



## **Strategic Plan 2017– 2021**

**Improving the lives of underserved and underrepresented adult learners in Rhode Island.**

**FALL 2017**

## **I. Purpose/Theory of Change**

College Unbound exists to improve the lives of underserved and underrepresented adult learners in Rhode Island, ensuring access to and completion of purpose-driven bachelor degrees.

College Unbound is founded on the simple belief that the burden lies with the college to be student-ready rather than with the student to be college-ready. We believe that working adults over the age of 25 learn differently than 18 year olds, requiring different curriculum, and different learning structures and supports. We believe in the power of digital technologies to increase flexibility and complement face-to-face learning interactions. We also believe that an enormous amount of untapped talent exists within the 36 million adults in the United States who began degree programs but did not finish and that low-income minority adults are overrepresented in that population. Developing that talent pool improves communities, the workforce, and the economy. Our theory is that if we align our resources, processes, and priorities to our core beliefs and our mission, developing and sustaining the necessary structures and supports these adults need, we will provide pathways out of low wage jobs and into rewarding careers for low-income adult learners in Rhode Island and beyond. We have structured a single degree program, ready to be expanded across multiple sites.

### **Mission**

Our mission is to reinvent higher education for underrepresented returning adult learners, using a model that is individualized, interest-based, project-driven, workplace-enhanced, cohort-supported, flexible, supportive, and affordable. Through rigorous and engaged scholarship, College Unbound integrates the students' own purposes for learning with the needs of their workplaces and communities, improving the lives of the students and the lives of those they touch. As a degree completion college, College Unbound provides access, support through completion, and career placement, ensuring that students get in, stay in, and move forward.

### **Guiding Principles**

- 1) Learners come to CU with prior experiences, knowledge, and abilities which must be recognized, honored, used, *and credited*. The multiple roles of these adult learners (workers, community members, partners, parents) are used as assets, not barriers. They are supported as scholar practitioners.
- 2) Curriculum begins with the student and builds from there. It must be personalized around the unique skills, knowledge, and needs of individuals—acknowledging that students have different goals and are at different places in their lives.
- 3) Learning in the world is multi-faceted and interdisciplinary; it is not broken into compartmentalized subject-matter packages. Content of disciplines is important as a means to an end, not an end in itself.

- 4) Learning means paying attention to *how* one knows as well as *what* one knows; paying attention to *why* it matters and *where* it can be applied.
- 5) Learning is a process powered by the learner and supported and stimulated by collaboration with others; social interaction empowers making meaning.
- 6) Learning is not a linear process; learners choose to access content at different times for different purposes, in different contexts. Arbitrary sequencing decisions may actually impede learning.
- 7) Adult learners have a strong preference for learning that is real—problem-centered or task-centered (with immediate application) rather than subject-centered.
- 8) Expertise exists in many places and forms; expertise accessed beyond the professor is encouraged and honored.
- 9) The workplace provides rich opportunities for learning; it provides space in which action and reflection can take place in a continuous cycle.
- 10) When assessment is shared between professors, academic advisors, workplace mentors, field experts, and peers, the learning is rigorous, relevant, and ongoing. When students open their work to public analysis, the learning increases.
- 11) Competence is not demonstrated through a single event; rather, a range of evidence in different contexts over time must be presented before judging competence.
- 12) Technology must be used to do more than deliver content; it must be used by students to discover, create, use, share, assess, discuss, manipulate and reshape content, and to connect with others.

### ***Where We Will Operate***

We will operate initially in Rhode Island, becoming accredited and targeting the 110,600 adults with some college credit but no degree. We will focus on affinity groups including single mothers, Native American tribes, public employees, participants in low-income housing programs, the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated, and cohorts within businesses which offer tuition reimbursement programs. Building a strong foundation in Rhode Island prepares us for expansion across the nation, using the existing infrastructure of Big Picture high schools across the nation to provide us with facilities and connections to potential students and faculty.

***How We Will Succeed***

We will focus on nine (9) strategic goals between August 2017 and August 2021. Each year we will target specific objectives within those strategic goals and monitor our plan and our progress quarterly. There will be an annual review of the entire strategic plan to determine specific objectives for the following year.

**Strategic Goal 1:** We will increase our reach, strengthening presence in Rhode Island.

- #1 - Accreditation – Self Study
- #2 - Student exhibitions take place in the community—1 per year out in the world.
- #3 - Community members attend exhibitions.
- #4 - Bi-weekly Social Media Presence
- #5 - Regular Website Update
- #6 - Quarterly presence in local media
- #7 - Ensure College Unbound presence in key spaces/convenings.

