

Memorandum

To: Jan Yoshiwara, Executive Director | WA State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
Kristi Wellington-Baker, Director for Student Success Center | WA State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

CC: Dr. Kathi Hiyane-Brown, President | Whatcom Community College
Dr. Shouan Pan, Chancellor | Seattle Colleges
Peter Lortz, Interim President | South Seattle College

From: Dr. Luca E. Lewis, VP for Student Services | Whatcom Community College
Dr. Rosie Rimando-Chareunsap, VP for Student Services | South Seattle College

Date: June 21, 2018

RE: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Co:Lab Executive Summary

Overview

Post-secondary completion reform has increasingly taken the national spotlight in the context of a need to clearly demonstrate that high quality higher education experiences can be delivered to students and taxpayers at an affordable price, especially for low-income, students of color, and first-generation students. However, notable national data and best practice experts such as the Gates Foundation, The Aspen Institute, Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), and the Community College Research Center (CCRC) strongly convey significant and chronic equity, access, and completion gaps of students seeking and/or earning a post-secondary degree in order to thrive in a 21st century global economy. According to the Lumina Foundation, there is also an economic imperative to get more students graduating with meaningful credentials: to stay globally competitive, the U.S. will need 16.4 million more graduates by 2025¹. Expediting the need for comprehensive post-secondary reform is a critical student debt crisis which peaked for the very first time at \$1.521 trillion in the first quarter of 2018, according to the Federal Reserve². Alarming, student readiness, access, cost, persistence, and graduation rates are prevailing systemic barriers which permeate the higher education landscape and they don't appear to be subsiding anytime soon.

The Co:Lab Experience

Enter the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's event entitled, Co:Lab (short for collaboration). The Co:Lab convening took place at Gates Foundation headquarters in Seattle, Washington April 30th through May 2nd. More than just mulling over the chronic and acute systemic barriers which plague post-secondary education, Co:Lab was a dynamic and interactive space where higher education institutions, distinguished researchers, national think tanks, higher education organizations, consulting groups, and strategic thinking partners from all over the country examined and explored key aspects of comprehensive higher education transformation.

According to the Gates Foundation, Co:Lab was designed to provide a forum to examine the co-developed tools for planning, prioritizing, and accelerating transformation that have emerged from years of partner research and national contributions. The group gathered for Co:Lab represented a broad spectrum of important contributors, early users and testers, innovators, and provocateurs. The overall purpose of the Co:Lab convening was to celebrate progress with Gates Foundation partners, share ideas and insights on how to build upon the work completed together, and to explore new and innovative ways to catapult alignment to support post-secondary transformation at the institutional level.

Change Management and the Institutional Transformation Assessment (ITA)

Following over a decade long co-development process with various consulting groups and leading national experts, the Gates Foundation developed a comprehensive online institutional diagnostic framework known as the Institutional Transformation Assessment (ITA). The purpose of the ITA coupled with the organizational development process is to gain a clearer understanding of an institution's health and readiness through the diagnostic in order to select the right interventions and outputs for change. Whatcom Community College and South Seattle College were selected as ITA Testers in early 2017—two of five institutions chosen nationally to participate in this ground-breaking assessment study. Testers and early contributors offered insights, feedback, and essentially 'pressure-tested' early stages of the institutional rubrics and scaling content with a human-centered design focus.

The outcome of this journey resulted in what is known as the Gates Foundation Observed Practices—part of a collection of institutional case studies with an integrated approach of promising strategies and practices that guide transformation. The Lean Model Prototype stems from what is now known as the Frontier Set³—a select group of higher education institutions who have comprehensively utilized the ITA and consensus conversations, and have inspirationally distinguished themselves by advancing student success and closing equity gaps. For more detailed information regarding the Lean Model Prototype, please review the following attached documentation for further information about the tool and the structure of the coinciding activities.

Shared Perspectives for Washington State SBCTC

Four critical themes emerged from our Co:Lab experience. Such themes mirror some of the same prevailing challenges that permeate our own individual colleges, as well as the SBCTC in its entirety.

Equity. Surprisingly, the overall experience did not include explicit conversations and value proposition building regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion. Along that vein, the ITA is supporting documentation are completely centered upon equity.

Resources and Support. Affordability of resources and support was a consistent inquiry among Co:Lab participants. Gates Foundation staff indicated that they hoped to release the assessment at no cost to the higher education community for governance and use.

However, a need for extensive follow-up consultation and technical assistance was identified. Many unanswered questions regarding available resources for this type of deep work that will not exclude institutions, particularly the two-year college system remain looming. Additionally, a more elaborative environmental scan is needed to develop resources in each of the areas defined in the ITA.

Change Management. A significant amount of discussion was provided on what the architecture for change looks like and how institutions would source these levels of change. Broader discussions took shape addressing equity-minded leadership and providing meaningful support to employees who need to get the work done on a daily basis. Additionally, the Co:Lab facilitation was noticeably absent of student and faculty voices, input and feedback. Gates Foundation staff recognized and fully acknowledged the need to include faculty and student voices in the calibration and scale-up of this transformational process.

Addressing Comprehensive Education Experiences. While outside of the scope of the Co:Lab experience, Co:Lab participants observed a need to address reform utilizing similar transformational models at all levels of the education experience, including primary and secondary education, and post-secondary education.

Washington State Community and Technical Colleges have much to gain in our own understanding of using this tool as it relates to our overall strategy of entry, progression, and completion of our diverse student populations. We look forward to continued conversations with you and how SBCTC might use this tool, could with support resources, to best support Washington's community and technical colleges on closing equity gaps and increasing completion rates.

References

¹Lumina Foundation Strategic Plan for 2017 to 2020 (2017).

<https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/strategic-plan-2017-to-2020-apr17.pdf>.

Date Retrieved: May 21, 2018.

²Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System (2018). Effects of Demographic Change on GDP Growth in OECD Economies.

https://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/g19/HIST/cc_hist_memo_levels.html. Date Date

Retrieved: May 21, 2018.

³Gates Foundation Post-Secondary Success (2018). The Frontier Set.

<https://postsecondary.gatesfoundation.org/areas-of-focus/networks/institutional-partnerships/>.

Date Retrieved: June 21, 2018.