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FACT SHEET: ED Launches Initiative for Low-Income Students to Access New Generation Of Higher Education Providers

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Today, the U.S. Department of Education (http://www.ed.gov/) (ED) is inviting eight selected partnerships between institutions of higher education and non-traditional providers to participate in the EQUIP (Educational Quality through Innovation Partnerships) experiment.

These partnerships will allow students—particularly low-income students—to access federal student aid for the first time to enroll in programs offered by non-traditional training providers, in partnership with colleges and universities, including coding bootcamps, online courses, and employer organizations. The goals of the experiment are to: (1) test new ways of allowing Americans from all backgrounds to access innovative learning and training opportunities that lead to good jobs, but that fall outside the current financial aid system; and (2) strengthen approaches for outcomes-based quality assurance processes that focus on student learning and other outcomes. The experiment aims to promote and measure college access, affordability, and student outcomes.

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> 📄 Transcript of Press Call (http://www2.ed.gov/documents/press-releases/equip-partnership-press-call.pdf)

EQUIP falls under the Experimental Sites Initiatives, which test the effectiveness of statutory and regulatory flexibility for postsecondary institutions that disburse federal financial aid. Through the EQUIP program, the Department seeks to learn about these new models and their costs and educational and employment outcomes for students, as well as explore new methods to measure quality. Testing and learning from this program may help inform future policy reforms.

"I'm thrilled that students will soon have access to these innovative programs, developed in partnership with colleges and new providers, with the help of federal financial aid," said Under Secretary of Education Ted Mitchell. "As these innovative programs continue to develop, it will be increasingly important to understand what an outcomes-based quality assurance system looks like for such programs. I am encouraged to see that these colleges, providers, and quality assurance entities have stepped forward to provide models for doing so."

Why we are launching EQUIP

Over the next decade, the share of jobs requiring some level of higher education is expected to grow more rapidly than those that do not, with 11 of the 15 fastest-growing occupations requiring a postsecondary education. That is why the Obama Administration has worked to ensure that all students have access to a high-

quality, affordable higher education. From the First in the World grants with which institutions of higher education designed and are testing innovative approaches to teaching and supporting students, to recent changes that will allow students to apply for federal aid earlier and more simply, the U.S. Department of Education has continuously worked to promote college access, affordability, and completion.

The expansion of higher education to more students means that students today are more likely to be older, living away from campus, and attending part-time while balancing work and school. To meet the needs of all students, our higher education system must continue to innovate and evolve.

There are many efforts across the higher education community to explore new ideas and affordable models for offering a quality education, such as short-term credential options, and online or blended skills training that is responsive to the need for accountable innovation. These programs can be accessible, affordable, and customized to the needs of a diverse student population.

For students seeking access to these new models of education, there are two key barriers to enrolling: lack of access to financial aid, and lack of information about the program's quality that can help students make a confident choice about whether to enroll. Because many of these new models fall outside of the traditional higher education system, students who wish to participate in them do not have access to federal financial aid. This experiment is designed to build on Administration efforts to increase access and strengthen transparency with tools like the College Scorecard, and to enable the Department to learn more about both issues in a new context.

How the experiment will work

EQUIP will provide federal financial aid to eligible students enrolled in the selected institutions' programs with non-traditional providers. Under the Higher Education Act, colleges and universities are barred from receiving federal student aid for programs in which at least half of the content and instruction is provided by an ineligible entity rather than the institution. As part of an experiment designed to explore the efficacy of the approach, EQUIP will enable students at the selected colleges and universities to receive federal financial aid for programs that exceed the 50 percent cap, thereby increasing access for students to new types of programs and allowing the Department to consider whether those programs resulted in positive student outcomes and how to track meaningful quality measures.

Each partnership between institutions and non-traditional providers will be reviewed and monitored by an independent, third-party quality assurance entity (QAE). QAEs will hold the non-traditional providers and postsecondary institutions accountable by assessing the student outcomes, including learning and employment and the management of the program. Additionally, the institution's accrediting agency must determine that this new program falls within the institution's accreditation.

How the sites were selected

Applications were evaluated on five criteria:

1. **Innovating to Improve Outcomes**: The extent to which the proposed activities will produce innovative, high-quality programs likely to lead to positive student learning and employment outcomes;

2. **Equity and Access**: The extent to which the programs will provide equitable access to high-quality postsecondary education programs, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds;

3. **Quality Assurance**: The extent to which the proposed quality assurance processes have the potential to address key questions about how best to evaluate and ensure the quality of these programs and nontraditional providers;

4. **Affordability**: The extent to which the programs are affordable;

5. **Student and Taxpayer Protections**: Particularly for programs in which students will have access to federal student loans, the strength of proposed student and taxpayer protections.

Based on these criteria, a limited number of institutions were invited today to continue to Phase 3 (https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2015/10/15/2015-26239/notice-inviting-postsecondary-educational-institutions-to-participate-in-experiments-under-the#p-119) of the selection process, in which the institutions will begin to set up their proposed programs and apply to the Department for final approval. These institutions, their non-traditional provider partners, and their quality assurance entities are listed below.

Selected Sites

Institution: Colorado State University Global Campus (Greenwood Village, CO)
Non-traditional provider: Guild Education
Quality assurance entity: Tyton Partners

With Guild Education (http://documents.guildeducation.com/equip-press-release.pdf), the Colorado State University-Global Campus plans to offer a one-year certificate program in Management and Leadership Fundamentals, aimed at helping students advance from low-wage roles into supervisory roles. The credits earned in the certificate can also be applied towards a bachelor's degree from CSU-Global Campus. Half of the program will be comprised of credits from the Guild leadership modules, and the remaining half will be offered through regular CSU-Global coursework. Tyton Partners will form a non-profit organization to serve as the quality assurance entity, in partnership with Burning Glass Technologies, and Professional Examination Service, with support from RSM. Its quality assurance processes will include cognitive and non-cognitive assessments, compliance reviews of the program, and labor-market analytics.

