Opportunity Support Programs: 10 Year Strategic Plan

I. Where do you want your department to be in 10 years?

The year is 2025. The Executive Director of Opportunity Support Programs oversees a department serving 2,000 low income pre-college students and 1,000 low income college students. Programs are located on the main college campus and along the bustling Gate Way Corridor.

Pre-college students are served through six federal TRiO programs including three classic Upward Bound programs, one Upward Bound Math/Science program, one Talent Search program, and one Educational Opportunity Center. Low income undergraduates are served by an expanded TRiO Scholars Program that includes an additional federal grant to serve low income STEM students and another to serve students with disabilities. First in the Pack has expanded services to include a state-of-the-art virtual coaching program that greatly increases the number of students served, including transfer and co-enrolled TMCC students. McNair Scholars collaborates with the undergraduate research department to provide a campus wide platform offering extensive undergraduate research and graduate school preparation for low income students. McNair also collaborates with the graduate school to deliver a nationally known undergraduate research conference.

The department’s pre-college programs have established a pipeline of academically prepared low income students who take advantage of dual enrollment opportunities so that they are able to graduate in three and a half years. Strong collaborative initiatives with campus support services have fully integrated all department programs into the fabric of the University. By working diligently with University and community stake holders, the AOP Department has assured a place of significance for low income students at the University of Nevada.

II. Five Measurable Goals

1. By 2025, the AOP Department will serve 2,000 pre-college students*
2. By 2025, the AOP Department will serve 1,000 undergraduates*
3. By 2025, a fully implemented Grad First program will prepare 100 underrepresented UNR undergraduates for graduate school annually
4. 75% of matriculating pre-college participants will attend UNR annually
5. 40% of undergraduate participants will graduate from UNR within four years; an additional 40% will graduate within six years for a total graduation rate of 80% within six years

*Excludes Gear Up Ambassador and Gear Up Mentor programs as the funding for those programs are outside the control of the University.

III. Vision Statement

The Department of Opportunity Support Programs aspires to establish the University of Nevada as the premier service provider and first choice for the state’s growing population of low income and first generation students.

IV. Context

Access to and preparation for higher education is one of the greatest civil rights issues of our time. Forward thinking colleges and universities are already making plans to serve a different student profile in the very near future as available recruits from the wealthy are tapped out and the sheer numbers of low income high school graduates continues to grow, especially among the Hispanic population: the pool of high income, second generation students is shrinking while the
pool of low income, first generation students is growing rapidly. It is imperative that substantially increased numbers of poor students complete the qualifications for degrees and certificates beyond the high school diploma. Failure to achieve this goal will result in certain poverty for the individual and economic calamity for our country.

An estimated two-thirds of job openings by 2020 will require postsecondary education or training. In addition to the employment benefits of higher education, college graduates with a bachelor’s degree earn 66% more than those with only a high school diploma and are far less likely to be unemployed (Fact Sheet: Focusing Higher Education on Student Success, July 27, 2015 released by the U.S. Department of Education). Despite the increasing need for higher education, access to this essential asset has been steadily eroding over the last several decades for those with modest incomes. The maximum 2015 Pell grant covers only about 30% of the cost of a four-year public college degree – less than half of what it covered in 1980 (Fact Sheet, 2015).

Access inequality is starkly portrayed by the disparity in high school graduation rates between the poor and the rich. Economically advantaged students have been graduating from high school in very high numbers for at least three decades. Only 74% of poor students graduated from high school in 2013 as compared to 90% of their more financially advantaged peers. (Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States, 45 Year Trend Report, 2015 Edition, the Pell Institute). Graduating from high school is by no means a clear indication that low income students will continue on to college. In fact, the most well prepared low income high school graduate is less likely to go to college than poorly prepared high income students: 44% of low income students continue on to college as compared to 77% of high income students (Indicators, Pell Institute 2015).

