




# PROJECT FINISH LINE SUMMATIVE REPORT

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## Executive Summary

Project Finish Line, in its inception, maintain ambitious goals. Without exception, the project met its goals and has helped four colleges learn from the experience of another college, while developing unique adaptations that fit the needs of each campus. To achieve its outcomes, the project created strong learning communities among the four colleges and encouraged the participants at those colleges to extend their knowledge to other areas within their campus. Interview data suggest that the project helped each college coalesce multiple, prior initiatives into more cohesive approaches that helped more students complete.

Additionally, the data show that the students whom Project Finish Line served are representative of the populations served by these college. The data also show that the connections that the colleges made to students in this project were successful, regardless of the method of personal contact that the college selected to use.

In brief, Project Finish Line colleges developed whole-systems approaches to helping students complete who would not have otherwise completed their degree or certificate.

## Data Sources for the Report

This report provides an analysis of Project Finish Line, a project that sought to replicate the student completion successes of one community college within four other colleges. As described in the preliminary report on the factors that contributed to the successes of Walla Walla Community College as it increased its student completion rates (available online at the Project Finish Line site), the four replicating colleges sought to increase their completion rates using the lessons learned from Walla Walla Community College. In the report to the project funder, the Project Finish Line project manager provided data on the completion rates overall and at each college. Instead of duplicating that information, this report analyzes the student data and the experiences of the colleges to offer an analysis of the project's impact beyond the descriptions of increases provided in the funder report. Thus, the report to the funder identifies the number of students who were served; and this report explains how impact came to be.

The data for this report come from multiple sources. Specifically:

- A review of the peer-reviewed literature on completion and retention
- Initial interviews with 16 key staff, administrators, and faculty at Walla Walla Community College to establish factors supporting success
- Initial interviews with 48 key staff, administrators, and faculty at Green River College, South Seattle College, Seattle Central College, and North Seattle College
- Questionnaire data collected from participants (n=101) attending six Learning Community events – note: this includes additional colleges and organizations which participated
- Interviews with six staff members from three colleges to look at issues of data access and to provide their colleges with formative analyses of identified issues
- Project completion interviews with 16 staff and administrators directly involved in implementing the project at the four colleges
- A comparison of student demographics, interventions, and progress through logistic regression modeling to see which students were impacted and how

## The Framework for Analysis

In the early stages of this project, the evaluation team conducted an analysis of Walla Walla Community College to determine the factors that contributed to its success. While the addition of completion coaches to the work there provided a focus for the completion efforts in the college, our analysis found that the hiring of completion coaches was embedded in a list of other actions. We found that the college's successes were tied to four "impact themes" that generated and supported the processes and systems the college needed to improve its completion rates. The four impact themes identified from the work of Walla Walla Community College are:

1. Campus Culture
2. Commitment from Across Campus
3. Systems that are Responsive to Need
4. Finances and Funding

Each of these themes has significance; and as our early investigation showed, they are all synergistically interwoven. The creation of a completion coaching model and the addition of completion coaches provided a focal point for systemic change for larger systemic change needed to generate the success. It would have been inadequate for Walla Walla Community College simply to hire completion coaches and achieve the successes it did. Therefore, we have used these themes throughout our work to guide our analysis, while continuing to look for other potential themes in data we collected formatively throughout the project.

## The Four Themes Explained

What we discovered at Walla Walla Community College, and have found to hold true throughout this project, is that the four themes provide explanations for the potential and impact of completion work. The themes also offer a framework with which to evaluate causes for success and to identify how programs might improve. Therefore, it is important to understand these four themes and how they inter-relate. It is with that lens that this report begins with an explanation of these themes. It is important that the descriptions that follow are not in any order. None of these themes is subordinate to another, and none exists in isolation from the others. These categories provide a convenient way to look at what made an impact; however, in practice, they cannot be considered in isolation of each other.

Moreover, it is important to note that the work at Walla Walla Community College and the four replicating sites did not arise *de novo*. At each college, the work on completion represents an evolution of other work that has its foundations in each college's prior efforts to support the success of its students. The following information provides a brief summary of the more full description of findings that are explained in greater detail in the initial report on Walla Walla Community College.

### *Theme: Importance of Campus Culture*

In the initial findings from Walla Walla Community College, interview data emphasize the importance of the culture that the college developed around completion. In the initial site visit that the four colleges

made to Walla Walla Community College, the college's president asked the participants if they knew what their completion rate was for their colleges, and few of the people attending, at that point, could offer a response. He went on to explain that at Walla Walla Community College, it is expected and communicated that everyone should know the college's completion rate, and their role in helping to improve it as a measure of the college's success. In the evaluation team's interviews with staff and administrators at Walla Walla Community College, it was clear that the "culture of completion" went deeper than just an awareness of the student completion rates.