Institution: Dallas Community College System (Dallas, Texas)
Non-traditional provider: StraighterLine
Quality assurance entity: CHEA Quality Platform

In partnership with StraighterLine, the Dallas County Community College District (http://www.prweb.com/releases/2016/08/prweb13617267.htm) (DCCCD) will offer two programs: an associate degree in Science (Business Concentration) and an associate degree in Arts (Criminal Justice Concentration). The programs aim to enable individuals in Dallas County that have attended some college, but who have not yet obtained a credential, to complete their degrees with credentials that can help them land jobs in the community. Students will be able to earn up to three-quarters of their degrees through StraighterLine courses. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation's (CHEA) Quality Platform will serve as the Quality Assurance Entity for this program, measuring critical student outcomes like graduation rates, repayment ability, and the students' cost per credit.

Institution: Marylhurst University (Marylhurst, Oregon)
Non-traditional provider: Epicodus
Quality assurance entity: Climb

In partnership with Epicodus, a local software coding school, Marylhurst will offer a 27-week certificate program in Web and Mobile Development, with the goal of providing access to careers in computer software coding to low-income and historically underserved students. The program is designed to support students in a variety of ways, including using a flipped classroom approach so that in-class time will be used for exercises, projects, and discussions. It will also include a cohort social learning model that pairs students together. In completing the program, students will not only earn a certificate, but also will have access to industry employers through internship opportunities. Climb, Marylhurst's quality assurance entity, will measure the outcomes for students and progress towards program goals, including data on student satisfaction surveys, persistence, retention, completion, and employment information such as salary data.

Institution: Northeastern University (Boston, Massachusetts)
Non-traditional provider: General Electric
Quality assurance entity: American Council on Education (ACE)

In partnership with General Electric (GE), Northeastern University will provide an accelerated bachelor of science in Advanced Manufacturing. As the industry partner, GE will provide experiential training to students, and Northeastern will co-develop the curricula alongside GE and provide academic support services. The American Council on Education (ACE) will serve as the quality assurance entity, leading an academic quality evaluation process and evaluating the learning that takes place and the effectiveness of the program by surveying stakeholders like faculty evaluators, psychometricians, and subject matter experts in the field.

Institution: SUNY Empire State College (Saratoga Springs, New York)
Non-traditional provider: The Flatiron School
Quality assurance entity: American National Standards Institute (ANSI)

The proposed SUNY Empire State (http://www.esc.edu/news/releases/2016/equip-federal-financial-aid.html) program is partnering with the Flatiron School (http://blog.flatironschool.com/forging-new-ground-with-us-department-of-education-to-expand-access-to-job-skills-training/), a coding school with experience serving both low- and high-income students. The program will allow students to earn a certificate in Web Development. Courses will be offered through multiple modalities, including both online and in-person, depending on the program. Graduates will complete the program with a professional work portfolio of web products and a technical blog and profile. The quality assurance entity, American National Standards Institute, will evaluate student work, assessments, and key student outcomes such as credit transfer, retention and completion rates, using and building on existing models and processes for quality assurance

Institution: Thomas Edison State University (Trenton, NJ)
Non-traditional provider: Study.com
Quality assurance entity: Quality Matters

Thomas Edison State University plans to partner with Study.com to offer a bachelor of science in Business Administration and a bachelor of arts in Liberal Studies through online, self-paced video courses. In these programs, at least half of their coursework will be completed by taking Study.com courses. As a correspondence program, students will complete the courses they need at their own pace. Quality Matters (QM), which has served for over a decade as a quality assurance provider, will be the program's quality assurance entity. It will apply and adapt its Online Learner Success quality assurance framework to address the program's specific questions and assess the extent to which the program improves student outcomes such as credits earned, completion of the degree, cost compared to national benchmarks, and student satisfaction.

Institution: University of Texas—Austin (Austin, TX)
Non-traditional provider: MakerSquare
Quality assurance entity: Entangled Solutions and Moody, Famiglietti & Andronico, LLP

The University of Texas at Austin proposes to partner with MakerSquare—a coding and software bootcamp—to offer a 13-week certificate program in Web Development. Students will learn a range of programming skills, including JavaScript and functional web computer programming, to prepare them for jobs as mid-level software engineers. The program will be continuously evaluated by two quality assurance entities: Entangled Solutions and Moody, Famiglietti & Andronico, LLP (MFA). Entangled Solutions will have responsibility for setting and monitoring outcomes-based standards for the program including claims for learning, assessments, student work, placement rates, earnings growth, and student satisfaction, while MFA will provide independent auditing to verify the program's reported data, particularly for employment outcomes.

Institution: Wilmington University (New Castle, Delaware)
Non-traditional provider: Zip Code Wilmington
Quality assurance entity: HackerRank

Wilmington will partner with Zip Code Wilmington, a nonprofit software development organization, to offer a 12-week boot camp program in Software Development that will provide students with skills to pursue an entry-level position using Java programming language. Zip Code Wilmington places graduates of the boot camp in either long-term apprenticeships or direct-hire employment, and plans to help find employment for its students with one of its many corporate partners. Wilmington and Zip Code Wilmington have engaged Hacker Rank and Code to Work to serve as the program's quality assurance entities and to assess student learning, track progress, benchmark performance, assess skills, and the measure employment outcomes.

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