The simple act of college enrollment is an excellent indicator of degree completion for students from wealthy families; the outlook is far more dismal for college going students from poor families: poor students were somewhat more likely graduate from college in 1970 than they were in 2013 - 22% in 1979 and 20% in 2013. The bachelor degree completion rate of high income students, on the other hand, has increased from 55% in 1970 to an expected graduation rate of nearly 100% in 2013. Clearly, not much is to be gained by focusing support services on high income students. Rather, efforts made to assist the growing population of low income students would have a far greater impact on over-all graduation rates.

In order to significantly increase the graduation rate of low income students from our colleges and universities, however, we must understand that this population, many of whom are students of color and also the first in their families to go to college, faces more than cut and dried academic challenges. It is frequently presumed that post-secondary students have all the necessary skills to succeed. Research shows just the opposite: “Oftentimes in higher education, we assume that students know how to behave. We assume that they know how to study, how to prioritize, and how to plan. However, given what we know about rates of college persistence, this is an assumption that should be called into question” (Bettinger & Baker, 2011. The effects of student coaching in college: An evaluation of a randomized experiment in student mentoring [http://www.nber.org/papers/w16881]).

Furthermore, Bettinger and Baker (2011) note that many college students do not take the initiative to seek out help, often times do not know the questions to ask, and, more importantly, do not know that they need help. This is particularly true for low income, first generation college students: Non-cognitive factors play an important role in the academic and personal success of low-income, first-generation students (Ting, 2003. A longitudinal study of non-cognitive variables in predicting academic success of first-generation college students).
The success of low income students is vital to the political and economic success of our country. It is also critical to the success of our state. As is true on the national level, employment trends for Nevada also indicate a critical need for higher education. Due to the expected growth in STEM industries in Nevada, for example, EDAWN (Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada) predicted in January 2015 an increase of nearly 55,000 new jobs in the northern Nevada region over the next five years. The expectation is that nearly 50% of all STEM jobs now and in the future will require a university degree (Brookings Institute: A People’s Strategy for Nevada’s Economy, May 2015).

Unfortunately, Nevada also mirrors the national scene in terms of students prepared to succeed in STEM majors. A recent report, ACT: The condition of STEM 2015, indicates that, although many students demonstrate a strong interest in STEM fields, far fewer have the academic preparation to succeed in these majors: “... based on the percent meeting the new ACT STEM College Readiness Benchmark, far too many STEM-interested students are not well prepared to succeed in the type of rigorous college math and science coursework required of STEM majors.” According to this report, 52% of seniors tested in Nevada indicated an interest in STEM majors and careers as compared to 59% of the U.S. population. However, only 49% of Nevada students interested in STEM majors met the math benchmark and only 43% met the science benchmark for success in STEM careers as compared to a national average of 49% and 45% respectively.

The critical focus on the recruitment and graduation of low income students to the future of the state is underscored by a demographic shift in the population of college age students. Nearly 50% of school children in Washoe County are currently participating in the national Free and Reduced Lunch program (Department of Agriculture, Nevada Schools, 2014-2015). As we look to the future, it is clear that a growing number of Nevada high school graduates enrolling in higher education will be from low income families. Over 30% UNR students are currently receiving Pell grants as compared to 11% in 1995; this number will surely grow in the very near future as the University remains true to its mission to educate eligible Nevada citizens.

A large number of University students are also the first in their families to go to college. It is estimated that nearly 45% of students attending the University of Nevada come from homes where neither parent has a bachelor’s degree (first generation). According to a recent UNR orientation report, 2,099 of the 4,673 students who completed the orientation survey during the summer of 2015 identified as first generation. Many UNR first generation and low income students share the same challenges experienced by their peers across the country. Students who come from local low income high schools are less academically prepared for success when compared to their peers matriculating from higher income schools: 74% of UNR students who graduated high schools serving low income families enroll in one or more remedial courses as compared to 28% of students from high schools zoned for more affluent neighborhoods.