Collaboration forms a critical component of Walla Walla Community College's culture, and it contributed to the impacts of this project at the four replicating colleges. In the evaluation team's earliest interviews, as we spoke to people at Walla Walla Community College, they explained the connection among various campus departments that contributed to the college's completion efforts. They explained, for example, how the campus' Information Technologies director had approached the Student Services department to see what information they needed to support their completion work. In responding to the request from Student Services, the IT department worked closely with the Institutional Research office to develop a "dashboard" that allowed consolidation of data that gave the Student Services staff a central location to review student progress. As the dashboard was implemented and into the time of this project, Student Services, IT, and IR departments met regularly to review the efficacy of the tool and to make adjustments that met users' needs.

In order for that collaboration to continue, staff at Walla Walla Community College needed to maintain strong and ongoing relationships among key staff and administrators. This included formal meetings where intra- and inter-department discussions are encouraged. It also included informal connections that employees have made and maintain as they conduct their daily work lives. That relational culture gets extended to the ways in which the staff and administrators interact with students. A student who may be in distress can bring a concern or issue to a variety of people and because people understand who accomplishes what tasks, the initial contact can walk that student to the appropriate person to get served.

The final component of the culture of completion is an emphasis on innovation. Walla Walla Community College staff are encouraged to develop ideas and there are venues for those ideas to be considered for implementation. An example is the "triage" team that looks at students' immediate financial needs and provides a process for rapid response to financial needs. That came about as staff realized that the traditional avenues were inadequate to serve a student, for example, who did not have funds to pay a light bill or was about to lose housing. Staff recommended the development of a triage team that would recommend immediate release of funds made available by the college's Foundation office. The culture of innovation allows new solutions to be recommended in response to needs.

#### *Theme: Importance of Commitment from Across Campus*

The collaboration at Walla Walla Community College and the participating colleges in this project support the development and implementation of completion work as the responsibility of the entire campus and not as tasks that can be assigned only to a specific role or roles. As noted in the example above, Walla Walla Community College needed participation from departments such as its IT, IR, and

Foundation office to be successful. Completion could not be the sole responsibility of Student Services. For the collaboration noted above to exist, the college required a commitment from all parts of the campus to provide collaboration and support. That meant committing to discussions and meetings, but it also meant that departments across campus had to prioritize their work so that completion work became a part of their efforts. The financial aid office had to participate in the triage funding team. The Foundation need to raise funds and find time to distribute funds as part of its weekly routine. The IR and IT departments had to assist in developing the data sets that were needed.

In order to make that commitment of time and resources, completion had to become a priority in the college's strategic plan and work. The president, vice-presidents, deans, and directors had to see this work as a priority in their areas to allow for staff's participation. At Walla Walla Community College, the administrators committed to completion as a priority and that prioritization fueled the work dramatically as staff saw the importance and value of completion to their work – as well as they saw results from their efforts.

*Theme: Importance of Systems that are Responsive to Need*

Walla Walla Community College evolved key systems to support its completion work. As suggested above, having technologies was one of those key systems. The data dashboard allowed completion coaches and other campus personnel to find information on students much more readily than they had prior to the dashboard's development. As noted in the initial report on Walla Walla Community College, the college also generated additional technologies that the campus was able to use in both completion coaching and other operational processes. What is remarkable at Walla Walla Community College was the ways in which those technologies formed the point of dialogue among different components of the campus community. The IT and IR departments sought to work closely with both managers and end users to ensure that the campus' technology systems aligned with daily operational and strategic needs. To achieve that aim, they used a design model of development that allowed for iterative feedback and constant adjustment to meet needs.

The development of those technologies is critical to Walla Walla Community College's success since access to student and campus data are important to understand which students are in what need. Prior to the development of the data dashboard, staff had to seek information from multiple sources, and they had to compile information on students needing support in "shadow" systems that only a few people (or in some cases, one person) could access. While some of that still exists at Walla Walla Community College, and to a greater extent still exists at the replicating colleges, the use of data systems to centralize information reduces the amount of time staff take in compiling, maintaining, and accessing information.

The final system that required attention at Walla Walla Community College was a change of policies and procedures. As the college developed its completion efforts, it found that some policies and procedures were contrary to supporting students' completion. It adopted new policies, like "autoconferral," that helped transferring students, especially, or changing the fee structure for applying for graduation which created a barrier for some students. In reviewing and changing these policies, the college reduced barriers and provided more supports for students' completion.

