The Ohio State University

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The Ohio Student Education Policy Institute Research and Guidebook 2011

Rachel White, The Ohio State University

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The Ohio Student Education Policy Institute
Research and Guidebook

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Ohio Student Education Policy Institute Description

The Ohio College Access Network (OCAN) is the first and leading statewide coordinating body for college access programs in the nation. OCAN member college access programs across Ohio help students pursue and complete education beyond high school, with particular focus on low-income students and aspiring first generation college students. As a voice for college access, OCAN provides advocacy through a three-tiered approach by:

1. Educating Ohio legislators to influence public policy
2. Creating public awareness of available college access and success services
3. Building partnerships with like-minded organizations to advance a college-going culture

OCAN has fervently worked to be the voice for those students who are oftentimes not heard. Our work includes: developing the nation’s first and only College Access and Economic Opportunity Caucus within the Ohio legislature; hosting annual Partners in College Access and Success Policy Breakfasts; conducting one-on-one legislative meetings; connecting legislators with programs serving their constituency; conducting the KnowHow2GO social media campaign; fostering collaborations with national college access organizations; circulating industry-related literature; and publishing monthly issues of The Collegium. **Experience has taught us that it is also important that the students are given the opportunity to speak on their own behalf regarding issues that affect them.**

Conceptualized over a conversation with Florida’s ENLACE (ENgaging Latino, African-American, and other Communities for Education) program, OCAN’s leadership visualized a student institute that culminates in a two-day education policy summit in which students debate the issues affecting their education and economic success and create an advocacy action plan to take their policy analyses and recommendations to policymakers.

The institute began its initial work by selecting students from colleges and universities with active public policy, public affairs, civic engagement and leadership programs. Those schools in Ohio that participated in 2011 were: The Ohio State University John Glenn School of Public Affairs, The Ohio University Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs, and The University of Akron Bliss Institute of Applied Politics. Students were selected by faculty leaders at the participating universities through a competitive application process.

On Friday, February 18, 2011, twenty-six college students from across the state of Ohio convened in the Vernon L. Riffe Center, home of the Ohio House of Representatives in Columbus to kickoff the first ever Student Education Policy Institute. Experts from the participating universities and key staff from Governor Kasich’s office were featured speakers who discussed with students the necessity and the process by which to inform policy, as well as current issues affecting college access and success, and workforce and economic development. Student teams were then charged with making creative policy recommendations that present cost-savings and result in increased college completion and successful workforce entry.

From April 10th-12th, eleven students from The Ohio State University, ten from Ohio University, and five students from the University of Akron convened over a three-day conference in Columbus, Ohio. The Ohio Student Education Policy Summit brought together the three student teams to:

- present policy analysis and recommendations to one another;
- debate and critique each teams policy analysis and recommendations;
- formulate overall creative, and cost-savings policy recommendations using all teams input;
elect one delegate per team to take part in the student-led testimony to the Ohio Senate Education Finance Committee and the Ohio House of Representatives Education Committee. All delegates, accompanied by their advisors and armed with their individual policy analysis and resolutions, will develop, display, discuss and distribute information regarding each team’s education policy recommendation to legislators, policymakers, and educational stakeholders during individual office visits to legislators and during the student roundtable in the Capitol Museum Gallery.

Institute Goals

The general goal of the Institute is to provide an opportunity for students to engage in a process which can directly affect their educational experiences as well as the educational experiences of those who follow. We wanted students' voices to be represented in the discourse of what constitutes an excellent education system. Our desire was for their thoughts and analysis to have influence on the policies and funding distribution in the next biennium. More specifically, the goals of the Institute were three fold:

1. To increase engagement and participation of students in the policymaking process
2. To influence the education debate through student-passed policy resolutions, specifically, issues of Preparation, Access, Success, and Economic Opportunity.
3. To coordinate policymaking efforts between community organizations, colleges, students, and Legislators.

The opportunity to gather 26 students carefully selected by delegated advisors with the intent to analyze, debate, and create solutions which contribute to a better education system became the central focus. We especially wanted to emphasize the importance of the student’s personal connection to the chosen policy analyses and the student-led research and recommendations as compared to policy recommendations given to the students by overarching organizations or institutions. As they met this challenge, students practices their research skills; organization skills; teamwork; critical thinking skills; communication skills; and consensus building skills.

Model of Analysis

The Ohio Student Education Policy Institute, in design, facilitates thorough analysis of the policies by providing students time to understand the issue(s), research and analyze existing situation, generate policy options, evaluate policy options, make a policy decision, recommend a plan of policy implementation, assess policy impacts. The analysis of policy was guided by each institution’s advisors. Each institution went about the research and analysis process in their own, unique way. However, at the Student Institute Kickoff Meeting, students and advisors were presented with the following model to serve as a prototype:
Initial Thoughts, Impressions and Understanding of College Access and Success, and the Education Policy climate in Ohio. Discussion of:

1. How the students would define the following terms: “education policy,” “student advocacy,” “college access,” “college success,” “economic development through education.”
2. The unique experiences – both positive and negative – the students have had related to college access, persistence, and success? Issues range from high school preparation for college, obtaining financial aid, attending college, to the challenges encountered once arriving on campus.

Initial Sense of Necessary Changes to Education Policy in Ohio. Discussion of:

1. The issues related to college, access, and success do you believe are in need of more attention within the State of Ohio
2. Some recommendations the students would make prior to doing research
3. Elements that go into making a reputable and respectable policy recommendation
Develop Defend and Present Education Policy Recommendations regarding College Access and Success in Ohio. Discussion of:

1. The education policy issue each team is interested in researching, analyzing, and for which each team will develop a set of policy recommendations.
2. The way(s) in which the students would like to see changes made in policy and legislation with regard to education policy in Ohio.

Evaluating Policy Recommendations

- **Desirability**
  - Who will benefit? Who won’t?
  - How will is impact economic development?

- **Feasibility**
  - Is additional training required?
  - How long will it take?
  - Is it sustainable?

- **Affordability**
  - Fiscal costs
  - Private costs
  - Opportunity costs
  - Political costs
Institute and Summit Outline

Teams met one to two times per week and each student participant was expected to conduct independent research prior to each meeting time. Various teams brought in education policy experts, such as legislators, lobbyists, and college access program directors. By the end of the eight-week preparation period, students were expected to be well-versed in their team’s education policy topic and prepared to present a set of policy recommendations to fellow Institute members and the Ohio General Assembly.

Students convened in Columbus, Ohio on April 10th for the Ohio Student Education Policy Summit (hereafter, “the Summit”). The first day included an informal dinner for the student participants and their advisors. Teams were then given the evening on their own to finalize their policy recommendation presentation. The second day began with a 15-20 minutes presentation by each team. The presentation included the teams: policy issue background, research findings, recommendations, and rationale for recommendations. A constructive dialogue followed each presentation. Following the last team’s critique session, all students voted for a member of their team to become their team delegate. The role of the delegate was to present their team’s policy recommendations to the Ohio General Assembly on the final day of the Summit. The delegates were announced immediately after the voting period and then the teams were given a chance to work with their delegate to write a three to five minute testimony. At this time, the teams also finalized any hand-outs or materials they wanted to distribute or display at the Statehouse on the final day of the Summit. Those materials were sent to an OCAN staff member who had them printed and ready for distribution by the next morning.

The final day of the Summit began with a breakfast with the Director of the Governor’s Office of 21st Century Education, Bob Summers. Following the breakfast, the chosen delegates presented their testimonies to an ad-hoc House Education Committee. While the delegates were in this meeting, their team members set up the Student Roundtable event in the Statehouse Museum Gallery. The Student Roundtable event gave each team the opportunity to display their policy research findings and recommendations and talk with legislators. Additionally, teams that set up meetings with legislators were able to visit their offices at this time. The final event of the Summit was the delegates’ testimony to the Senate Finance Committee. All student participants were invited into the Senate Chamber to listen to their delegates testify. Following the testimony, students participated in a wrap-up discussion and then returned to their respective institutions.