TRiO pre college staff have observed a troubling trend in the post-secondary aspirations of their participants. Too many of those who are qualified to enter UNR elect to attend TMCC as a less expensive option. Most, if not all, intend to transfer to UNR, but that is an uncertain outcome. According to the most recent TMCC Fact Book, 74% of entering students indicate a desire to transfer, but the actual transfer out rate is only 16% and the 2014 graduation rate was 28%. The odds of earning a bachelor’s degree are much higher for students who start at the University. The most recent six year graduation rate for UNR Pell students was 52% as compared to a general graduation rate of 55%. However, low income students participating in the TRiO Scholars Program had a 2008 six year graduation rate of 84% and a 2009 six year
AOP 10 Year Strategic Plan (2015-2025)

graduation rate of 69%. These graduation rates are significantly higher than the 40% six year graduation rate of a national comparison cohort of first generation, low income students.

Another troubling reality for higher education is the lack of faculty who reflect the changing demographics of the college-going population. A recent article published in the Chronicle of Higher Education (Ben Myers, 2/14/16) indicates that 75% of faculty at Carnegie classified higher education institutions are White; 10% are Asian; 5% are Black; and 4% are Hispanic. The percentage of Native Americans and Pacific Islanders is too small to be measured. It is imperative that more students of color earn doctoral degrees with the goal of becoming university professors in order to more effectively serve the growing population of diverse students.

As we look to the future, there are many threats to the successful recruitment and graduation rate of UNR low income students. There are also viable opportunities to increase socio-economic diversity on our campus and to create a climate of success for our low income, first generation students. Following is a brief outline of potential threats and opportunities in regard to the recruitment, retention, and graduation of low income students and first generation students.

**THREATS**

- Rising cost of college and need for increasing amounts of need-based aid *in tandem* with support services addressing academic & non-cognitive challenges facing many low income and first generation students, especially in their first year at the University for both freshmen and transfer students; fear of accumulating debt
- State grants aimed at low income students attending community college – the belief that community college is the best option for low income students, regardless of academic ability; the growing political climate to reduce the cost of community colleges for low income students
- Controlled growth: the trend toward recruiting lucrative out-of-state students and foreign students could reduce the number of low income Nevadans attending UNR, especially if standardize tests are ever used to determine ‘good fit’ in an effort to control growth
- Disruptions: The growing tendency of students to ‘swirl’ between UNR and TMCC for both traditional and on-line classes
- Increasing admission standards may increase the number of low income students who opt out of the University or delay entry by starting at TMCC – students who may never find their way to UNR
- Failure of low income students to consider graduate school, particularly in high need STEM areas and areas that lead to a career in university teaching and research

**OPPORTUNITIES**

- Incorporate best practices from successful programs such as TRiO Scholars to provide support to a much larger population of low income, first generation students
- Scale up First in the Pack to serve more freshman, transfer, and co-admission students
- Target effective support services on the students who benefit most rather than diluting the depth of services and grant aid by providing support to those who are likely to succeed without such services or aid
- Eliminate duplication of support services so that existing resources can serve more students
• Target recruiting efforts at pipeline programs serving low income and first generation students including TRiO and Gear Up programs in northern and southern Nevada
• Embrace the concept of swirling attendance between UNR and TMCC by building well-defined support services intentional pathways for transfer students
• Develop effective virtual support strategies for students enrolled in on-line classes or for those who spend a limited amount of time on campus due to work and family obligations
• Expand Grad Fit to include a McNair-like program for a wider audience of underrepresented students by creating the Grad First program
• Collaborate with the graduate school to create a national UNR undergraduate research conference

V. Plan to Achieve Goals and Vision

Goal 1: By 2025, the OSP Department will serve 2,000 pre-college students*
• Upward Bound (UB) Classic grants continue to be funded
• New TRiO grants (Upward Bound Math Science, Talent Search and Education Opportunity Centers) written and funded; programs implemented
• Space in Gateway established for Talent Search (TS) & Economic Opportunity Center (EOC)
• Space for UB Math/Science established on campus