*Theme: Importance of Finances and Funding:*

Financial barriers are not the only reason why students do not complete, but they are one major reason. If a college seeks to improve its completion rates, it must understand the financial barriers that exist for its students, and it must provide a response that address the need. At Walla Walla Community College, that meant understanding the ways in which its existing, short-term emergency funding was not adequate for the immediate needs of some students. As noted previously, and explained in more detail in the initial report, the college developed a “triage” system whereby a student can come to any front-line staff and be helped into a system of immediate review that can provide immediate funding within 24 hours. Given the processes and constrictions of state and federal financial aid funds, the college needed to find another source of funding that could be managed without the slowing processes of the state/federal funds, but with clear fiscal oversight and management. For Walla Walla Community College, that has meant direct management by its Foundation office which receives requests from the triage team and processes those immediately. After expending an initial infusion of funds from a national award that the college received, the Foundation has raised funds for its emergency completion funds.

In order to sustain the project, however, Walla Walla Community College has had to institutionalize its funding for its completion efforts. In addition to the Foundation’s development of ongoing extraordinary funds, the college has put the completion coaches into its base budget, after starting the positions with funding from its national award. As noted previously, the units within the college have also provided time and resources to start and maintain projects that focus on completion.



## The Institutional Experience: What the data tell us about the replicating colleges as a whole

A separate report has been provided to each of the four replicating colleges for their internal use. All four reports are provided to the project director; however, each college only received its report. To account on the experiences of the four colleges in this report, their experiences are aggregated in what follows. Where there are differences, those differences are identified without identifying the specific college(s). In this section, the colleges' experiences are explicated in relation to the four themes and in relation to the project's impact.

As noted previously, the focus on completion is not new to any of the four campuses and this project is an extension of other work in either established or developing projects at each college. Therefore, the ways in which the completion work was housed at each of the four colleges looks different. Even though three of the colleges are within the same college district, each of them approached the work differently. Where the completion coaches reported, for example, was unique on each campus. One campus hired graduate interns to conduct the completion coaching, and another housed the completion coaching within its existing TRIO program. Those differences, however, allowed for adaptation of the work to the needs of each campus, rather than being determiners of the project's impact. For the most part, the organizational reporting structure, and the systems in which the completion work was conducted seemed to have little influence on the efficacy of the project. As will be noted in the analysis of student data that follows, there were very few differences in student outcomes among the four campuses. Additionally, there are few reported differences in how the project was supported or infused into the fabric of each campus' overall work. This all suggests that the adaptations made by the four campuses allowed the project to be successfully implemented at each campus. A more rigid and uniform adoption of the Walla Walla Community College work may not have been as successful.

The data from the initial and final interviews of the four replicating campuses plainly support that assertion. In relation to the four themes that are explained above, we find that the project has had helped shift campuses toward student-centered completion models that fit within the systems and cultures of each institution. The sections that follow are a synthesis of the reports we provided to each campus about their work.

### Theme: Campus Culture at the Four Colleges

The project built on existing structures at each campus that supported collaboration and innovation. Respondents in initial and final interviews all provided evidence of their campus' prior work in supporting completion. Many interviewed respondents noted that completion coaching was unique among these other initiatives for its focus on students near completion. While the colleges have other initiatives to support retention and completion prior to PFL, one interviewed administrator noted that the college had not had, "...intentional, laser-focused project like this" before.

Because of the prior work at each college, as noted previously, the embedding of completion coaches and the focus work on completion were adapted within each campus' existing culture. It is consistent across all four replicating campuses that this work encouraged and supported collaboration both within each campus and across campuses and beyond the four colleges. It is consistent across all four campuses that the project generated a focal point for discussions and action. As the completion coaches worked across departments to address issues, they assisted their colleges in identifying service gaps to students and systems gaps in their college. A comment from a project participant who described how a challenge was overcome provided an example in relation to how the campus solved a problem with data collection:

We were not able to confirm that the reports were accurate. And we found that we wanted more from the tool. And what we wanted from the tool we could get just from working with our local campus. And then when it became obvious that further developing the tool might not be a viable option, it just made sense then to work with our campus to get the data that we wanted.

Interview data are filled with multiple reports of resolving issues in a similar, entrepreneurial way. Participants from the four colleges consistently described multiple examples of how the PFL campus teams would work together to generate solutions and address barriers. Coaches' holistic scope allowed them to bridge multiple areas of student services. As solutions became evident in the completion work, those solutions often positively impacted other efforts in the college, also. One interviewed administrator offered this example of how the work begun in the completion project has extended out to the campus:

Setting up that spirit of partnership and collaboration has been a very important practice that [coaches] established for us. It makes it easier to create credibility for other Student Services functions to go into different areas and say, "And what can we do for you?"