Institute and Summit Evaluation

Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered through student surveys and advisor focus groups. Overall, students and advisors demonstrated both a high level of engagement in all facets of the Institute and Summit. The evaluations revealed that the students and advisors, as a whole, were highly satisfied with the experience and outcomes.
2011 OSEPI Student Survey Results

I. Student Demographic Information

Gender

- Male: 42%
- Female: 58%

First-Generation

- Yes: 32%
- No: 68%

Major/Degree

- Political Science: 58%
- Education: 21%
- Business: 6%
- Journalism: 5%
- International Studies: 5%
- Environmental Policy: 5%

Academic Status

- First Year: 11%
- Second Year: 32%
- Third Year: 32%
- Fourth Year: 11%
- Fifth Year: 5%
- Graduate Student (Master's Degree): 26%
- Graduate Student (Ph.D.): 5%
### Previous Colleges & Majors/Degrees (for those applicable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Major(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Akron</td>
<td>Political Science &amp; Communications (B.A.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright State University</td>
<td>Mass Communications (B.A.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
<td>Bachelor's of Fine Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Joseph University</td>
<td>Master's of Business Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami University Middletown</td>
<td>Psychology (PSEO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio University</td>
<td>History &amp; Spanish (B.A.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana State University</td>
<td>Liberal Studies (B.A.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Participant Hometowns

- Geneva, OH
- North Canton, OH
- West Palm Beach, FL
- North Canton, OH
- Okemos, MI
- Salem, OH
- Cincinnati, OH
- New Philadelphia, OH
- London, OH
- New Bremen, OH
- Delaware, OH
- Port Clinton, OH
- Whitehouse, OH
- Lebanon, OH
- Carrollton, OH
- Sioux Falls, SD
- Orville, OH
- Cincinnati, OH
- Franklin, OH
I. SWOT Analysis

**Strengths**

- Opportunity to create change, learn about education policy & lobbying; meet with politicians; mimic the activities of a lobbyist; see Ohio government and meet legislators.
- Brought together students from a variety of schools to take an inside look at the policy making process.
- Organization, networking, teamwork, and communication skills were gains.
- The recommendations were completely shaped by students, which allowed students to apply their academic skills to hands-on problem solving research.

**Weaknesses**

- There was not enough meeting structure and the expectations were unclear.
- Students needed more background about the policy proposals of other schools before the student presentations.
- The program was fast paced and the initial learning process of public policy decreases the amount of time to focus on the policy recommendations.

**Opportunities**

- Ability to meet with legislators and gain experience on policy drafting.
- Opportunity for expansion to other schools and include more students.
- Opportunity to make clear what the objectives and deliverables are and to improve upon team communication.
- Opportunity to network, gain research and communication skills, and gain experience in policy drafting.

**Threats**

- The initiative could lose impact if it becomes an annual event.
- There is a hefty time commitment and some students dropped out throughout the program.
- There was less opportunity for those students who worked hard & did research because one delegate was chosen.
- Grading students may cause students to become preoccupied with getting a good grade rather than developing good policy recommendations.
- Cost may become an issue.
### II. Quantitative Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in the Ohio Student Education Policy Institute (OSEPI) helped increase my knowledge of the current policy issues and the state of education in Ohio.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.3% (1)</td>
<td>42.1% (8)</td>
<td>52.6% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in OSEPI helped improve my understanding of the policy analysis process.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.3% (1)</td>
<td>42.1% (8)</td>
<td>52.6% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in OSEPI sparked an interest to further advocate for education policy issues in the state of Ohio.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10.5% (2)</td>
<td>52.6% (10)</td>
<td>36.8% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in OSEPI sparked an interest to further advocate for education policy issues across the nation.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.8% (3)</td>
<td>42.1% (8)</td>
<td>42.1% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more interested in education policy now than prior to participating in OSEPI.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.8% (3)</td>
<td>42.1% (8)</td>
<td>42.1% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The skills and knowledge that I acquired through OSEPI will be useful in future academic and career endeavors.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10.5% (2)</td>
<td>31.6% (6)</td>
<td>57.9% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in the OSEPI Summit increased the amount of discussion I had about education policy with friends, classmates, and others.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.8% (3)</td>
<td>47.4% (9)</td>
<td>36.8% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in the OSEPI Summit motivated me to become more involved with the policy making process.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10.5% (2)</td>
<td>57.9% (11)</td>
<td>31.6% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was satisfied with the recruitment and application process.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.8% (3)</td>
<td>21.1% (4)</td>
<td>36.8% (7)</td>
<td>26.3% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was satisfied with the team meeting and preparation process.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10.5% (2)</td>
<td>31.6% (6)</td>
<td>42.8% (8)</td>
<td>15.8% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt prepared and confident to present our team's policy analysis at the OSEPI summit.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10.5% (2)</td>
<td>26.3% (5)</td>
<td>47.4% (9)</td>
<td>21.1% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was satisfied with the research support our team received.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.8% (3)</td>
<td>15.8% (3)</td>
<td>57.9% (11)</td>
<td>10.5% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was satisfied with the OSEPI Kickoff Meeting format and agenda.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10.5% (2)</td>
<td>15.8% (3)</td>
<td>57.9% (11)</td>
<td>15.8% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was satisfied with the lodging at the Summit.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.3% (1)</td>
<td>57.9% (5)</td>
<td>68.4% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was satisfied with the meeting venues (The Capital Club, Ohio Statehouse, The Riffe Center).</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.3% (1)</td>
<td>57.9% (9)</td>
<td>47.4% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was satisfied with the meals provided.</td>
<td>5.3% (1)</td>
<td>10.5% (2)</td>
<td>21.1% (4)</td>
<td>57.9% (7)</td>
<td>26.3% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was satisfied with the variety of guest speakers, legislators and stakeholders who joined the events.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.3% (1)</td>
<td>57.9% (10)</td>
<td>42.1% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was satisfied with the format and agenda for the OSEPI Summit.</td>
<td>5.3% (1)</td>
<td>21.1% (4)</td>
<td>10.5% (2)</td>
<td>57.9% (11)</td>
<td>5.3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, I enjoyed participating in OSEPI.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.3% (1)</td>
<td>57.9% (8)</td>
<td>52.6% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ohio Student Education Policy Institute and Summit should be an annual event.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.3% (1)</td>
<td>57.9% (8)</td>
<td>63.2% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that it is important that we strive to reach the Lumina Foundation's &quot;Big Goal&quot; of 60 percent of Ohioans with a postsecondary credential by 2025.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>36.8% (7)</td>
<td>63.2% (12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Qualitative Data

Ideal Time to Begin Work on the Institute

- January: 17%
- February: 11%
- September: 33%
- October: 11%
- November: 28%

Ideal Time to Hold Summit

- May: 20%
- February: 10%
- March: 15%
- April: 55%

Ideal Number of Team Members

- 5: 15%
- 6: 15%
- 8: 65%
- 9+: 5%

Ideal Number of Advisors

- One: 26%
- Two: 48%
- Three: 26%

Ideal Length of the Summit

- 2.5 Days: 78%
- 3 Days: 6%
- 2 Days: 12%
- 3.5 Days: 1%
- 1.5 Days: 3%
- 3 Days: 6%
When asked about if, or how, they would change the student workload for upcoming years, most students felt that additional time and meeting structure was needed. The University of Akron team comprised the smallest team with just 5 students. Knowing that they were part of a pilot project and that they were part of a smaller team, the Akron students “were able to divide the tasks in a time efficient manner; so, in essence, the work load for each student was as expected.” Similarly, a student from Ohio University commented that “the workload the team took on was certainly self-imposed, but we enjoyed what we were doing…most of us didn’t mind the heavy workload, wanting to make sure we compiled thorough recommendations.” However, students from Ohio University and The Ohio State University felt that “there were often some disparities in the amount of work the team was doing; some students had to take on more of a burden than others.” Other recommendations for future Institute’s included:

- limiting the research areas to a specific topic
- make the Institute a college course
- give students strict deadlines
- provide students with specific knowledge of what the end product should be

With these recommendations in mind, we believe that it would be beneficial for future Institute’s to adopt the program as a winter semester (or quarter), for-credit college course. We also recommend that:

- program advisors be chosen in September;
- student recruitment last from mid-September through October;
- student application deadline be October 31st;
- students be notified of acceptance by November 15th;
- student be given a course syllabus prior to winter break

Students were also asked to comment on the least beneficial and most beneficial parts of their participation in the Ohio Student Education Policy Institute. Most students agreed that making connections with legislators and physically engaging in the policy making process were the most beneficial elements of the Institute. Other student benefits included:

- being able to talk about an issue we were passionate about
- understanding lobbying on a more personal level
- gaining a greater appreciation for the complexity of the policy making process
- working as a team to debate and determine which issues were most important to address
- fine-tuning research and verbal communication skills

Some students did feel that the Institute required a hefty time commitment. One student also felt that there needed to be more time to rework changes to the policy recommendations after the student presentations at the Summit. Another student also felt that the Student Roundtable was not as effective as it could have been, since not many legislators had time to stop and talk with the students for a long period of time.

I really enjoyed the experience. I learned a lot about policy making and about education policy specifically. I really liked the fact that it was so focused on the students and that it was up to the students to create policy recommendations and to complete all of the research. It was very much a "self taught" experience. I would love to participate again!