Goal 2: By 2025, the OSP Department will serve 1,000 undergraduates
• First in the Pack expanded to serve 300 freshmen and 200 transfer, co-admission students for a total of 500 students
• TRiO Scholars and McNair Scholars continuously funded to serve 200 students
• New TRiO grants (SSS STEM, SSS Disability) written and funded; programs implemented to serve an additional 300 students

Goal 3: By 2025, a fully implemented First Grad program will serve 100 underrepresented UNR undergraduates
• Undergrad Research work group/coordinating committee established
• Fifty sophomores and fifty juniors recruited to participate in two year program
• Self-supporting GRE and graduate admissions workshops created to generate funds to support cost waivers for low income participants as part of enhanced First Grad program.
• National undergraduate research conference established at UNR; revenue supports First Grad participation and conference participation for low income students
• Academic faculty and graduate school mentors identified to work with Grad First participants

Goal 4: 75% of matriculating pre-college participants will attend UNR annually
• Fully integrated recruitment and support services for low income and first generation students at the University.
• Targeted recruitment of pipeline programs implemented for students and parents across the state including UNLV, CSN, and NSC TRiO programs
• Transfer and Co-admissions work group established
• Collaborative Pell work group established to monitor the condition of low income students at UNR including retention and graduation outcomes and identification of students most in need of services
• First in the Pack coaches contact seniors during spring and summer to assist with questions and concerns, thereby avoiding ‘summer melt’

Goal 5: 40% of undergraduate participants will graduate from UNR within four years; an additional 40% will graduate within six years for a total graduation rate of 80% within six years

• First in the Pack coordinator identified
• Expand First in the Pack to serve freshman, transfers and co-admission students
• Virtual coaching program established
• Space identified for TRiO Stems and expanded First in the Pack; TRiO disabled grant will be housed with the DRC
• Data used to identify best fit profile for support in the First in the Pack programs to make best use of existing resources
• Collaborative arrangements made with existing campus support services to add academic support options to First in the Pack
• Strong collaboration with financial aid to provide accurate and compelling information to all program participants including improving their financial literacy

DESCRIPTIONS AND BENCHMARKS FOR ACHIEVING FIVE CORE PLANS

1) Expand McNair Services to a Wider Population of Low Income, Underrepresented Populations

The current Grad Fit program is modeled after the McNair Scholars Program. The focus of the program is to bring students from other Nevada and out-of-state institutions onto the UNR campus for a 5 day grad school boot camp. An expanded program would allow more UNR underrepresented students to benefit from graduate school preparation. Collaborations with stakeholders such as the graduate school, the CENTER, and the Office of Undergraduate Research would create a seminar curriculum that could be taught as semester or weekend classes for credit. The program would include connecting students to graduate student mentors from areas of interest, connecting students to academic research mentors, and informing students about selecting and applying to graduate programs. A self-funded GRE prep course could eventually support a sliding scale for low income students to fully participate in the graduate school preparation program. It is assumed that many participants would be preparing for master’s programs and that many would be applying to UNR. Consequently, the UNR graduate school would be an important stakeholder in the program’s success. This expanded McNair-like approach has the potential to become a major source of diverse student applicants for the UNR graduate school and an excellent start toward diversifying higher education faculty.

2016
• Identify stakeholders: Grad Fit, Undergrad research, CENTER, grad school, McNair
• Establish work group
• Identify target students
• Create program framework and curriculum
• Identify recruitment pathways
• Lay the ground work for expanding McNair GRE prep to a wider fee paying audience; Revenue would be used to provide grants/waivers to help subsidize GRE prep participation for low income students and to pay for instructors for the GRE prep course

2016-17
• Implement program with limited target population for fall semester
• Teach first GRE prep course
• Establish tracking procedures to measure success
• Work on spring semester curriculum for implementation of full year program in 2017-18
• Modify the program based on evaluation and outcomes of pilot. Expand to a larger target audience
• Use revenue from GRE prep course to subsidize low income students to the extent possible
• Identify best practices
2018-2025
• Continue to fine tune all aspects of the Grad First program. Continue to assess and track results
• Continue to offer revenue generating GRE prep and increase the number of low income students subsidized with the goal have subsidizing 50% of participants
• Scale up successful aspects of Grad First program focusing on best practices

2) Create a UNR National Undergraduate Research Conference

Create a national undergraduate research conference modeled on the Berkley undergraduate research conference for McNair participants across the country. Hosting a McNair undergraduate research conference would bring several hundred diverse students onto our beautiful campus for multiple days each year and provide our graduate school an opportunity to show case programs and opportunities for underrepresented students.