During the project, each of the colleges used their participation to interrogate their existing practices and make students' completion a focus of the college. As noted in the report on the learning communities (available online at the Project Finish Line site), participants' interactions with each other and with the consulting team from Walla Walla Community College and being able to collaborate widely meant that each college could take ideas from other colleges and adapt them to the work at each college. That provided an "infection" point of ideas as ideas went from projects participants, back to their colleges, and into campus general discussions. In each college, the important "culture of completion" evolved widely. One interviewee, at the end of the project, offered these comments that are representative of others echoed among all participants:

We're trying to look at a completion model that really looks at the lifecycle of students from the very beginning when they're exploring what careers they want to focus on through that advising component and then as they get closer to graduation and completion coaches really push them forward to get through."

## Theme: Commitment from Across Campus at the Four Colleges

The most significant measure of the ongoing commitment to the completion work started in this project is that all four replicating campuses have found ways to extend the work of completion coaches into the coming academic year. While budgets in all of the four campuses are stretched, multiple respondents noted that there is no guarantee that completion coaches will be funded after this coming year, that is the case for all services at all colleges. However, the commitment for funding in this coming year suggests that the project participants have made the case for their efficacy strongly for the coming budget cycle. Being added to the base budget funding of a college during budget reductions is no small feat for a new program that had not existed three years ago.

The commitment to place completion coaching within a college's budget is a testament, also, to the support that the project has had from administrators and staff at all four campuses since budgets are generated as part of a collaborative exercise in which multiple people on campus must agree to provide new funding. All of the campuses experienced turnover in the project staff during the project. However, none of those turnovers affected the commitment. Two of the campuses had interim presidents and vice-presidents during the project, and it was clear that as new executive administrators came to the campus, the project team was able to show the positive impact of their work. There was very strong commitment expressed by all of the executive-level administrators who were interviewed.

All of the campuses found very strong support in the departments within their Student Services division. The coaches and other participants in the project all came from Student Services and it is within this division that the coaches are all housed. Much of the work that the coaches perform requires that they work closely with and learn from with Student Services departments such as registration and financial aid. Collaboration outside of Student Services proved to be less uniformly successful among the four colleges.

As noted in the report that our team prepared on technology and data access during the project, during the project three of the four colleges experienced challenges in having the kind of centralized data sources that helps Walla Walla Community College. By the end of the project, respondents at those three colleges reported some hope in resolving the issues as their colleges participate in the development and use of a new product. This is coupled with challenges in working with institutional research offices that have been in flux and are overwhelmed. The fourth college reports very strong support from its IT and IR offices which worked in tandem to support the project's needs, much in the same way that Walla Walla Community College had done.

Of the four, one college reported being satisfied with the project's connection to the instructional unit of the college. Overall, respondents at that college described increased collaboration between the faculty and Student Services. One associate dean said that the project had highlighted the importance of collaboration between Student Services and Instruction. As college students are busy and often leave campus after their classes, Student Services and Instruction have been "working together to bring the service into the classroom." For example, some faculty members at that college have given students in their classes an assignment to write their educational plan, a task that previously would not have received attention during instructional time. On other occasions, staff members from Student Services

have attended classes, in order make information and resources available to students during instructional time.

The other colleges seek to find better connections to their instructional colleagues. Responses suggest that this is a result of focus, time, and the demands of other tasks, rather than recalcitrance on anyone's part.

### Theme: Systems that are Responsive to Needs at the Four Colleges

As noted in the section immediately above, the technology and data systems worked on one campus and are in process in the others. The issues for the three campuses are highlighted in the report provided to those campuses, so will not be repeated here. It is instructive, however, to look at the fourth campus to see what was unique about the campus. In addition to creating a specialized dashboard tool that staff at the campus can use, the IT/IR staff remained active participants in the project from its onset. They attended meetings, offered workshops, and were available for consultation for their own project staff and the staff of other campuses in the project. The IR director left that college mid-way through the project, but still attended some of the site visit meetings to offer advice. That level of engagement in the project appears to have paid off for the college. It is important to note, however, that the staff at this college are still using some Excel sheets that only one or a few people can access, and that they need to consult multiple databases that are not connected. This college is still working toward solutions and hasn't discovered a fully implementable solution for all of its needs.

