COLLEGE FOR AMERICA

BRINGING HIGHER EDUCATION TO WHERE STUDENTS LIVE AND WORK

> " *We're extending higher education beyond the university. By bringing in employers, we're trying to close the skills gap and involve the business community in ways they aren't traditionally engaged.* "
>
> *KATE KAZIN, SOUTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE UNIVERSITY INNOVATION LAB*

AT A GLANCE:

Targeted Degree Program: Associate's Degree in General Studies

Organization: Private, nonprofit four-year institution

Opening Date: September 2013

First Year Enrollment: 500

Anticipated Students Served in First Five Years: 100,000

Tuition Model: $2,500 per year, all-inclusive

Geographies Served: Nationwide

Targeted Students: Working adults with little or no college credit

Project Partners: Business Innovation Factory; Educational Testing Service; Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts; RiverWoods Continuing Care Retirement Community; ConAgra; Cumberland Gulf; Sodexo; City of Memphis

HALLMARKS:

Competency-based model

Extremely low cost

Self-paced, self-directed

Year-round enrollment

Use of open educational resources

Community mentors and peer networks for student support

E-portfolios to demonstrate and document competencies

Dynamic Knowledge Map to track progress

When Southern New Hampshire University's Innovation Lab sought to redesign the college model, students were at the core.

And not just any students—in particular, they wanted to find a way to reach, support, and empower "unconfident learners"—those who are familiar with educational failures, unsure of their abilities, or balancing the demands of work and family. These students often seek a degree but lack the resources, motivation, or confidence to enroll in a traditional program.

For them, SNHU has created College for America, a self-paced online program that helps students earn an associate's degree at a cost of roughly $2,500 per year. The program is designed to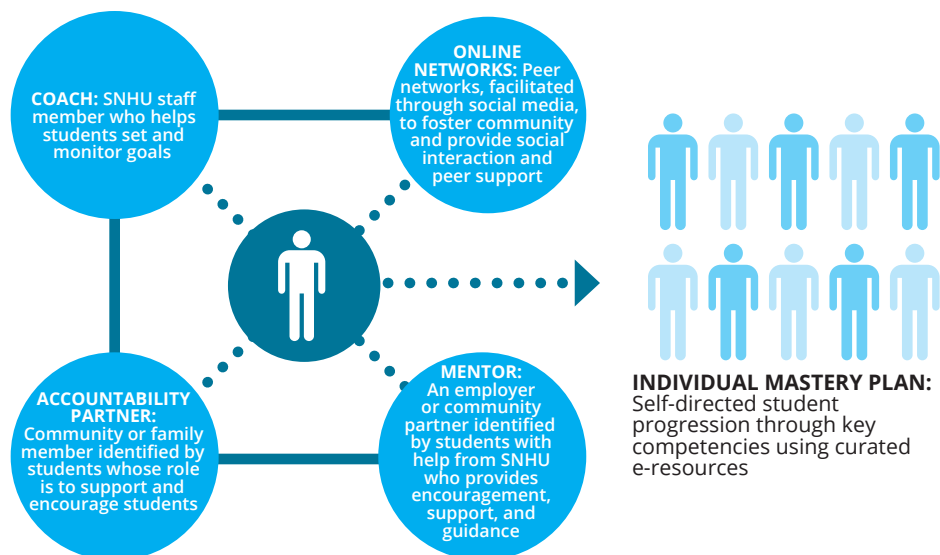 support students in their pursuit of a degree by encouraging them to seek mentors in the workplace or the local community and by using and measuring a set of key competencies defined, in part, by employers.The program is defined both by what it offers and what it doesn't offer. There are no courses, no credit hours, no traditional faculty, and no grades. Instead, students develop an Individual Mastery Plan that outlines the key competencies they will master throughout the course of the program. (The program includes 90 key competencies arrayed across a Mastery Triad of Content Knowledge, Foundational Skills, and Personal and Social Skills, aligned with the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile.)

Students show mastery of each competency primarily by completing tasks that are scored by expert graders using rubrics.

STUDENT SUPPORT MODEL

COACH: SNHU staff member who helps students set and monitor goals

ONLINE NETWORKS: Peer networks, facilitated through social media, to foster community and provide social interaction and peer support

ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER: Community or family member identified by students whose role is to support and encourage students

MENTOR: An employer or community partner identified by students with help from SNHU who provides encouragement, support, and guidance

INDIVIDUAL MASTERY PLAN: Self-directed student progression through key competencies using curated e-resources

THE SNHU KNOWLEDGE MAP

COMMUNICATION SKILLS	**CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING**	**DIGITAL FLUENCY**	**QUANTITATIVE SKILLS**	VIEW ALL COMPLETED
				VIEW ALL ATTEMPTED
				VIEW ALL REMAINING
PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS	**ETHICS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**	**TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION**	**BUSINESS ESSENTIALS**	**SCIENCE, SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

At the center of SNHU's approach is the Knowledge Map, a set of 90 competencies influenced by both the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile and employer feedback. Competencies are distributed across three domains: Content Knowledge, Foundational Skills, and Personal and Social Skills. With the help of curated e-learning resources, students complete tasks designed to demonstrate his or her mastery. An individual student's Knowledge Map serves as an ongoing and evolving roadmap for their learning.

With the help of a coach, each student charts a path through the 90 competencies, accessing curated learning resources that accompany each task. Once a student has satisfactorily completed a task, his or her progress is immediately reflected in a dynamic, online Knowledge Map. Evidence is key. An e-portfolio contains all student artifacts along with the rubrics used to score them. The result is a clear picture of a student's capabilities in terms defined not by course numbers but by skills employers understand. After graduation, those competencies can be mapped to traditional course credits for students who wish to transfer to a four-year institution.

The model hinges on the assumption that students can and will take control of their own learning. To ensure their success, SNHU has designed a multilayered student support model. Students can interact with peers using social media tools and virtual networks; an SNHU coach helps hold them accountable to their individual mastery plan; and each learner identifies an accountability partner from the family or community as well as a workplace mentor.

The university is also working with the Business Innovation Factory to design a user interface that makes sense from the student's point of view. The program combines high-touch support with self-determination to build participants' self-confidence to ensure they stay on track to degree completion.
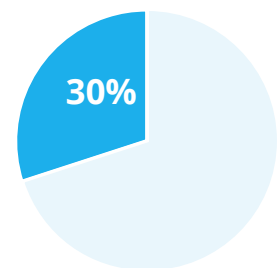
Intended Outcomes:

- Reduce the cost of tuition to $2,500 per year
- Reduce the cost of delivery below $5,000 per year
- Graduate 5,000 low-income, minority students by 2017

PELL-ELIGIBLE STUDENTS:

30%

PRICE TO STUDENTS PER YEAR:
$2,500

COST PER FTE PER YEAR:
$2,000–$3,500

DELIVERY:

100% ONLINE

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
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NEXT GENERATION LEARNING CHALLENGES
nextgenlearning.org