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to participate in such a cool experience! It truly was a hands-on experience that furthered my interest in pursuing a career relating to policy analysis and development.
Advisor Focus Group: Qualitative Data Summary

Advisor Overview:
- **Tally Hart, Director, Educational Access Initiative, Ohio State University**
  - Became involved since she is the Vice Chair of the Ohio College Access Network (OCAN) Board. Tally was anxious for the program to include other types of institutions.
  - Favorite Element of the Institute: The amazing work that students at all three institutions achieved. Tally hopes that student growth at other institutions was parallel to that which occurred at The Ohio State University (OSU).
  - Least Favorite Element of the Institute: Although this had nothing to do with the program itself, the OSU team experienced a faculty advisor switch in the middle which produced difficulties. This was overcome, however, through the help of student leader Kelly Finzer. OSU will work hard to avoid this negative in future years.

- **Dr. David Horton, faculty member, Higher Education & Student Affairs, Ohio University**
  - Became involved when he was invited to participate by Valerie Conley-Martin (who does research with the Voinovich School). Based on his research interests and the work that he has done, Valerie asked Dr. Horton to participate in the Student Policy Institute.
  - Favorite Element of the Institute: It was interesting to see the students work together – they came together from different backgrounds and tried to understand what is going on in K-12 and higher education and then were able to sit down and develop some recommendations for improving either one of these areas.
  - Least Favorite Element of the Institute: The unclear outcomes/goals: the advisors tried to guide the students, but weren’t exactly clear what the final product needed to be. Students worked through it and were able to be successful given the information they had.

- **Marsha Lewis, faculty member, Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs, Ohio University**
  - Became involved when the OCAN team came to Ohio University to talk about the initiative while still in its development stage. Ohio University had worked with OCAN in the past and Ohio University felt that this was a great opportunity. They were honored to work with the Glenn School and Bliss Institute as the three pilot universities in the program. Marsha contacted Valerie Martin-Conley at the Center for Higher Education who then contacted Dr. David Horton.
  - Favorite Element of the Institute: Not only did students learn content and something about the policy process but they also had to figure out how to work together in a team environment when they didn’t know each other before. They had to get things together under stringent deadlines.
  - Least Favorite Element of the Institute: Ohio University would really like to get our regional campuses involved because those students are also affected by access issues. However, the timing just wouldn’t allow that but Ohio University hopes to remedy this next year.

- **Dr. John Green, Director of the Bliss Institute at the University of Akron**
  - Dr. Green became involved when he received a letter of invitation from OCAN in January. He immediately saw this as a promising initiative and began to make contacts with colleagues in the college. Dr. Green received a very positive reaction and was able to get in contact with a lot of different students. The fact that the University of Akron didn’t get started until mid January made it difficult for many of the interested students to
participate because they already had other commitments. Dr. Green thought Akron would have around twelve students, but ended up six students (one student had to withdraw due to family problems). All of Dr. Green’s comments were influenced by the short time frame in which Akron had to put their Institute team together. All of the students ended up being Political Science Majors which mean they all knew each other and John knew them all. Although Dr. Green did not quite get the diversity and numbers he originally planned on, the group he did get was very cohesive and made the Institute a priority. Although there were some real debates among the students about what the outcome should be, Dr. Green saw that as a positive part of the learning process. The students had to do a lot of learning just to decide what they were interested in.

- Favorite Element of the Institute: The level of work the students put into it and being able to come to the summit in April to meet our counterparts at other universities. The students and advisors learned a lot from one another at the summit.

- Least Favorite Element of the Institute: Because of Akron’s late start, Dr. Green kept getting e-mails and phone calls from our campus that thought this was a terrific idea but they weren’t able to participate. Next year Dr. Green will get started earlier so he can bring a broader group of students together.

Dr. Ani Ruhil, Associate Director of Academic Affairs, Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs, Ohio University

- Dr. Ruhil became involved because he works closely with Marsha Lewis. Marsha asked him to help as a faculty advisor.

- Favorite Element of the Institute: Dr. Ruhil loved the fact that it was student driven. This was the first time Dr. Ruhil have been involved in something where the students were the drivers. He have never been involved in anything to this extent, which made the Institute excellent because students are always treated as people who “don’t have enough knowledge” to be able to contribute to real issues. That element, coupled with the synergy or what the institute was all about -- increase college access and retention for underserved populations -- made it absolutely stunning. The Institute brought together students who have managed to come this far, looking at problems facing the state and asking “what can be better? What can be different? What does the state need to do?”

- Least Favorite Element of the Institute: Lack of time, which is expected in a pilot year. It would have been ideal to offer a course which is basically “The Institute” at each campus (maybe, an independent study) where students come in 3-4 hours a week and are assigned readings and given grades. The Institute became, in a compressed time format, an add-on to whatever jobs, coursework and commitments the students had.

(1) MOU Process and Funding:
The Memorandum of Understanding was clear and the financial commitment was clear. The MOU process went as well as it could in a University system. Now that we completed the process and funding for one year, it is anticipated that future years should run smoothly. Additionally, the MOU will be signed and processed in the fall instead of the winter.

(2) Introduction to the Program and Outlined Goals
Since this was a pilot year, a lack of clarity and questions about the end product was anticipated. The advisors agreed that they would have been surprised had this not happened. However, the advisors and students had a good grasp of the “big picture” once they got closer to the conference. In future years,
we will ensure that the goals are clear and specific for the student participants. For future Institutes, we would recommend joining OSEPI alumni with the new OSEPI students in a near-peer mentoring environment. This will help the new students understand the process and how to go about researching and developing the policy recommendations.

(3) Student and Advisor Recruitment

The Ohio State University conducted targeted recruitment, with a majority of their student participants coming from the Social Justice Immersion program within the Ohio State Honors and Scholars program. Next year, Ohio State does not plan to repeat the Social Justice Immersion program so they anticipate new challenges in recruitment in coming years. As a result, however, Ohio State is considering repeating the Social Justice Immersion program and overtly informing the students at the start of the program that one of the potential outcomes of the class is participation in OSEPI. The course gave a lot of the student participants a strong grounding, which enhanced the research and policy recommendation process. Ohio State will not limit their recruitment efforts to only this group of students but it may be something they will tie together. Ohio State also had the advantage of having a young group, allowing a lot of alumni interaction with new students in future years.

The University of Akron students did not come out of a specific class but, since they were all Political Science students, they had specific classes together so they all knew one another. Some of the students that were unable to join the Institute due to class conflicts were in different departments. As the University of Akron moves forward, they anticipate that classroom connections will be very important for recruiting students. Advisor recruitment was difficult at the University of Akron because of their late introduction to the program. Therefore, the Director of the Bliss Institute of Applied Political Science, Dr. John Green, took on the advisor position himself. The students at the University of Akron expressed interest in having more students on their team so they could spread the research out among more people and get a wider variety of perspectives. The University of Akron also anticipated having to bring in additional advisors if more students become involved.

The Ohio University offers a $1,000 per quarter scholarship for Honors students and undergraduate students with a certain GPA who are interested in public service and leadership. For those students who qualify, Ohio University tries to align at least one “real world” project that the student can work on for approximately eight hours per week. Ohio University started recruitment with these students but they also distributed information through their honors list-serv and circulated an e-mail within the College of Education. Ohio University ended up with a wide variety of students – ranging from freshman to Ph.D. candidates. Ohio University also had three co-advisors for one team and would recommend having multiple advisors to bring in different resources, areas of expertise, and networks.

(4) Involvement of Outside Sources

The Ohio State team felt that they were uneven in their engagement beyond the group itself, partly due to the switch in faculty advisors half way through the program. Ohio State felt fortunate to have a Glenn School staff member step in to pick up some of the key details and help them through the process of finding a new advisor. Ohio State is looking forward to having more engagement from the Glenn School in future years. Those who worked on this program at Ohio State this year found it interesting that, at the last moment, they received a lot of engagement from their Government Relation folks who were in face-paced contact with the Voinovich, Glenn, and Bliss school-related colleagues because of the budget cuts proposed for the three schools. Although it was sometimes difficult to get in contact with legislators this year due to the looming budget process, future Institute’s that are not during the government budgeting process should not see this as a prevalent problem.
The University of Akron had a lot of success with their external contacts—both by design and by accident. The University of Akron found that the university administration was very responsive to talking with students. President Proenza and the Provost both made time to talk with the students and put the students in touch with many other administrators. However, the University of Akron hopes to involve even more colleagues in future Institutes. In the initial year, the Akron team was able to talk with some professors but they hope to formalize this in coming years. Although the budget process did make it difficult to get in contact with legislators, the University of Akron students were able to go to a local meeting of the Akron-area State Legislators at which all of the legislators stayed after the meeting to talk to the students. The University of Akron’s chief lobbyist is very interested in continuing this project as a valuable way to showcase what the Universities across the state are doing. Also, the University of Akron felt that putting the responsibility of contacting legislators on the students was very valuable, especially towards the end of the Institute when the students felt comfortable talking about their chosen issue.