In surveying participants at each of the learning community events, we found that the project generated vibrant discussions at each college about the policies and procedures that impact completion. That was corroborated as we interviewed participants at the end the project. All of the colleges have changed some of their policies and practices, and all of the colleges continue to have ongoing discussions about their policies and practices. Changes include:

- Process change around repayment for emergency assistance funds
- Improving intake & student orientation
- Implementing auto-confer and reverse transfer auto-confer
- Streamlining processes for course substitutions, prior learning assessments, and evaluation of work experience
- Streamlining the graduation process
- Improving course scheduling
- Implementing an advising initiative for students whose GPAs fall below 2.0
- Creating an early warning system for referring students to services, modeled on Walla Walla's system
- Implementing cross-training for all new student services staff
- Improving mandatory educational planning policies and processes
- Suspending a \$20 fee to apply for graduation.
- Students who have earned at least 24 credits can earn a degree or certificate from the college through reverse transfer from another institution.

- Streamlining pathways to completion so that students don't "rack up credits and not get anywhere."
- Regularly reaching out to students who do not re-enroll from one quarter to the next
- Registration policies, such as the deadlines for registration and add/drop dates
- Course availability so that students can take required courses when they need them

While not all colleges have adopted all of these policies and practices, the list suggests ways in which the project has shifted the discussions on the four campuses and that the project has helped these campuses evolve their policies and practices.

### Theme: Finances and Funding at the Four Colleges

As noted previously, financial challenges are often a significant contributor to students' non-completion. At Walla Walla Community College, that need was resolved as the Foundation took an active role in providing emergency funding that allowed students to receive funds rapidly. That relationship between Students Services and the Walla Walla Community College Foundation took time to develop. The relationships at the four replicating colleges are similarly evolving. At one college, the Foundation has partnered with a local credit union to provide completion funding. At another, the Foundation has helped provide emergency funding, albeit in a "last dollar" model that requires students to exhaust all other forms of financial aid prior to receiving the funding – a policy that respondents see as problematic. One college reported that it is still working on how to develop emergency funding. The fourth college has adopted a model similar to Walla Walla Community College's that has created an endowment of \$115,000 that provides \$4,000 annually for emergency funding. All of the colleges continue to evolve their emergency funding processes to be more responsive to the needs of their students.

In addition to a need for funding for students, the campuses have, as noted previously, committed to sustained funding for the completion work that began in the project.

## The Student Experience

### Methods

In providing a summary report to the project funder, the project director provided summative quantitative data on the project's impact. Table 1 on the following page provides those summative data to show the service that the project provided students. It is clear from both the data that we include from that report in Table 1, and the other components of that report, that the project has positively impacted completion rates at the four campuses. For our analysis, we sought to analyze deeper than the numbers of completers and the increase at each campus. We sought to see the impacts of specific interventions on specific populations to see if any of the interventions had more or less impact on specific groups. We conduct this analysis because it is vital to look more closely than just the outcomes to see if certain groups are more advantaged and if certain interventions have more impact.

To conduct our analysis, we obtained de-identified data files from each college's IR office. Those data files provided information on 31 key variables. Over the course of the project, we worked with the IR and IT staff at the four colleges to determine both what data would be feasible to collect and in what format those data should be collected. We produced the data table in Appendix A and sent it to the IR directors at each campus to collect two years of data. Because two of the campuses began the project six months early, we made our request to each pair of campuses at different times, and the two pairs each submitted data for different quarters. However, all campuses submitted exactly two years of data to provide a clear comparison among groups.

Data were received in comma separated values files and then imported to Excel for initial analyses. That allowed to see that some data variables could not be used because the data were not in the proper format or the database corrupted some of the data. That is normal for data sets coming from multiple sources.

We employed a two-stage process for our analysis. We began with descriptive analyses of the variables to look at any interesting or unusual trends within each variable. That allowed us to further refine the data set and have an initial view of the data's story. We found, for example, that the population served by the project mirrored the demographic profile that is found in the four colleges, and that the four colleges have some differences in makeup.

It is after that step that we conducted a multinomial logistic regression to see what relationships exist among the multiple variables. The logistic regression model analysis and results were generated using SPSS statistical software with the equation:

$$\ln\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right) = \beta_0 + \sum(\beta_1 x_1 \text{K } \beta_n x_n)$$

Table 1 (from project funder report) <sup>1</sup> Project Finish Line Summary Data Winter Quarter 2015-Fall Quarter 2016	
	Total
Students Identified for Completion Coaching	8,016
Students Responding to Completion Outreach Efforts	3,809
Students Agreeing to Work with Completion Coaches	2,193
Completes a Short Term Certificate	230
Completes a Certificate (not short-term)	91
Earns a Two-Year or a BA Degree	1,009
Total Credentials Completed	1,330
Total Unique Student Completions	1,147
Student Transfer before Two-Year Degree	130
Enrolled	695
Not Enrolled	1,798

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The numbers in this current report differ from the numbers in the funder report because of the different timeframes in which data were collected for the two reports. The funder report collected data from the project's onset to fall, 2016 when the funder report was delivered.

