies. Complete Florida has a web portal with pages for each partner university and its programs, a common application process and completion coaches.
- “UW Flexible Option” a University of Wisconsin self-paced competency-based program that began at UW-Milwaukee and two-year colleges offering Associates degrees. Online Bachelor of Science degrees are offered through UW-Milwaukee in Diagnostic Imaging, Information Science and Technology and Nursing (RN to BSN). Nursing and Diagnostic Imaging programs have program- specific admissions requirements. Students are paired with academic success coaches. Students apply to the institution granting the degree.

Within Virginia, a few collaborations include:

- Old Dominion University and the Virginia Community College System are now celebrating 20 years of 2+2 partnership across dozens of program areas between ODU and all 23 community colleges throughout Virginia.
- Commonwealth Graduate Engineering Program – a partnership between Old Dominion University, George Mason University, the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech and Virginia Commonwealth University sharing engineering courses via technology.
- 4-VA. A partnership between George Mason University, the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, James Madison University and Old Dominion University sharing courses, facilitating collaborative research efforts, sharing best practices in STEM education and degree completion advancement within the Commonwealth.

Collaboration among institutions in the Commonwealth will maximize state investments in higher education. Articulation agreements between institutions must be crafted to link courses of study into a comprehensive degree program where each institution remains satisfied that the students receive necessary learning components. While there will be challenges, George Mason University and Old Dominion University benefit from similarities between general education requirements, computer systems and technology platforms, and a broad spectrum of program offerings aimed at serving diverse populations within both urban and rural communities. Jointly, with appropriate resourcing we will have tremendous ability to effectively serve the degree-completion needs of the Commonwealth.

## **2) The need for Adult Completion Programs**

Adult degree completers, often referred to as non-traditional learners, represent a diverse group of students with varied needs requiring different interventions (WICHE Report, 2014).

Most adult learners are considered to be 25 and older, with significant work experience. Many adults are veterans or currently in the military. Many hold down multiple jobs and raise families while trying to finish school. According to the National Student Clearinghouse, a nonprofit organization that works with colleges to verify students' enrollment and graduation status, approximately 29 percent of those who started college in 2007 are no longer taking classes toward a degree. Over 1.1 million Virginians fit into this category, a significant segment of the population who are potential “degree completers”, and could be encouraged to finish the degree they started.

All students, particularly adult returning students, need guidance in navigating the admission, matriculation, and degree progress milestones. The students who are likely to seek completion programs bring many types of transfer and life learning credits. Advisement needs are complex and require extensive time to evaluate transfer credits and discuss skills and career outcomes with prospective students. They also need assistance with the transition/return to higher education. It is important to have strong intrusive advising to keep students on the road to completion.

Coaching has been shown to have significant, measurable effects on adult student success. A study by InsideTrack, experts on student success coaching, found that adult students enrolled in an online program who received coaching were five percentage points more likely to remain enrolled (Bettinger & Baker, 2014). Examples of assistance and coaching offered to students includes navigating the admissions and financial aid processes, transfer credit evaluation, readiness for online learning, academic advising, career counseling and many other enrollment needs.

Adult completers benefit from recruitment and enrollment counselors and degree completion advisors and coaches. Recruitment and enrollment counselors are generalists who are not affiliated with a specific university. Their role is to help students find the most appropriate path to degree completion given the many complexities students present. Degree completion advisors and coaches are institution specific. They keep students on track for graduation and offer encouragement and support.

### **3) Potential Academic Programs**

Researchers have explored how to best ensure that adult completers have access to educational programs that result in gainful employment. One study pointed out a “Virginia model”, which encourages institutions to develop programs that are responsive to workforce needs rather than using one model that all institutions follow, “may improve the chances that a student will be able to get a good job after completing the program.” Beyond ensuring that adult completion programs are responsive to immediate market demand, it is imperative that programs are developed to meet future workforce needs as well. Future projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) include the following areas to be in high demand:

- RN to BSN – the number of nursing positions increased 254 percent between 2010 and 2014.