The Ohio University was able to engage Brenda Haas, former director of the Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education (OACHE), who added value to the students ideas and clarified some of their thought processes. The Ohio University also anticipated bringing in Senator Jimmy Stuart but there was a miscommunication between their team, OCAN’s office, and Senator Stewart’s office so that meeting never came to fruition. In order to engage high level government and university officials, it is anticipated that they will need to be informed very far in advance. Dr. Ruhil would like to be able to structure the Institute like a typical college course in which each student is given a syllabus that informs them of due dates and days in which guest speakers will be coming to the meetings. It was highly recommended that future institutes include three to four guest speakers that could discuss such topics as “the do’s and don’ts of lobbying” or “how to write a policy white paper.” The recruitment of these speakers could be a full collaboration between OCAN and the institutions and the presentations could be available to all institutions via the internet (webinar, Skype, etc).

(5) Team Meetings

Ohio State utilized a senior student as a team leader alongside the faculty member. The students dug into the whole education policymaking process and it was very amorphous from the beginning.

Ohio University had a plan from the start to ensure that all student participants understood the types of information and resources they needed to digest. The advisors began the Institute by forwarding the students several articles on educational issues and by week two, the students were placed in separate groups in which they debates which issues they felt were most important to address. At this point, one of the students took on a leadership role by putting together meeting outlines. By weeks five and six, students identified two key issues they wanted to discuss and pursue and then they worked together the next two weeks to develop their policy recommendations. Ohio University advisors stressed the importance of (1) not choosing a student leader right from the beginning, since the remaining team members may not buy in to his or her leadership abilities right away and (2) making the students feel comfortable speaking and make it known that every student had a voice. Because Ohio University’s team included both undergraduate and graduate students, the advisors did notice that the undergraduates naturally seeded to the graduates. Therefore, Dr. Ruhil suggested that graduate students could maybe be given a different role in the Institute to level the playing field.

The University of Akron hopes to have a larger group of students in future years but, with a small group of students, they were able to work together very effectively. The team advisor would be reluctant to suggest team leaders early in the process. The advisor also said that the students would set up their meeting schedule and then change it because every meeting would get the students more excited and they
would want to meet the next day. However, the Akron team was small enough to be able to coordinate that. In future years, the University of Akron hopes to add more structure to their meetings.

(6) Summit

There was overwhelming satisfaction with the Summit and the events that took place during that time, specifically the policy recommendation feedback sessions. It was clear that the students from all three Universities were dedicated to trying to help one another better their final product. Next year, we anticipate allowing more time for the students to interact with students from other schools. We also would like to involve OSEPI alumni in the Summit.

(7) Addressing the idea of an annual Institute and Summit as well as competition and adding universities to future Institutes

All advisors felt that the Institute should be an annual event and that introducing competition would be beneficial and would only make the policy recommendations stronger. Some advisors felt that if the event were not annual: (1) the Institute could lose momentum, (2) some students would miss out on an opportunity to participate due to their academic program requirements, and (3) the student and faculty interest would be more difficult to institutionalize. In terms of bringing in additional universities, the Ohio University plans to expand to their six regional campuses and create two teams. Especially with 21st century technology, it is possible to pull teams together across regional campuses. There was also conversation about how we could involve K-12, such as inviting a local high school student to join or talk with a team. Finally, there was also interest in expanding the Institute to neighboring states down the road with a vision of a set of policy proceedings that would come out of each state every year that could be made into a white paper. This would give the students something to put their name on and be proud of.
Appendix A: Student Documents

To: Whom it May Concern
From: The University of Akron OSEPI Team
Date: April 12, 2011
Re: Incentivizing Learning Communities

Executive Summary

Low income, first generation students today are at risk of never completing college. According to the Pell Institute 43% of these students drop out and only 11% earn a bachelor’s degree compared to 55% of their peers. Attrition rates from these students are lowering the overall retention rates of students entering college. In response to such low retention rates for this target population schools have begun to find new and innovative ways to help students transition to college and be successful. One of the many ways institutions have increased retention rates is learning communities.

Learning communities in the last decade have become an increasingly innovative way to ensure student success in their first year of college. According to the Washington Center there are now more than 245 2-yr and 4-yr institutions utilizing learning communities nationwide. Learning communities incorporate 20 to 30 students who attend class, study, and often live together. Learning communities are becoming a proven method of aiding students in their first year and ultimately retaining them. Currently at the University of Akron only 13.2% of the freshmen class is participating in a learning community. Expanding this number to 26% of the incoming freshmen class has the potential of expanding retention rates throughout the state.

Based on the evidence supporting learning communities we recommend to the Ohio State Legislature that a .5% increase in tuition rates be used to fund our model that expands learning communities to low-income, first-generation students. Through expanding learning communities to the state we will incentives both the students and the faculty members to participate in our model. Lastly, after the first year of the program, retention rates at Universities should increase to a point that our model will self-fund itself and have the potential of expanding to larger populations of students. Implementation of our model will raise retention rates throughout the state of Ohio and aid low income, first generation students in becoming productive members of society.

The Problem: Higher Education in Ohio

Despite the fact that an institution of higher learning is located within 30 miles of every Ohio resident, the state’s graduation rate is poor: 70% of Ohioans will attend at least one year of a community college or four-year university, yet only 17% will obtain a college degree (Ohio College Access Network). In fact, Ohio stands 35th in the country in the number of 25 to 64 year olds that hold a graduate degree at 20.6%--nearly five percentage points behind the national average of 25.1% to 20.6%.

The implications of Ohio’s education gap are significant. The earning power of a college graduate is about twice that of a high school graduate (U.S. Census Bureau). So while the state battles an $8 billion budget deficit, increasing its percentage of college educated residents to just the national average, would account for $21.8 billion in taxable revenue (OCAN). Further, as the economic value of a high school diploma declines, so too has Ohio’s population as it makes the painful transition from an industrial workforce to a knowledge-based economy. Not only is there a correlation between level of education and an increased level of income, but there also is a correlation between increased education and a person’s likelihood for employment. It is thus tantamount for Ohio to increase its college graduation rate if it hopes to end many of its families’ cycle of poverty. Beyond the utility of this achievement, it would also curtail rising costs in Ohio’s welfare entitlement programs; because, over time, the gap has only widened between the income of high school graduates and the income of college graduates (OCAN).

While Ohio’s high school graduation rate is above the national average, its percentage of high school graduates attending college immediately after graduation is below the national average (SASCCO). One of the most likely explanations is the cost of college and its burden on Ohio families.
2001, for instance, the percent of an Ohio family’s income needed to pay for higher education was 28.9%, sixth highest in the country (SASCCO). Even more disconcerting is that Ohio received an F for college affordability in a 2004 national report card (NCPPHE).

So while it is true that the struggle to pay for college is ubiquitous across the nation and across most income levels, Ohio students are disproportionately affected. Low college graduation rates compound the problem because of the debt accumulated. The earning power of a student with some college, but no degree, is relatively equal to a person with only a high school degree (Pell Institute). The ramification, then, is that not attending college, in many ways offers less risk than attending college without guarantee of earning a degree. No population suffers more from this reality than low-income students, the very demographic hoping that higher education will improve their financial future.

The Special Problems of Low Income Students

General Statements:

According to The Pell Institute, low-income status is defined as “having a family income below $25,000, and first-generation status includes students whose parents do not have bachelor’s degrees.” In the U.S. there are 4.5 million students enrolled in post-secondary education that qualify as being low-income, first-generation. Students that are at this risk status are four times more likely-to drop out after their first year than students who are not low-income or first generation. Over the span of six years, 43 percent of the at risk students left and did not complete their degree, with nearly two-thirds leaving after their first year (The Pell Institute).

Low-income students comprise 35% of Ohio’s undergraduate population, though they are significantly underrepresented in the state’s four-year colleges and universities. Low-income students are more likely to enroll in public two-year and for-profit institutions (Pell Institute). Even if 70% of community college students have expectations of obtaining a bachelor’s degree or higher, most will never transfer to a four-year institution and about half will drop out before receiving their associate’s degree (Pell Institute). Had these students started at a four-year college or university, they would be seven times more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree. Only 25%, however, do. It would thus be advantageous for Ohio to create the incentive for low-income students to begin their collegiate careers at a four-year university, and preferably, directly from high school.