## Findings Based on Student Data

In the section that follows, we provide both a summary of the data and our findings. Our analysis is based on:

- n = 2,347 Students from four colleges over a two-year period
- 1,154 students in contact with a completion coach finished the degree or certificate they sought

<i>Gender</i>	
Male	51.6%
Female	48.2%
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	
White, non-Hispanic	44.4%
Hispanic	10.4%
African American	11.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	14.1%
Native Am/Native Alaskan	1.5%
Other/Not Reported	14.0%
<i>Age (Mean = 30)</i>	
Under 20 years old	1.6%
20-24 years old	22.3%
25-29 years old	12.1%
30-34 years old	5.5%
35-39 years old	3.7%
40-44 years old	2.3%
45-49 years old	1.4%
50-54 years old	1.6%
55-59 years old	0.9%
60-64 years old	0.7%
65 years or older	0.3%
<i>Student Intent</i>	
Transfer	66.8%
Professional/Technical	26.5%
Basic Skills	2.7%
Non-Degree Seeking	1.5%
Other/Undecided	1.3%



The demographic profile of the students served by this project skews toward transfer students. These numbers suggest that the project either through its design or focus served more transfer students than it did other intent categories. That is higher than the percentages of transfer students in these colleges, according to the profile of the four campuses in the most recent academic year report available through the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (see Table 3). However, other demographic variables show that the population served in the project aligns with the age, gender, and ethnic profiles of students in these schools.

	Green River	Seattle Central CC (includes SVI)	North Seattle CC	South Seattle CC	Total
Transfer	5,002	3,502	2,520	1,706	12,730
% of total	57%	52%	53%	29%	49%
Workforce	1,722	1,976	1,394	2,422	7,514
% of total	20%	29%	29%	41%	29%
Pre-college	1,243	388	308	843	2,782
% of total	14%	6%	6%	14%	11%
Basic Education	863	919	559	874	3,215
% of total	10%	14%	12%	15%	12%
Total	8,830	6,785	4,781	5,845	26,241

One proxy for the socio-economic status of students is the amount of financial aid and the type of financial aid they receive. Fifty-nine percent of the students served by this project qualified for financial aid, with a mean of 2.8 financial aid awards per student. As noted in Table 4, the awards are mostly needs based, suggesting that the project did impact those students with financial need.

	YES	NO	Total % Receiving
Number of All Financial Aid Awards	1394	954	59%
Pell Grant Awarded	948	1399	40%
Student Loan Received	417	1930	18%
College Based Scholarship Received	281	2066	12%
External Scholarship Received	784	1563	33%
Work Study Awarded	184	2163	8%
VA Benefits Received	97	2250	4%
BFET Funds Received	164	2183	7%
Opportunity Grant Funds Received	190	2157	8%
State Need Grant Received	831	1516	35%

## Completion Student Outcomes

A project like Project Finish Line can increase its outcomes by focusing on those students who are most readily served. As noted above, the demographic profile of students served by the project suggests that is not the case. The project served a diverse range of students in terms of race/ethnicity, economic levels, age, and gender. In order to understand whether there are any biases within the final outcomes of the project (i.e., the students whom the project supported to completion), we sought to see the relationships among the demographic variables and the outcomes. In so doing, we explored whether one group or student profile was better served than another. We chose to use logistic regressions to conduct our analyses among the demographic and outcome variables because the data were categorical and could be analyzed within and among those categories to determine the relationships among those variables. Students' status as completers or non-completers was employed as the dependent variable in our analysis. The multiple demographic categories that we used as covariates (i.e., independent variables) are noted above.

We also employed logistic regression to explore the various interventions in the project. Again, the dependent variable in our analyses was the completion status of each student (completed or not completed). The various interventions for which we had consistent data for all four campuses provided the covariates for the analysis. While there are other variables where data were collected for one or more campuses, we limited to the analysis to only those variables where there are consistent data available across all campuses. For example, one campus relied on automated phone calls and included the data for those contacts with their data set; however, because those data are only available for that one campus, they are not included in this analysis.