**Strategic Goal 2:** We will expand and refine the curriculum to meet the needs of student affinity cohorts.

- #1 – Formalize and implement curriculum adoption/approval process.
- #2 – Build cadre of experts for curriculum vetting.
- #3 – Refine Adult Correctional Institution (ACI) transfer policy and 2 year plan to move to CU Solo.
- #4 – Design and implement Gateway and new student admissions.  
Determine Gateway experience for: all pre-first semester? Low skilled? Part-Time? Incompletes?
- #5 – Study part-time program structure – United Way and other partnerships. Determine whether requirements for project, personal learning plan, advisor, professional mentor, portfolio remain the same.
- #6 – Conduct a curriculum review.
- #7 – Map curriculum to General Education requirements. Sequence?
- #8 – Conduct a First and Last Semester Review.
- #9 Review and refine Prior Learning Assessment protocols and systems.
- #10 – Review and refine curriculum structure. Consider 3-semester model? Whole cohort commitment? Core classes? PLA?

**Strategic Goal 3:** We will build a diverse faculty that demographically echoes the population it serves, honors local wisdom, and covers a wide range of experiences, consisting of both practitioners and academicians in early career, mid career, late career, and retired.

- #1 – Create faculty mentorship pathways. Convene experienced CU faculty to generate/determine interest.
- #2 – Review and revise faculty compensation structures.
- #3 – Study faculty recruitment and retention
- #4 – Develop professional development opportunities
- #5 – Refine Instructional Faculty/Advising Faculty relationship
- #6 – Use Independent Studies as a tool to recruit faculty

#7 – Online/Offline

**Strategic Goal 4:** We will increase stakeholder engagement and involvement in decision-making.

- #1 – Ensure wide representation on decision-making committees.
- #2 – Increase student voice.
- #3 – Review/Revise structures of faculty governance.
- #4 – Review and define the role of stakeholders in Evaluation and Assessment.
- #5 – Review and define the role of the currently and formerly incarcerated.

**Strategic Goal 5:** We will develop the necessary information technology infrastructure to support students, faculty, and administrative staff, and provide training for optimal usage.

- #1 Complete Learning Management System (LMS) pilots and refine the College Unbound LMS.
- #2 Determine/Design an electronic competency tracking system
- #3 Design Student Information Data Systems
- #4 Build systems and protocols for IT support
- #5 Build systems and protocols for e-library research.
- #6 Evaluate student/faculty/staff engagement with IT infrastructure
- #7 Develop training structure for students/faculty/staff for technology use.

**Strategic Goal 6:** We will build capacity in the administrative team, reinventing back office structures, and hiring consultants for targeted areas, ensuring that College Unbound meets regulatory and professional standards.

- #1 – Hire consultants with appropriate higher education expertise to surround the work.
- #2 – Hire Director of Development
- #3 – Hire Director of Recruitment/Enrollment
- #4 – Hire Director of Financial Aid
- #5 – Hire Director of Communications
- #6 – Hire Director of Information Services
- #7 – Hire Director of Human Resources

**Strategic Goal 7:** We will become financially self-sustaining.

- #1 - Hire a part-time Development Coordinator to work with Dennis on a development plan for fundraising.
- #2 - Identify 100 funding sources and prioritize the top 20 – include foundations and individuals
- #3 - Consult with experts concerning non-profit funding strategies/models
- #4 - Develop materials/”leave behinds” for funders explaining CU and its needs.
- #5 - Hire Director of Recruitment to ensure meeting enrollment targets.
- #6 - Increase enrollment to cover operating costs with tuition dollars

#7 - Utilize development plan to secure additional funds to complement enrollment.

#8 - Hire full-time Director of Development

#9 - Hire a Director of Financial Aid to ensure that we meet regulatory standards and can count on federal funds for student tuition.

**Strategic Goal 8:** We will inspire alumni to maintain a lifelong connection with College Unbound.

#1 - Communicate strategically with graduates to enhance affinity with CU and gain valuable and accurate alumni data.

#2 - Showcase graduates to increase pride among alumni/students/faculty/staff.

#3 - Create opportunities for alumni to connect with each other and current students.

#4 - Collaborate with current students, building buy-in and designing alumni services for their future

#5 - Utilize alumni for recruitment

**Strategic Goal 9:** We will advocate for the reinvention of higher education to serve adult learners.

#1 – Document, analyze and publicly share College Unbound data as Proof of Concept.

#2 – Convene representatives from key sectors to build awareness of and programs for adult learners.

#3 – Use social media regularly and strategically to insert College Unbound in local and national Higher Education conversations.

***What Capabilities We Will Need***

College Unbound will build capacity sufficient to address development and implementation needs to support a growing student body by strategically increasing staffing in key areas, as needed—e.g., Finances, Student Services, Communications, Registrar/Admissions, Library, Information Technology, Development, Career Services, and Alumni Services. This staff will ensure the further development and implementation of policies, systems, and processes that were developed for our initial state authorization. These policies, systems, and processes include:

- Admissions/Enrollment Processes
- Faculty Evaluation
- Course Evaluation
- Student Support Services Evaluation
- Administrative Leadership Evaluation
- Facilities Planning
- Curriculum Adoption
- Alumni Data Review
- Budget Planning
- Operations Review