There are numerous reasons why this target group often struggles to obtain an associate’s degree, let alone receive a bachelor’s. First, these students are more likely than their affluent counterparts to be the first in their family to attend college. In fact, 59% of high school graduates from rural, high-poverty districts, and 56% from urban, high-poverty districts, are first generation college students (Pell Institute). Comparatively, only 21% of high school graduates in more affluent suburbs would be the first in their families to attend a university (Pell Institute).

Beyond the fiduciary burden of attending college, low-income students often also lack the social capital of a strong family base, community network, and other resources that offer the guidance, advice, and encouragement to succeed in college. In fact:

• For all institutions, low-income, first-generation students are nearly four times more likely to drop out after one year than higher income or non-first generation students (Pell Institute).
• After six years, 43 percent of low-income, first-generation students drop out and only 11% earn a bachelor’s degree. This compares to 55% for their higher advantaged peers (Pell Institute).
• In public four-year institutions, 34% of low-income, first generation students earned a bachelor’s degree after six years; nearly half the rate of higher-income, non-first generation students (66%).

Low-income and first generation college students, also, are often non-traditional (older) and often lack the financial support of their parents. Non-traditional students also tend to have families of their own, jobs to hold down, and other responsibilities while attending school. These obligations, research finds, decrease their likelihood for academic success (Pell Institute). Low-income and first generation college students are also often comprised of ethnic or racial minorities with lower levels of academic encouragement or preparedness, making college curriculums a formidable challenge.

What is most profound is that even when having fully considered the demographical backgrounds of low-income, first generation college students; even when taking into account income, race, enrollment
characteristics, and academic preparation; our target group is still unlikely to obtain their degrees. “This suggests,” according to the Pell Institute, “that the problem is as much the result of the experiences these students have during college as it is attributable to the experiences they have before they enroll.” The Pell Institute continues:

“Research has shown that low-income and first-generation students are less likely to be engaged in the academic and social experiences that foster success in college, such as studying in groups, interacting with faculty and other students, participating in extracurricular activities, and using support services. Lower levels of academic and social integration among this population are inextricably linked to finances and financial aid.

A Solution: Expanding Learning Communities

Learning Communities bring a small group of students together at the college level and cluster courses for an integrated learning experience. Over the last twenty years universities and colleges have begun to create new and innovated ways to teach students. Learning Communities though not a new technique for teaching has become increasingly popular as a way to help college student’s transition into their collegiate career, and aid low income, struggling students to be successful. So what is a learning community and why do they work? According to Glabellnck a learning community is a variety of curricula that links several courses together, with a smaller group of students to help them obtain a better understanding and integration of the course work (19). Learning Communities focus small groups of students with a faculty member that guides the group to a clearer understanding of course work and how it applies in the real world.

Learning Communities are a strong tool for students looking to take advantage of opportunities afforded to them. Much of the evidence on this point comes from the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education at Evergreen College. In 1996 the Washington Center, expanded its reach to learning communities with funding from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education, and the Pew Charitable Trusts (Washington Center). The Washington Center now maintains a directory of over 245 learning communities from both 2-year and 4-year institutions (Washington Center). This illustrates the rapid success of learning communities in America where new and innovated methods of teaching have become prevalent in developing students in a global economy.

There are several types of learning communities each with its own attributes. However, according to Shapiro and Levine there are several shared characteristics that form the basis for each of the learning communities:

- Organizing students and faculty into smaller groups
- Encouraging integration of the curriculum
- Helping students establish academic and social support networks
- Providing a setting for students to be socialized to the expectations of college
- Bringing faculty together in more meaningful ways
- Focusing faculty and students on learning outcomes
- Providing a setting for community-based delivery of academic support programs
- Offering a critical lens for examining the first-year experience (Shapiro, 12)

These key factors contribute to the overall models that are being used nationally. The first model is the Paired/Clustered Courses Model. This model links a pair or cluster of courses together through a cohort or block of scheduling. This model typically enrolls twenty to thirty students who enroll in the block, and not only spend time in the classroom but time outside the classroom in seminars or study groups. Faculty members invest time to develop a meaningful interaction and guide them through the first year of college. Faculty members should also be prepared to invest time setting up this style of program initially according to Shapiro (14). Linking course together so students can analytically see how their courses all share common ground will help to develop students who are able to see how important the general requirements are to the overarching goal.

The second model is the Cohorts in large Courses Model. Students within this model represent a subset of total enrollment in large lecture courses. Usually students will participate in a pair of courses that are uncoordinated (Shapiro, 30). Students will participate in a weekly seminar consisting of in depth explanation of current course material. This model needs little faculty involvement, creating a place for a
peer mentor to lead group discussions and seminars. This allows students to see the success of other students who have gone through the program and gives the mentor a unique insight into what the students are going through having recently been in their shoes.

The next model is the Team-Taught Model. This model is the most comprehensive approach to learning communities (Price, 7). The model is taught by two to four faculty members who combine two or more courses into an interdisciplinary themed curriculum. Themes focus on broad-based education, emphasize skill development, and prepare students for professions. These types of learning communities can have a large student population, which can be broken down into smaller groups for focused discussions on topics. Peer mentors are a critical component to the overall program. Former students can help guide the current members coming through the program, or participate in helping faculty members facilitate learning and curriculum.

The last model which is often more of a component to the other models is Residence-Based. This model adapts any one of the fore mentioned models and incorporates it into a group of students that live on campus. According to Shapiro, not only does learning occur within the walls of a classroom, but a significant portion of overlaps between a student’s social and academic activities (36). Residence-based models are designed to incorporate academic and social aspects of the college experience. Students with this model will have the ability to maintain a social circle of friends that they can study with on a daily basis fostering a sense of community and purpose amongst one another. This program enlists the help of peer mentors to again guide students on a path to success in and out of the classroom.

The Impact of Learning Communities

In recent years there has been a surge in relevant data related to the learning communities due to their widespread use throughout the country. The overarching question becomes do learning communities retain more or less students? The short answer is yes! The overall statewide retention rate for first to second year college students in a public university is 78% (Board of Regents, 3). When analyzing data provided by the University of Akron first year retention rates for students outside of learning communities’ stands at 69.2% of the 4,534 students enrolled as freshmen are retained (1). The retention rate for students who participate in learning communities’ jumps to 73.1% of the 599 students enrolled in a learning community (UA FTIC). A 3.9% jump in retention rates. The number of students who currently participate in learning communities is 13.2% of the freshmen class. The numbers show a slight increase in the retention rates of students. However, with an increase in the number of FTICs eligible to participate in learning communities that number has the potential of growing to new heights increasing the overall graduation rates of students.

Graduation rates for the 6-yr cohorts for all public universities in the state of Ohio are respectively at 56% according to the Ohio Board of Regents (3). The University of Akron has a 6-yr graduation rate of 37.3% of the 2670 students who started in 2004 (1). The learning communities’ number only increases slightly to 38.1% of the 367 students who participated (Six Year). It is important to note that only 13.8% of the freshmen class participated in learning communities in this cohort. Since 2004 the University of Akron has expanded their program and the success rates have increased. These numbers show only the rates according to University statistics, there is however a human component that cannot be over looked.

In July of 2010, the Washington Center conducted a survey called Online Survey of Student Learning in Learning Communities (1). The survey generated response from 1221 students nationwide participating in a variety of learning communities (Online Learning, 1). The survey produced some of the strongest supporting data for the overall success of learning within these communities. The responses ranged from “Very Often” to “Never” and it produced these statistics:

- 90% of respondents reported an increase in their ability to take responsibility for their own learning.
- 87% of respondents reported that participation in a learning community helped them learn how to think critically and analytically.
- 15% reported never working with classmates outside of class on course work.
- 10% reported never participating in peer review of theirs or another’s work.
8% reported never presenting course work in class
8% reported never discussing ideas from their learning community with people outside of the learning community (Online Learning, 1)

Although there are many encouraging statistics, respondents reported some troubling findings about the faculty members:

- 28% of students reported that faculty members rarely assigned work asking them to connect concepts from other classes
- 30% of students reported rarely working on integrating ideas, strategies and skills from other course in their learning community
- 30% of students reported rarely reflecting on how these connections lead to new insights (Online Learning, 2)

The statistical data shows a severe lapse in the co-coordination between faculty members in a specific learning community. This often is a result of the amount of time, resources and energy involved in creating a curriculum that encompasses several courses into a broad category.

Learning communities have been found to increase retention rates at The University of Akron by at least 3.9% (UA FTIC). In addition, learning communities increase curriculum integration and faculty collaboration, as well as helping the students to progress through developmental coursework at a higher passing rate (The Heldrich Center).