The summary of the findings<sup>2</sup> is that:

- 1) Student demographics (e.g., sex, race/ethnicity, financial need, and age cohort) are *not significant* in establishing the probability/likelihood of completion with success coaches.
- 2) Student intent (transfer, professional/technical, basic skills, non-degree seeking, or other) are *not significant* in establishing the probability/likelihood of completion with success coaches. [However, when we parsed each category out as dummy variables and ran them individually, each was significant at 99%. This represents an anomaly in the data.]
- 3a) The type of contact between success coaches and students (email, phone, or in-person appointment) is *not significant* in establishing the probability/likelihood of completion with success coaches.
- 3b) The frequency of contact between success coaches and students (1 or more, 2 or more, etc.) is *not significant* in establishing the probability/likelihood of completion with success coaches.

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<sup>2</sup> The data outputs for these analyses are available on request as a PDF file. That document is provided to the project director but not included in this report because of its length (122 pages).

The statistical evidence supports an assertion that students served by the project were not disadvantaged by their demographic profile or academic intent. The project had equal successes with all of the categories of students which our analysis reviewed. Our analysis also suggests that the method of contact and the frequency of contact by the completion coaches did not have a relationship to student completion. Within this data set, it appears that having made contact is the most critical determinate to the success of completion coaching, regardless of the method or frequency. As noted in the interview data and in the project funder report, there is ample anecdotal evidence that some students benefitted from multiple and ongoing contacts. However, from this holistic analysis of data of students impacted by the project, the evidence for the entire population is that any contact makes a difference.

## Lessons of Project Finish Line

Triangulation between quantitative and qualitative data suggest that Project Finish Line was successful because it addressed the challenges of increasing completions at the four colleges from a systems approach. While the colleges continue to evolve this work, they have worked to develop the cross-campus collaborations and systems to continue the successes from this project. The interview data and data from the learning communities, especially, suggest that having the funding from Project Finish Line served as a catalyst to focus each campus' efforts and to provide a focus for the work that helped tie multiple other initiatives together.

The importance of using data to inform practice was another lesson of Project Finish Line. In addition to the formative analyses that we provided as the evaluation team, each college developed robust data systems to analyze their work and to make adjustments to that work as needed. That institution-level data collection and analysis provided not just information for action, but it established an expectation that actions are informed by data. More than one interviewee noted the important standard that the Project Finish Line team has established or reinforced on campus.

Project Finish Line provided opportunities for staff and administrators to innovate new practices that informed each college's larger structures. The adaptive nature of the project allowed each campus to create its own version of completion work, and that encouraged the creation of, actually, four unique Project Finish Line models. Even the central role of the completion coach has evolved uniquely on each campus. This diversity in adaptation, while maintaining fidelity to the aims of the project, has been a significant strength of the project.

Over the course of the project, encouraging communications among the project participants, as well as inviting people from other campuses and organizations to meetings, has offered project participants and others in the region and opportunity for ongoing learning. The learning communities contributed to that, but so did regular phone conferences and site visits where there were opportunities to learn new ideas and share new knowledge. The project employed a model of professional development that relied on social construction of knowledge, and that model paid off as participants "owned" the process by recommending topics for exploration, offering workshops on what they learned, and inviting others from their campus to join them. At the end of the project, despite turnovers in participating staff at every campus, the project participants have developed a strong learning community that now seeks ways to continue.

Finally, a significant contributor to the success of Project Finish Line has been the support provided by the model generated by Walla Walla Community College. They developed their model over a number of years and were generous in their willingness to share their knowledge and time as the four replicating colleges developed and continued their work. Of special note, as identified in multiple interview comments, was Kristi Wellington-Baker who participated in planning and implementing Project Finish Line and was available for consultation and support to the four campuses.

## What's Next

The colleges have committed to continuing this work at each of the four replicating campuses. In order to do so, they will need to continue the efforts to refine and develop completion coaching and the four elements that support completions at each campus. As noted previously, Project Finish Line has been successful because it allowed for innovation and continued adaptation. As new staff come and staff move on, it will be critical not only to institutionalize the roles, but the expectations for what those roles have provided in helping the campuses focus on completion. That will require a continued commitment to the conversations that helped Project Finish Line – conversations both on and off campus. The one collaboration in which all of the colleges, including Walla Walla Community College, agreed that this discussion needs to take stronger root is in the instructional units within each campus. Students, including the majority who never visit Student Services, all attend classes. To fully engage the campus in developing a completion culture, each campus must find ways to engage its faculty and other members of its instructional unit.