- Supply chain management – Job postings for logistics analyst occupations grew 91 percent between 2001 and 2013. There is particular demand for employees in Maritime, Ports, and Logistics fields. The proximity to major military installations and defense contractors provides an opportunity for both universities.
- Cybersecurity – demands for cybersecurity jobs increased nearly 100 percent over the past four years. Distance education platforms easily adapt for cryptology labs as these labs do not require face-to-face physical interaction. Those businesses hiring the most employees in this area include defense industries and professional services.
- Software developers – These jobs are ranked as the Best Jobs of 2015 in the technology field by US News and World Report. The BLS anticipates nearly 140,000 new jobs in software development by 2022.
- Computer systems analyst – The BLS projects a 25% percent increase in jobs in this field. This equates to nearly 128,000 new jobs. The topic is a natural fit for online programs.
- Dental hygienist – A 33% increase in dental hygiene positions is projected by 2022. The need to educate hygienists in rural areas can be addressed through distance learning programs.
- Elementary school teacher – Increases in the number of kindergarten and grade school students are projected by the BLS to lead to 167,000 new elementary education jobs by 2022. Teacher prep programs in Virginia can help to fulfill this demand. Education has been a popular alternative for career switchers, particularly those transitioning from the military.

The advantages of programs such as these are threefold. First, they can easily be integrated into adult-completion models. Second, they meet workforce needs and will improve the state’s economy. Third, because they meet the workforce needs, adult completers will enjoy all of the benefits (financial, social, physical, and emotional) that stem from gainful employment.

#### 4) Scheduling Models

Flexible course scheduling options with multiple start dates and year round offerings work best for adult learners. The ability to take courses in 8-week or shorter sessions is especially desirable. Offerings at ODU and MASON can be adapted so that courses may be taken at either institution to fulfill degree requirements (see **Appendix D** for the current list of programs to be included in the network).

## 5) Pricing Models

The cost of offering online programs is similar to face-to-face. While costs for “bricks and mortar” are avoided, online learning has unique expenses associated with instructional design, online systems technology and support, and remote student advising and engagement. Additionally, in contrast to for-profit institutions, quality online teaching involves a high level of faculty-to-student interaction and offers world-class faculty currently found at ODU and MASON.

Research shows that students are willing to pay for quality online educational programs. In a 2012 report from industry analysts at the Parthenon Group, students identified per credit hour rates of between \$300 and \$467 as acceptable based on the type and quality of institution. Tuition costs at both ODU and MASON are below national peers (see **Appendix E**).

The plan is to work out a pricing model that retains quality instruction with the greatest efficiency. In the interim, each institution will charge their respective tuition and fees and publish where appropriate.

## Appendix B

### Budgetary Needs

The preliminary budget addresses items such as building a portal, determining the infrastructure, and developing the marketing plan. All items require more careful consideration. As we move into deeper discussions, we will refine the budget and anticipated costs. Below is a draft budget.