According to Lardner and Malnarich in 2008, four key features need to be considered to sustain learning communities:

- Goals must remain clearly aligned with the larger institutional goals; learning communities must be a compelling place for faculty members to do their best work
- Learning Communities must be placed right in the student’s pathway, in other words course work should tie together with what the students are already working towards, i.e. degree program, developmental courses etc…
- Learning communities should not ask too much of faculty members to initiate a program. Faculty members should instead find innovative ways to incorporate extra assignments, readings, or projects, for a specific group of students. Faculty members should work together closely to choose what curricula is the best and how best to implement it.
- The most important point is that student learning should remain at the center of the learning community (Lardner, 2-3).

Learning communities must remain focused on the students and the betterment of their collegiate career and furthermore their adult life. Faculty members must be dedicated and willing to become an active participant in the students learning and success. Creating a program that is sustainable by using these key points will keep a program working for years to come. Allowing Universities to raise their retention rates, ultimately spurring new economic growth, and innovation

On November 18, 2009, The University of Akron’s Diversity Council Subcommittee issued a report called “Undergraduate Retention Recommendations.” The report was based on a target audience similar to ours, including first generation, minority, low-performing, low-income students (Nicholson et al. 2009). With the goal of the recommendations being an increase in undergraduate retention rates for full-time, first-year to second-year students, two of the recommendations aligned with our proposal.

The Council recommended that students in the target audience be required to participate in a semester or year-long learning community. The report pointed to two current learning communities operated through the Office of Multi-Cultural Development at the University of Akron, Passage and INTERACT. In Fall 2007, minority students who participated in Passage were retained at 68.2% compared to the overall retention rate of 56.8% for all minority students. Similarly, in Fall 2009, students who participated in INTERACT were retained at 64.7% compared to 56.3% of all minority students (Nicholson et al. 2009).

The second shared recommendation regards peer mentoring. The Council recommended strong support for structured and comprehensive peer mentoring programs, including our recommendation of structured meetings with an upper-class student as the mentor. The core components of their model consisted of 20 peer mentors assigned with 150 mentees. The Bliss model of 7-8 students per mentors is
Based on the Council’s recommended ratio. In 2008, the retention rate for minority students we participated in peer mentoring programs was 68% versus 56.3% of all minority students (Nicholson et al. 2009).

**Proposal: Incentivize Learning Communities**

In order to increase retention rates statewide, we recommend implementing a pilot program to expand learning communities in Ohio’s thirteen public universities by providing low-income students with incentives to participate in learning communities.

**Summary of Proposal:**

The target population will be low-income students, which accounts for 10-15 percent of the freshman population. Students who are at this status and meet the aforementioned qualifications will have the opportunity to enroll in learning communities.

The paired learning communities will consist of 15 students in each community, and will be grouped according to their major. In order to do this, the Bliss Institute recommends that the learning communities should offer general education requirements during the first year, such as English, Math, and a Social Science, in addition to a semester long Student Success Seminar. The second year of the student’s education will consist of courses related to their major. Students involved in the learning communities will have the opportunity to meet with their peer mentors either weekly, or biweekly. A peer mentor will lead a group of 7-8 students, and discuss the fundamentals of academic success. This will align closely with the Student Success Seminar their first semester, but will translate into a more formal seminar taught by a faculty member during the second semester of their first year.

The students involved in learning communities will also receive a partial tuition remission, divided into 3 separate payments throughout the semester, and will be contingent upon their GPA and participation. If, by the second semester, the student’s GPA drops below a 2.75/4.0, the student will be ineligible for tuition assistance during their second year.

**Faculty Incentive**

Beyond creating the incentive for target students to participate in our program, it is also necessary to create incentive for faculty to participate as well. Given the significance of small class size, but the importance of ensuring cost effectiveness, our learning community would require a maximum participation of 13% of a university’s freshman enrollment, as well as one faculty member per 25 students. Using Akron as an example, 509 freshmen in 2007 would have been eligible to participate, requiring the facilitation of 21 faculty members. Our recommendation is that each faculty member receives $1,000 to be used towards their faculty development.

These dollars, depending on the institution and department, can often be sparse, with professors often having to pay out of pocket for research literature and conference travel expenses. Every university college, however, already has a pool earmarked for faculty development, to be dispersed at the discretion of college deans. Since these funds already exist, only a re-allocation of funds would create the incentive for faculty members to participate in our program.

**Incentives and Costs:**

Universities that agree to participate may be allowed to raise their tuition an additional 0.5%, rising from the legislatively allowed 3.5% to 4.0%. At the University of Akron, this 0.5% increase would raise an additional $505,000, based on the 2010 Full-Time enrollment rate. The additional costs to students would total an additional $23 after the 3.5% increase.

In exchange for participation, and meeting program requirements, the students would be offered a 25% tuition remission for up to four semesters. In 2007, according to The Ohio College Access Network, there were 3,912 first-year, full-time undergraduate students at the University of Akron. Our recommendation aims to offer economic incentive to approximately 10-20% of these students, or between 381 and 792 students, who, by definition, will be classified as low-income/first-generation.
The cost of the tuition remissions to the University of Akron, based on 10% student participation, would result in $378,095 in tuition remissions. With 20% participation, the remissions would total $756,189 each semester.

Assuming that the retention rate is increased by 7.7%, based on the number of full-time, first-year enrollees at the University of Akron provided by OCAN, an additional 258 students would reenroll. Those additional 258 students would account for $998,170 in additional tuition and fees for each semester they reenroll. We assume that many of these students will go on to graduate, thus providing the University of Akron with approximately 4 additional semesters worth of tuition and fees.

Evidence shows that learning communities contribute to an increase in retention rates, but finances are a frequently-cited reason for attrition, especially among low-income students. The combination of participation in both learning communities / peer mentoring programs plus economic incentives for worthy performance will serve to alleviate many of the barriers that prevent low-income/first generation students from succeeding. The program will be highly effective because it targets the students most susceptible to attrition.

We support providing an economic incentive for participation in learning communities and peer mentoring programs because we feel that alleviating a portion of a student’s financial burden will encourage stronger, more self-interested participation. The strict grade point average requirements will mandate that the students invest time and energy in these evidence-based educational enhancement programs, as eligibility is contingent upon participation and a minimum 2.75 GPA.
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Incentivizing Learning Communities

Proposal:

In order to increase college retention, universities should provide economic incentives for students of a target audience to participate in learning communities and peer mentoring programs, as these programs are self-sustaining and have demonstrably increased college retention.

Problem:

- 70% of Ohioans will attend college, yet only 17% will obtain a degree.
- Ohio is nearly five points behind the national average in its percentage of college educated residents.
- The earning power of a college graduate is about twice that of a high school graduate.
- Increasing its percentage of college educated residents to the national average would account for $21.77 billion in taxable revenue.
- Ohio received an F for college affordability in a recent national report card.

Target:

- Low-income students comprise 35% of Ohio’s undergraduate population.
- These students are likely to be the first in their family’s to attend college.
- First generation students earn bachelor’s degrees at nearly half the rate of other students. Low-income and first-generation students are less likely to be engaged in the academic and social experiences that foster success in college.

Background:

- 78% of students are retained in Ohio between first and second year, only 59% graduate in six years.
- Learning Communities have become increasingly popular in recent years as a way to retain students and aid them in a successful collegiate career.
- Learning Communities are groups of students usually 20 to 30 that take courses together, study, do extra-curricular activities, and sometimes live with one another.
- The Washington Center conducted a survey of students participating and garnered strong evidence of how well they work.
  - Students reported increase in responsibility of their education, learning to think analytically and critically, more time working with other students, participating in peer reviews, presenting course material, discussing being a part of a learning community.
- Office of Multicultural Development, UAkron report of recommendations to increase retention in target populations based on successful pilots:
  - INTERACT LC – 64.7% participants retained vs. 56.3% total non-participants
  - Department-sponsored peer-mentor program – 68% retained vs. 56.3%
  - Components of both models adopted by Bliss model

Learning Communities:

- Cohorts of 15 students; take 3 classes together
- Mandatory bi-weekly meetings to consist of:
  - 1st semester – success/social literacy seminar
  - 2nd semester through end of eligibility – to be determined by coordinating faculty supervisor
- Faculty members that participate will receive $1000 per semester to be drawn from existing faculty development funds
Peer Mentoring

- Cohorts of 7-8 students
- Mandatory bi-weekly meetings; coordinated and assigned by faculty supervisor
  - Bi-weekly meetings to be on alternate weeks of learning community seminars

University of Akron model

- Participating universities permitted to raise tuition an additional 0.5% to 4.0%
  - Revenue raised, based on 2010 full-time enrollment = $505,000/semester
  - Costs to students from 3.5% - 4.0% = $24/student/semester
- Participation offered to 13% of the first-year, full-time students (509 Students)
  - Students must meet low-income/first generation requirement
- 25% tuition remission; 4 semester eligibility
  - Cost based on 13% of FY, FT students = $491,523/semester
  - Savings of $15,000/semester if tuition increased 0.5%
  - Students receive $967/semester
    - to be allocated 3 times/semester = $322 every 5 weeks
- From fall 2007- spring 2008, $4.7 million in potential tuition and fees were lost from the 1,200 FT students who did not re-enroll the following semester
- If 258 students who would have dropped out are retained, $998,000 in tuition and fees could be collected per semester.
Our Teachers Affect Our Children,
Our Children Affect Our Future.