## Appendix A

Data Dictionary – Requested from Project Finish Line Participating Colleges

<b>Category</b>	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Data Definition</b>	<b>Data Format</b>
<b><i>Demographic Information</i></b>	SID	college issued SID needed	ID from SMS
	Gender	As self-reported in college records	Data from SMS
	Ethnicity	As self-reported in college records	Data from SMS
	Birthdate	As self-reported in college records	Data from SMS
	Intent Code	As self-reported in college records	Data from SMS
	EPC code	As self-reported in college records	Data from SMS
	Pell Grant Awarded	Yes/No: Identification whether student has received at any point at the college where she/he is receiving completion coaching services	Yes or No
	Student Loan Received	Yes/No: Identification whether student has received loan funding at any point at the college where she/he is receiving completion coaching services	Yes or No
	College-based Scholarship Received	Yes/No: Identification of any scholarship award provided by the college where she/he is receiving completion coaching services	Yes or No

External Scholarship Received	Yes/No: Identification of any scholarship award provided by any entity outside of the college where she/he is receiving completion coaching services	Yes or No
Work Study Awarded	Yes/No: Identification whether student has participated in a work study at any point at the college where she/he is receiving completion coaching services	Yes or No
VA Benefits Received	Yes/No: Identification whether student has received educational VA benefits at any point at the college where she/he is receiving completion coaching services	Yes or No
BFET Funds Received	Yes/No: Identification whether student has received BFET funding at any point at the college where she/he is receiving completion coaching services	Yes or No
Opportunity Grant Funds Received	Yes/No: Identification whether student has received Opportunity Grant funding at any point where she/he is receiving completion coaching services	Yes or No
State Need Grant Funds Received	Yes/No: Identification whether student has received State Needs Grant funding at any point at the college where she/he is receiving completion coaching services	Yes or No
<b><i>Progress Variables</i></b>		
Quarter First Enrolled	Identification of the specific quarter in which the student began where she/he began receiving completion coaching services	Quarter Code from SMS

Quarter Most Recently Enrolled	Identification of the most recent quarter in which the student was enrolled at the college where she/he began receiving completion coaching services	Quarter Code from SMS
Number of Quarters not Enrolled from First Enrollment	Identification of the specific number of quarters in which the student enrolled at the specific college where she/he began receiving completion coaching services	Whole Number
Date Completed Degree or Certificate	Identification of the specific quarter and year in which a degree or certificate is awarded	Quarter Code from SMS
Number of Credits at Time of Completion	Number of credits received at the college where the student is receiving completion coaching services after degree or certificate completed	Whole Number
Number of Credits in Basic Skills	Identification of the number of credits in basic skills courses at the college where the student is receiving completion coaching services	Whole Number
First Course Enrolled in Basic Skills	Identification of the first basic skills course in which the student was enrolled at the college where she/he received completion coaching services	Course Code from SMS
Quarter First Pre-college English Course Taken	Identification of the quarter and year in which the student was enrolled in a pre-college English course at the college where she/he received completion coaching services	Quarter Code from SMS

***Intervention Data***



Date First Met with Completion Coach	identification of the date at which the student met with the completion coach either in-person or by phone	Date Format: 01-01-2016
Times Met with Completion Coach	total number of phone and in-person meetings between the student and completion coach  <i>Note: Provide these data if they have been collected. If not collected, leave blank.</i>	Whole Number
Number of total phone contacts made to student to date	Include all contacts made on behalf of the completion project by any sources (including robocalls)  <i>Note: Provide these data if they have been collected. If not collected, leave blank.</i>	Whole Number
Number of total e-mail messages sent to student by all sources	Include all contacts made on behalf of the completion project by any sources (including e-mail blasts)  <i>Note: Provide these data if they have been collected. If not collected, leave blank.</i>	Whole Number
Number of phone contacts by completion coach	Include the total number of phone contacts by the coach only. Do not include contacts made on the coach's behalf, staff member, or through robocalls	Whole Number

Number of phone contacts made on behalf of the completion project and not made by the completion coach	<p><i>Note: Provide these data if they have been collected. If not collected, leave blank.</i></p> <p>Include the total number of phone contacts made on behalf of the completion coaching project, but not made by the completion coach</p>	Whole Number
Number of e-mail messages sent by the completion coach	<p><i>Note: Provide these data if they have been collected. If not collected, leave blank.</i></p> <p>Include the total number of e-mail messages sent by the coach only. Do not include contacts sent on the coach's behalf, staff member, or through e-mail blasts</p>	Whole Number
Number of e-mail messages made on behalf of the completion project and not made by the completion coach	<p><i>Note: Provide these data if they have been collected. If not collected, leave blank.</i></p> <p>Include the total number of e-mail messages sent on behalf of the completion coaching project, but not sent by the completion coach</p>	Whole Number