2015-2016
• Establish work group, time frame, and project plan of operation
• Create budget
• Identify startup funds for hosting first conference budget
• Identify housing options
• Identify a conference coordinator
2016-2017
• Dry-run conference with invited participants from targeted areas (McNair programs: UNR, Davis, UNLV, UNR Grad First participants and others as appropriate)
• Use profits to pay back startup funds and to establish an account for hosting conference the following year
2017-2018
• Full-blown conference with national outreach to McNair programs and affiliated UNR programs
• Revenue used to cover conference costs with funding plan established to assist UNR low income students to participate in future conferences
2018-2025
• Continue to fine-tune conference
• Explore additional sources of conference revenue
• Continue to fund account to subsidize low-income UNR student participation

3) First in the Pack for Transfer Students Who Participate in Co-Admissions

Create a peer coaching program modeled after First in the Pack to help first generation students who participate in the co-admissions program to acclimate and succeed at UNR. Strong collaboration with Student Services co-admission personnel would be the hall mark of the program. Pipeline programs such as Upward Bound, Dean’s Future Scholars, and Gear Up would be provided extensive information about
the UNR co-admissions program for those who start at the community college. Information could also be shared with our pre-college TRiO programs in southern Nevada. Program services would include near peer coaching from a UNR graduate student, an upper classman and a program coordinator. Coaches would be trained in using social media and/or other appropriate sources for on-line coaching. A kick-off orientation would introduce participants to coaches.

Contacts would include e-mail, texting, and phone calls. The program would also include a ‘shadow’ day when participants can spend time on campus getting a personal tour of support services and other important places. The program would continue to serve participants during their first year at UNR. Coaches would assist students to connect with campus services as well as serve as a safe place for students to ask questions and share concerns. Coaches would be trained to know limits of confidentiality and when and where to refer. Coaches would also produce a bi-weekly news bulletin with pertinent information for program participants as is currently done with our First in the Pack program for freshmen.

2016
- Identify roles and responsibilities and need for any additional staff
- Establish collaborators community colleges
- Identify funding source for graduate/undergraduate coaches and for operating costs
- Identify participants in co-admission program.

2017-18
- Train coaches
- Establish assessment/tracking procedures
- Implement program

2018-2019
- Assess program outcomes
- Modify program as needed
- Stay abreast of best practices in virtual coaching

2019-2025
- Use formative and summative assessment measures to fine tune program
- Increase numbers served if possible

4) First in the Pack (FIRST) Expansion

Expand the existing FIRST program to serve more students. Establish collaborative initiatives with UNR support programs, particularly those co-located in the PSAC. Create a permanent coordinator position with a budget to support two graduate assistants, a peer coach, and a kick-off orientation for new participants.

2015-2016
- Procedures established for collaborating with support services (Math, tutoring, writing, advising, etc.)
- Assessment/evaluation procedures including long-term tracking for all cohorts from first pilot program in place and operational
- Plan in place to use all available resources to identify at risk freshmen

2017-2018
- Number of freshmen served increased to 300
- Funding identified for coordinator, graduate assistant, and peer coach
- Best practices in electronic coaching identified and implemented

2018 – 2020
• Results assessed. Decision made to either scale up or down based on improved electronic coaching methods and continuing need for services

2020 – 2025
• Procedures in place with new SSS grants to avoid double serving/recruiting the same students
• Direction of program reassessed based on number of SSS grants funded