Our goal is to improve access to higher education for all students, which can be achieved by ensuring high quality teachers.

Ohio House Bill 1 is also known as the Education Reform Plan and includes the Ohio Residency Educator Program.

The Ohio Residency Educator Program is a 4-year comprehensive induction plan that was passed in February 2011. It is required by all new teachers in the state of Ohio, starting in August 2011, but the information regarding the implementation is unfortunately vague.

We propose the following considerations:

- **Clarifying Roles:**
  - The principal and/or administration must understand their vital role as the implementer.
  - The mentors need to understand importance and functionality of their role.
  - All roles should be clarified in an orientation prior to start of residency.

- **Creating Residency Timeline and Yearly Goals:**
  - Develop yearly goals for the mentor and resident so that adequate progress is achieved
  - Pair residents with mentor teacher in similar content/subject area or grade level

- **Establishing Effective Evaluation:**
  - At resident level, administration and mentor teacher evaluate the new teacher
  - If resident teacher fails to achieve protocol set forth by the Ohio Resident Educator Program, proper repercussions will be implemented
  - ODE needs to have an overarching evaluation of the program as a whole.

Our recommendation is to adjust the Ohio Resident Educator Program so that it has more specific and standardized components that will in turn improve the quality of Ohio’s teachers.

Creating quality teachers will lead to high quality education for all of Ohio’s students, ultimately encouraging access to higher education.
Good morning Chairman Widener and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for having us today. We are pleased to be here to provide our testimonies regarding access to higher education in Ohio.

As The Ohio State University team’s student representative, I will now present our proposal. Our recommendation is to adjust the existing Ohio Resident Educator Program so that it has more specific and standardized components that will improve the quality of Ohio’s teachers. Creating quality teachers will lead to high quality education for all of Ohio’s students, ultimately encouraging them and helping them access higher education. This increased access to higher education will directly influence Ohio as a state. According to United Way’s Common Good Forecaster, with just a 10% increase in college graduates, Ohio will experience substantial change. The median personal earnings will increase by 4%, leading to $1,388 more dollars on average. The unemployment rate will decrease 0.3%, with 16,451 fewer people unemployed. The poverty rate will decrease 0.5%, signifying 39,172 fewer people in poverty. These statistics are directly correlated with increased college access. Our team has decided to focus on a current piece of legislation in order to improve access and in due course, improve Ohio.

The Ohio Resident Educator Program is a component of Ohio House Bill 1, which was passed in February and will be implemented this coming August. The program is a 4-year comprehensive induction plan for new teachers in Ohio. It is replacing the current teacher certification process in Ohio, which includes taking the Praxis III Exam. The Ohio Resident Educator Program can be compared to a residency program that a medical student must complete in order to become certified to practice. Successful completion of the residency program will be required to qualify for a five-year professional educator license. This program has set forth goals and objectives that will allow new resident teachers to experience thorough training and professional development throughout the first four years of their careers. We sincerely appreciate and applaud this piece of legislation and the intentions that it has. However, we believe that the program guidelines are slightly vague. This is an issue because it will be difficult for schools to implement exactly what the state is looking for when the specifics are not drawn out. In turn, without revising the current program, schools will have a tendency to develop their own practices and policies for the program, which could lead to unequal teacher certification programs across the state. That being said, we’d like to suggest a few modifications that can be made to improve this program before it is implemented in August.

Our first recommendation is to clarify the roles of the people who are to be involved with this program. This includes specifically defining the position and responsibilities of the school’s principal, its mentors, and the resident educators. The current guidelines do not have detailed descriptions of what each individual is responsible for. We think that this program will be more successful if each party is fully aware of their responsibilities and the ways in which those responsibilities can be fulfilled.

Secondly, we believe that in order to ensure progress, distinct goals and a timeline to reach those goals must be established. Being that the current program guidelines suggest a 4-year experience for resident educators, it is important that we establish different goals for each year of the program in order to guarantee advancement and success. We think that the state of Ohio needs to establish a standard set of goals that each school is responsible for working towards. In order to ensure the achievement of these goals, it is essential that each new resident educator is directly paired with a mentor veteran teacher who, when possible, teaches in a similar subject area and grade level. The Ohio Resident Educator Program suggests the importance of a mentoring component, but does not provide details as to the requirements of this program.

Lastly, in order to gauge the success of any new program, a proper system of evaluation is imperative. The current guidelines do not specify a concrete evaluation process for the program. Ohio needs to establish a means in order to determine whether or not the program is successful. Along those same lines, the evaluation results should have clear and consistent consequences across the state. For example, if a teacher does not meet the set expectations of the program, an appropriate course of action.
should be taken. This could mean that a teacher does not receive their license or maybe that a teacher is allotted additional time to successfully complete the program. These consequences are something that needs to be established and made known across the state so that every program is equivalent.

Although it may seem that our policy recommendations imply additional costs, this is unlikely because the funding for these recommendations will come from the money that is already allocated for teacher training and professional development. We are not asking for more money and we are not advocating for a larger budget. We are simply requesting that the money that has already been allotted be spent in the most efficient and cost effective manner.

I cannot stress enough how crucial it is that we realize the true importance of quality teachers in Ohio. Mr. Bill Hollister, my high school Marketing teacher, was that teacher who was passionate about his work and who sincerely cared about the success of each and every one of his students. I would not be here today, if it were not for him. It is amazing to realize the impact that one quality teacher can have on a student’s access to higher education and success in life. Imagine how Ohio could grow if every student had a Mr. Hollister in their life. With that said, access to higher education begins with high expectations and standards for our teachers. It is with great teachers that we inspire our students to excel in the classroom and pursue higher education. This is why we believe that reevaluating the existing Ohio Resident Educator Program is the most effective way to improve access to higher education. Thank you for your time.
Why Dual Enrollment:

We selected dual enrollment because Ohio lags behind other states in educational attainment: 34th out of 50 states for associate degrees or higher

**Ohio Needs this Because:**
- Current Dual Enrollment students
  - completion rates are higher: 70 percent compared to 53 percent
  - Time to degree is less: 3.8 years for dual enroll 4.3 for all other students
  - 25% fewer dual enrollment students need remediation

**Recommendation:** *Standardize and Expand Current Dual Enrollment initiatives in Ohio*

**Current Climate:**
- Post Secondary Education Option (PSEO) primary option in Ohio
- Variability in current dual enrollment options not allowing program to reach its full potential
- Current options across state are sporadic and do not provide equal access across the state

**Funding:**
- Standardizing funding model will eliminate current win-lose situation
- Multiple, current dual enrollment options funded separately (PSEO, Seniors to Sophomores, etc...)

**Recommendation:** *Assign a committee to determine the current dual enrollment funding climate and assess what can be done for future appropriations*

**Benefits:**
- Makes college affordable to all students
  - Higher completion rates
  - Less time to degree completion
  - Less remediation
- Increases Ohio’s competitiveness through increased workforce readiness
Ohio University’s delegates selected dual enrollment, to address Ohio’s lag in educational attainment when compared to other states. Dual enrollment can be defined as high school juniors and seniors completing college level course work. This can take place either at the high school or at the higher education institution. Of every 100 Ohioans only 34 have an associate’s degree or higher. This statistic places Ohio behind many states in the proportion of adults with postsecondary experience.

Five of our nine colleagues have participated in some form of dual enrollment and have indicated that they’re experience prepared them for college rigor, allowed them to take prerequisites early and facilitated shorter degree completion. In fact, one of our members stated that her participation in a dual enrollment program amounted to essentially a free semester of school. Having said that, today we plan to cover dual enrollment benefits, the current climate, funding considerations and finally, our recommendations to standardize and expand dual enrollment options across the state of Ohio.