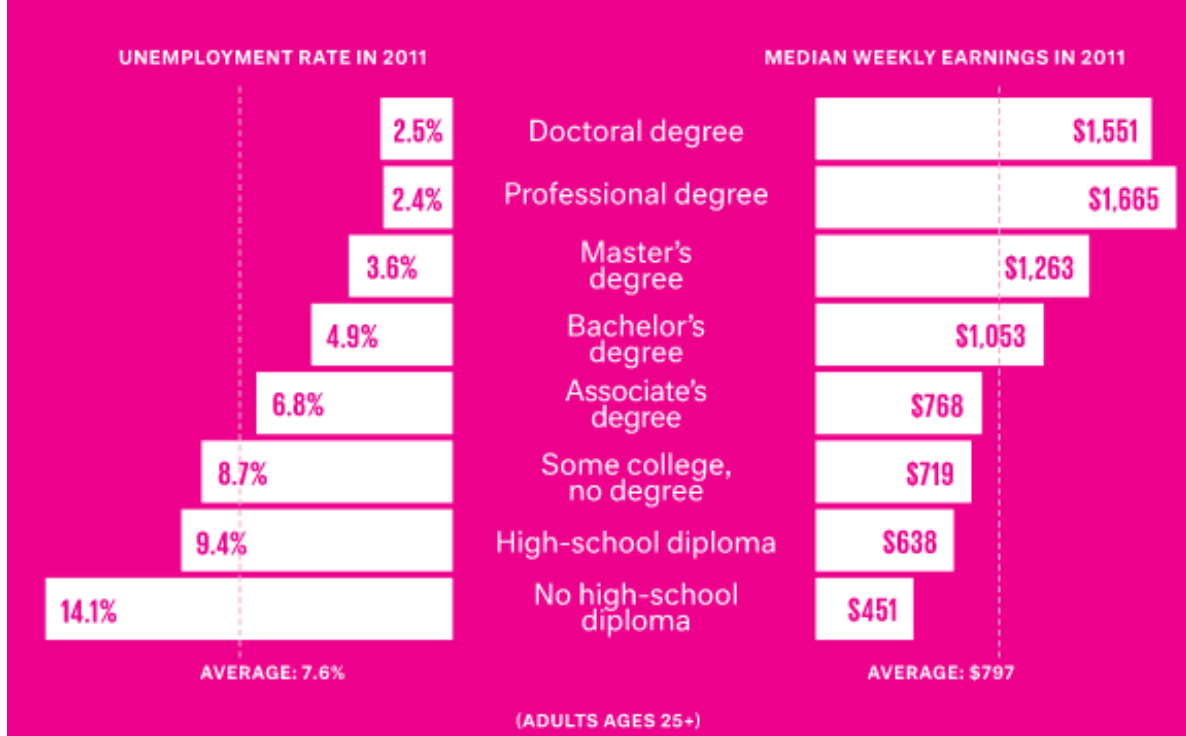
Virginia Degree Completion Network Budget Proposal					
Component/Initiative	Funding Request			Year 1	Year 2
	Base	One Time	Total Funding	2016-2017	2017-2018
Design and maintain a portal/website	150,000	350,000	500,000	500,000	
Outreach/communication	1,500,000		1,500,000	750,000	750,000
Identify degree completers in collaboration with SCHEV	100,000		100,000	100,000	
Seamless enrollment infrastructure	250,000	100,000	350,000	350,000	
Survey to assess student demand		200,000	200,000	200,000	
Assess and implement competency based learning and plans for prior learning assessment	300,000	200,000	500,000	500,000	
Offer flexible course scheduling option with multiple start dates and year round offerings with 24/7 support	1,000,000		1,000,000	500,000	500,000
Coaching/Advising development	2,000,000		2,000,000	300,000	1,700,000
Prior learning assessment support	250,000		250,000		250,000
Academic Support: faculty, tutoring, etc.	1,000,000		1,000,000	500,000	500,000
			-		
			-		
	6,550,000	850,000	7,400,000	3,700,000	3,700,000

Based on preliminary budget analysis, it is estimated that a biennial state investment of \$7m to \$10m will be needed, allocated between MASON and ODU. Further base support may be needed to fund the degree completion program. We will continue these conversations between the institutions and SCHEV to assess full budgetary needs and refine the appropriate budget line item amounts. Further detail will be provided by the end of October, 2015.

Although the exact number of Virginians who will benefit from the proposed program is difficult to project, the return to the Commonwealth promises to far outweigh the investment. According to Labor Department statistics, as reported in *The New York Times* article, “Is College Worth It? Clearly, New Data Say”, the relative pay of people who attended college without earning a four-year degree has stayed flat, whereas “Americans with four-year college degrees made 98 percent more an hour on average in 2013 than people without a degree.” ([http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/upshot/is-college-worth-it-clearly-new-data-say.html?\\_r=2&abt=0002&abg=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/upshot/is-college-worth-it-clearly-new-data-say.html?_r=2&abt=0002&abg=0)) In 2011 the median weekly earnings of an individual with some college but no degree was \$797 and the unemployment rate was 8.7%. A person with a bachelor’s degree had median weekly earnings of \$1,053 with an unemployment rate of 4.9%. (Bureau of Labor Statistics). With an investment in degree completion, the return will be felt in the Commonwealth’s economy and its citizens’ quality of life.