5) **New & Continuing TRiO Grants**

Plan in place to submit continuing and new TRiO grant applications based on the U.S. Department of Education calendar for grant applications. Identify funding sources to buy out existing director time to write continuation grants and to travel to grant writing workshops. Identify funding sources to hire a grant writer to prepare applications for new TRiO programs. Potential new TRiO grants include the following pre-college programs: Upward Bound Math/Science; Talent Search and Educational Opportunity Center. Potential new college-level grants include an SSS STEM and an SSS Disability program. The potential also exists for SSS Health Science and SSS Teacher Preparation grants, although those are not included in this plan. Time lines for grant submissions are included in the following table.

2015-2016
• Upward Bound Director and McNair Assistant Director attend grant writing workshops
• Funds identified to buy out 6 weeks of UB director’s time and 4 weeks of McNair Assistant Director’s time during the 2016-2017 program year to write 3 UB and 1 McNair grants
• Discuss the possibility of hiring an editor to assist with Upward Bound and McNair grants since this would be the first time these grants will be written by novice writers

2016-2017
• Write and Submit Upward Bound and McNair Grants

2017-2018
• Implement new grant cycles for Upward Bound and McNair

2018-2019
• SSS (TRiO Scholars) grant submitted by current director
• Hire grant writer to write SSS Stem and SSS Disability grants
• SSS Stem grant submitted
• SSS DRC grant submitted

2019-2020
• Implement new SSS grants

2021-2022
• Hire grant writer to write Talent Search and EOC grants
• Talent Search & EOC grants submitted

2022-2023
• Talent Search & EOC grants implemented
• 3 Upward Bound Classic and McNair grants written by current directors
• Grant writer hired to write Upward Bound Math/Science
• McNair Submitted, Upward Bound, UB and UB Math Science submitted

2023-2024
• New grants implemented

2024-2025
• SSS grants submitted by current directors
### Review of Current and Proposed Programs Included in Strategic Plan

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### Additional Programs by 2025

<table>
<thead>
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<th>2016</th>
<th>Additional Programs by 2025</th>
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<tr>
<td>Upward Bound Northwest</td>
<td>Upward Bound Math Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upward Bound Truckee Meadows</td>
<td>Talent Search</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upward Bound Washoe</td>
<td>Education Opportunity Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRiO Scholars</td>
<td>SSS Stem</td>
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<td>McNair Scholars</td>
<td>SSS Disability</td>
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<td>Gear Up Ambassador</td>
<td>Grad First</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gear Up Mentor</td>
<td>First in the Pack for transfers/co-admissions</td>
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</table>

**TOTAL: 8 programs serving 677 students**

**TOTAL: 15 programs serving 3,027 students**
VI. Needs

- Collaborative work team to coordinate activities for low income and first generation students at UNR and to build a pathway for low income transfer and co-admission students
- Steering committee to oversee work groups focused on low income, first generation UNR students
- Recruitment focused on needs of FG/LI students and parents
- Co-admission program linked to pipe line pre-college programs
- First in the Pack expansion to include Transfer First Program – need full-time coordinator, 3 grad students, 2 student mentors and 10% admin to implement programs serving 300 freshmen and 200 transfer, co-admission students
- TMCC, WNC, CSN pipelines
- Grant Writing: writer/Editor for TRiO grants; Buy out of Ellen & Perry’s time to assist with grants; Travel to grant writing workshops
- Space for SSS STEM and expanded First in the Pack programs program; need for equipment to provide services through social media
- Space in Gate Way for Talent Search and EOC pre-college program
- Space for Upward Bound Math/Science

If all programs are funded, including a total of ten federal TRiO programs plus Gear Up and First in the Pack, it would be good to consider a new Executive Director position to provide regulatory oversite, write grants, and ensure compliance with federal regulations. Directors would report to this position. The position should not be funded with federal monies. If funded sooner rather than later, this position could be in charge of writing all new grants and editing existing grants in addition to supervising directors and providing compliance oversite of all federal funding.