Ohio has a special interest in facilitating the standardization and expansion of dual enrollment because current dual enrollment students are shown to have higher completion rates; their time to degree is less – close to half a year. The shorter degree-to-completion will also allow for an increase in highly qualified and skilled workers with expedient matriculation to the state workforce. Remediation rates are reduced by 25% for students that participate in dual enrollment. This decrease in remediation rates will save both the state and the student considerable funding in addition to the quicker provision of a skilled workforce.

Ohio University’s delegates recommend expanding and standardizing current dual enrollment initiatives in Ohio. Standardizing the program will allow Ohio to effectively measure dual enrollment. Our team suggests utilizing a dual enrollment participant tracking system, which will allow the state to track specific characteristics of participants (such as age, gender, race, socioeconomic status etc.). This will help to determine the effectiveness of dual enrollment and ensure its extension across Ohio’s diverse demographics.

To this end, one program to highlight is the dual enrollment program at Syracuse University. This program is a national leader in providing educational opportunities to urban students by better preparing them for postsecondary options. All students that participate in this program earn one to two years of transferable college credit - leading to college completion. The program operates similar to an early college high school, which is one of many dual enrollment options.

By following our dual enrollment recommendations we hope that this will allow for the program to be measured in terms of its effectiveness and in turn allow for greater implementation and access across the state. The current policy climate includes the funding of post secondary education options, or PSEO, which is the primary option for students in the state of Ohio. There is also a considerable amount of variability in current dual enrollment options, which do not allow the program to reach its full potential. The current options for dual enrollment are inconsistent and do not provide equal access across the state, which puts many students at a disadvantage.

Another challenge is funding. By standardizing the funding model it will eliminate the current win-lose situation faced by high schools and institutions for higher education. The current model of PSEO only provides funding for the postsecondary institution and the high school does not receive credit for the student. Currently, there are also multiple dual enrollment options that are funded separately, PSEO, Seniors to Sophomores, etc. To address this issue we believe that both the postsecondary institution and the high school should receive credit for the student. We recommend that Ohio develops a task force to determine the current dual enrollment funding climate and to assess what can be done for future appropriations.

Data has shown that there are numerous economic advantages tied to dual enrollment. Dual enrollment increases affordability to all students through decreasing remediation rates by 25%, increasing
college completion rates and reducing time to degree completion. By implementing the previously mentioned recommendations, dual enrollment moves Ohio closer to the goal of having 60% of Ohioans’ obtain an associate’s degree or higher by the year 2025. This goal is also in line with the current administrations objective of having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020.

Uyland, a student from Lorain County, participated in an early college high school dual enrollment program. Upon completion of his high school degree, he also received his associate’s degree and is currently working in the Cleveland area as a state tested nursing assistant. Uyland didn’t think college was an option until he participated in this program. He is currently preparing for medical school. Choosing to standardize dual enrollment is choosing to put Ohioans’ education as a priority. These recommendations will aid in the students pursuit of higher education, increase Ohio’s stake for competitiveness in postsecondary education and produce a skilled workforce sooner. Dual enrollment translates to higher participation in postsecondary education, ultimately leading to a more highly educated workforce and a stronger economy.
Appendix B: Summit Agenda

**Sunday, April 10th**

4:00pm  Check-in available at DoubleTree Suites, Downtown Columbus, Ohio
6:00pm  Dinner at Boston’s the Gourmet Pizza
8:00pm  Individual Institute Team meetings to prepare for Monday

**Monday, April 11th**

All Monday events will take place at The Capital Club in the Huntington Center

8:00-10:00am  Breakfast
10:00-1:00pm  Team Presentation of Policy Issue Area, Research Findings and Recommendations
1:00pm  Break (food will be provided)
2:00-5:00pm  Student Dialogue regarding overall policy recommendations
- Students will discuss, debate, and rework recommendations to develop a set of creative, innovative, cost-saving, and realistic policy recommendations to present to the House Education Ad-Hoc Committee and the Senate Education Finance Committee. Three delegates (one from each school) will be elected to testify.
- Students will also develop a policy action process for individual and team Legislative visits and put together materials for the Student Roundtable Event.

6:00pm  Dinner at The Capital Club

Evening on own/Prepare for Wednesday. Any materials needed for roundtable or Legislative meetings must be submitted to OCAN staff by 9:00pm.

**Tuesday, April 12th**

8:00am  Breakfast with Bob Sommers, Director of the Governor’s Office of 21st Century Education
9:30-10:30am  Morning Legislative visits; Student Delegates to present testimony to ad-hoc House Education Committee (13th Floor, Vernon Riffe Center)
11:00-1:15pm  Student Roundtable Event: students to host team displays to inform Legislators, aids, policymakers, lobbyists of their policy recommendations and experience with the Institute (Ohio Statehouse Museum Gallery)
1:30-3:00pm  Lunch
**2:30 PM**
- **STUDENT DELEGATES TO TESTIFY TO SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE** (Senate Finance Committee Room, 1st Floor, Senate Building)
3:00-4:15pm  Afternoon Legislative visits
4:30pm  Debrief session at the Capital Club

Note: all students will need to be checked out of the hotel at noon on Tuesday. They may bring their bags either to the OCAN office or put them in their vehicles.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Date: April 12, 2011

Contact: Dessa Augsburger, Asst. Director of Development and Communications  
Office: 614-947-3505, Mobile: 419-615-8901, Email: AugsburgerD@ohiocan.org

Ohio’s First Student Education Policy Institute Closes Today with Student Testimony before Senate Finance Committee through Two-Day Policy Summit

Columbus – Three student delegates of Ohio’s first student institute on education policy presented this afternoon to the Senate Finance Committee amidst budget discussions for the 2012-13 biennium. The delegates were elected yesterday by the peers in the Institute during policy discussions at the Capital Club. Relating research to their own experiences, students presented before the Senate Finance Committee recommendations on dual enrollment, teacher preparation, and a model for learning communities on college campuses across the state.

The Institute is the first of its kind to provide students an exclusive opportunity to present their voice to an audience of educational leaders and policymakers. Participating in the inaugural class of the Institute are student teams representing the Ohio State University, Ohio University, and the University of Akron. Throughout the Policy Summit, students were received with much support and excitement among the legislature and engaged in dialogue by the Committee.

The Ohio Student Education Policy Institute is a collaboration of top policy and leadership colleges and the Ohio College Access Network. The goals are three-fold: a) to increase engagement and participation of students in the policy making process; b) to influence the education debate through student-passed policy resolutions, specifically, issues of preparation, access, success, and economic opportunity; c) to coordinate policymaking efforts between community organizations, colleges, students, and Legislators.

Students of the Institute undertook the charge to develop creative, innovative and cost-effective policy recommendations dealing with the issues of high school curriculum rigor, financial aid and college accessibility, persistence to degree and college retention, and economic opportunities resulting from postsecondary completion.

The Ohio Student Education Policy Institute is open to all Ohio colleges and universities. OCAN is poised to continue its coordination during the upcoming school year. Contact Ms. Rachel White, Policy and Advocacy Specialist, whiter@ohiocan.org for more information.

“Students have learned a tremendous amount. Now that they know so much they realize how much more they like to know.”

-Dr. John Green, Director, Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, University of Akron

“Overall I was impressed by the level of control we were given as students. I figured we would go in and give ideas and faculty would use them to advance their own policy recommendations.”
“We’ve been very pleased by the legislative turn out, and that they are actually interested in the voice of the students…You can’t replicate this in the classroom.”
-Dr. David Horton, Patton College of Education, Ohio University

“It seems the student voice has been missing from the dialogue around education policy; it’s cool to know we get to be a part of being that voice. I feel like a representative for the students on campus.”
-Rebecca Butler, Ohio University

“The Institute is an opportunity to help next generation educational leaders analyze and understand policy in ways that will better inform future practice.”
-Dr. Tom Lasley, Chair, OCAN Board of Directors

“The Ohio Student Education Policy Institute is a great learning experience for students from Ohio University, The Ohio State University and the University of Akron to come together to help craft policy solutions to pressing issues of educational access and the contribution of higher education to the economic growth of the State.”
-Dr. Mark Weinberg, Director, Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs Ohio University

“It was great to see how students valued the time they the legislators gave to them; they’ve appreciated the opportunity to share the policy recommendations they’ve worked so hard to create.”
-Rachel White, Policy and Advocacy Specialist, Ohio College Access Network

“Overall the Institute has been perfect; this has been the perfect opportunity for our bright and passionate students to take a stake in their educational and career success, and it will serve to only strengthen their voice in educational policy from here on out. We’re excited to see what we’ll accomplish in Ohio in terms of educational access and success with the voice of education’s most critical stakeholders in the game.”
-Dr. Reginald Wilkinson, President & CEO, Ohio College Access Network; former Director, Ohio