#### 4. The economic value of college, meanwhile, is indisputable.



[http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/03/myth-student-loan-crisis/309231/?goback=.gde\\_150353\\_member\\_217367090](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/03/myth-student-loan-crisis/309231/?goback=.gde_150353_member_217367090)

## Appendix C

### Web Portal Design

The web portal will be a collaborative effort between ODU and MASON to produce an engaging, interactive, and personalized online experience for potential and current participants in the program. It will align with the major objectives as follows:

- Incorporate the communications strategy through success stories, building the case for degree completion, military/veteran information, informing of and demonstrating the ease of initiation into the program.
- Gather level of interest and confidence to refer higher interest, lower confidence candidates to coaches/advisors.
- Provide easy self-service path from interest to program to application, etc.
- Provide clear and easy access to coaching/advising resources.
- Provide clear and easy access to 24/7 support services.
- Gather prospective student information including academic interests, previously earned credits, and helping prospective students determine transfer equivalencies and program opportunities.
- Help prospective students to find degree options.
- Provide path-to-completion information that includes a degree plan with course requirements and costs.
- Provide access to financial aid resources.
- Allow candidates to build an individual assessment and a degree plan.
- Allow candidates to save or share their individual assessment and degree plan.
- Step candidates through an application process checklist.
- Provide support through completion of the program.
- Provide access to career opportunities relative to the chosen program.

The web portal will be designed to add new institutions that will join the program and allow for the incorporation of their degree program information. It will provide a common advisor interface which allows coaches/advisors to build individualized assessment and degree plans for the program participants.

## Appendix D

### List of Online Bachelor's Degree Completion Programs

#### ODU Online Completion Programs

Accounting  
Business Administration  
Civil Engineering Technology  
Communication  
Professional Communication  
Computer Science  
Criminal Justice  
Dental Hygiene  
EEET-Computer Engineering Technology  
EET-Electrical Systems Technology  
Elementary Education (Interdisciplinary Studies: Teacher Preparation)  
Finance  
General Engineering Technology: Electromechanical Systems  
Health Science – Health Services Administration  
Human Services  
Information Systems & Technology  
Leadership (Interdisciplinary Studies)  
Management  
Marketing  
Medical Technology  
MET-Manufacturing Systems/Mechanical System Design  
MET-Nuclear Systems option  
Nursing - RN to BSN  
Occupational Studies - Industrial Technology Emphasis  
Occupational Studies – Training Specialist Emphasis  
Professional Writing (Interdisciplinary Studies)  
Psychology  
Special Education (Interdisciplinary Studies: Teacher Preparation)  
Special Education – Early Childhood & Adapted Curriculum (IDS: Teacher Prep)

#### Mason Online Completion Programs

In addition to offering all categories of general education, Mason has the following degree programs currently available online:

Applied Science, Health, Wellness, and Social Services Concentration (BAS)  
Applied Science, Technology and Innovation Concentration (BAS)  
Information Technology, Degree Completion Program (BS)  
Nursing (RN to BSN Pathway)  
Tourism and Events Management  
Individualized Studies (BIS)

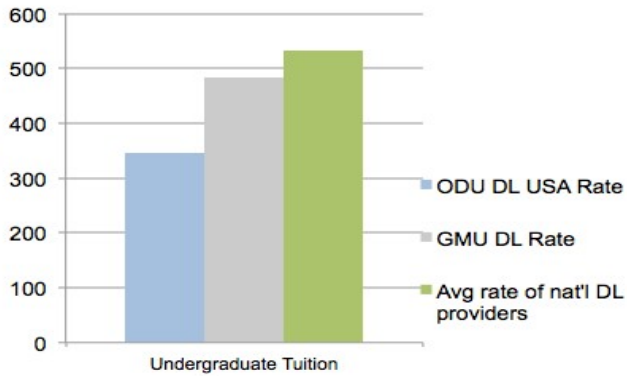
## Appendix E

### Charts on Tuition

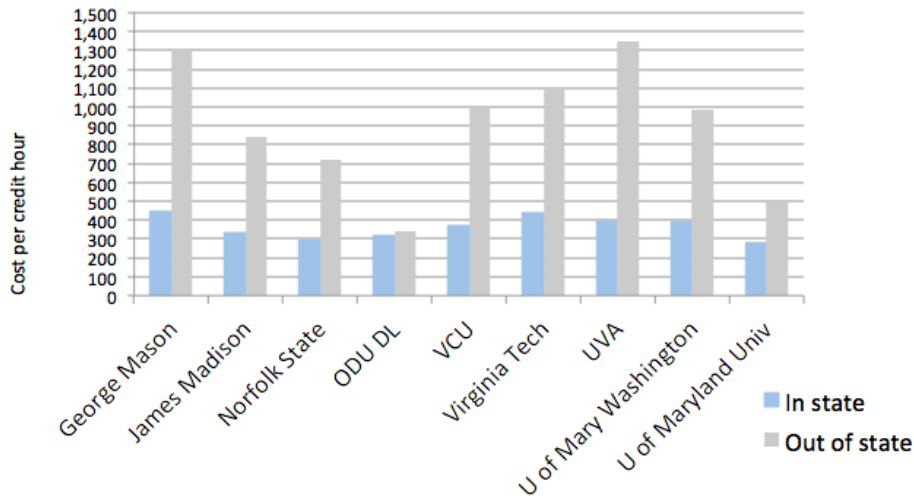
# ODU and GMU DL Tuition vs. Average Tuition of Major Nat'l DL Providers

Schools included:

- American Intercontinental U.
- Ashford University
- DeVry University
- Excelsior School of Nursing
- Kaplan College
- Northeastern U.
- Penn State World Campus
- Strayer University
- University of Phoenix
- Walden University



# Undergraduate Tuition at Virginia Public Institutions with DL Programs



## Appendix F

### Institutional Participation in Virginia Network

While ODU and MASON are leading the pilot program, it is hoped that other Virginia higher education institutions will consider joining this effort. The purpose is to propose a structure that can serve degree completers and students seeking an alternative path to degree attainment. Any institution interested in joining this effort must have a demonstrated commitment to serving diverse populations, including non-traditional students such as transfer, adult, and military affiliated. Participating schools must commit to offering flexible online course offerings, outreach services and financial aid support, seamless articulation, and comprehensive communication strategy targeting those in need. The ideal partner four year institution would offer:

- Organizational and technical capability
- Level of commitment to work actively and collaboratively to advance the goals
- Committed individuals from key areas (IT, registrar, financial aid, student success and distance learning) to actively participate in meetings and in the implementation
- Designate a lead person as a point of contact for this initiative
- Work with other institutions in developing and implementing a comprehensive communication plan
- Work in collaboration with other higher institutions and key government agencies in identifying potential students
- Develop and implement agreements with other institutions to assure seamless articulation of programs for degree completion
- Enter a consortium agreement for financial aid allowing students to receive financial aid while taking courses from multiple institutions simultaneously
- Develop with other participating institutions course transfer equivalency matrix that enables students to identify courses at both institutions which satisfy program requirements
- Create a standardized approval process for transfer credit
- Provide transcript transmission at no cost to the student
- Develop a strong intrusive advising plan (coaching) to assist with the transition back to college and enhance persistence

## **Appendix G**

### **Task Force Participants**

#### **George Mason University**

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#### **Old Dominion University**

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Brian Payne, Vice Provost for Graduate and Undergraduate Academic Programs

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#### **SCHEV Consultants**

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## Appendix H

### Resources Consulted

Assessment of Opportunities and Models for Adults to Complete the Baccalaureate Degree at Virginia Four-Year Institutions, *Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development Report*, 2012

Bettinger, E. P., & Baker, R. B. (2014). The effects of student coaching: An evaluation of a randomized experiment in student advising. *Educational Policy and Evaluation*, 36, 3-19.

Bureau of Labor Statistics

“Is College Worth It? Clearly, New Data, Say.” *The New York Times*  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/upshot/is-college-worth-it-clearly-new-data-say.html?\\_r=2&abt=0002&abg=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/upshot/is-college-worth-it-clearly-new-data-say.html?_r=2&abt=0002&abg=0)

Market Demand for Online Adult Completion Programs for Adults in Virginia, *Educational Advisory Board Report* 2015

Michelau, Demarée K. (November 12, 2014). “Keys to Collaboration: Developing Networks to Serve Adult Learners,” *Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE)*  
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National Student Clearinghouse Data

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State University System of Florida – Adult Degree Completion Initiative

Texas Bachelor Degree Completion Program, GradTX.org