
UTAH WOMEN'S COLLEGE TASK FORCE

Recommendations to
Governor Gary R. Herbert
February 2012

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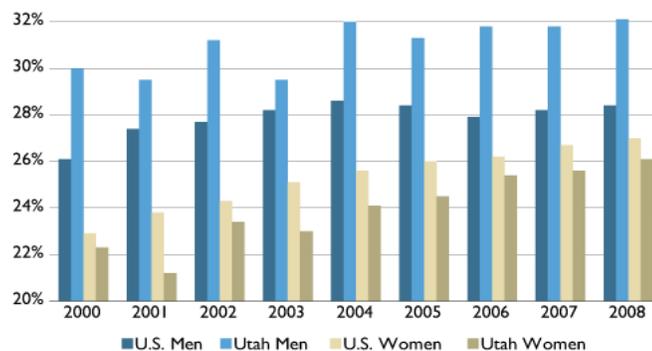
MAXIMIZING UTAH’S POTENTIAL

Utah must harness the power of education for its residents. Securing Utah’s future economic success and high quality of life for its residents rests squarely upon having an educated population. Governor Gary Herbert’s “Big Goal” for an educated population in Utah is that by the year 2020, 66% of Utahns aged 20-64 will have a postsecondary degree or certificate. He envisions a state even stronger and more vibrant as a result.

Increasing the number of Utah residents completing a postsecondary certificate or degree is a powerful strategy for maximizing the quality of life in Utah. An educated population increases both the social and economic “capital” of the state.

Cultivating an educated population requires creating a college-going culture and assuring that both men and women earn postsecondary certificates and degrees to the maximum extent possible. Yet, statistics from various sources show that the state and its residents should be particularly concerned about the completion rates of Utah women. A report from the Utah Department of Workforce Services stated, “While prior to 1990, Utah women showed a higher rate of college graduation than U.S. women, by 2000, Utah women had lost their ‘bachelor’s degree or higher’ educational edge. Utah shows by far the largest gap in the nation between male and female college-graduation rates”.¹ The Utah Foundation² reported that, although the number of women in Utah with a bachelor’s degree or higher has slightly increased since 2000, percentages are not keeping pace with the nation (see Figure 1). This is particularly troubling since Utah men earn bachelor’s degrees or higher at a rate that exceeds the national average.

Figure 1: Percent of Adults (25 and older) with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher



Finally, Pamela Perlich, Senior Research Economist at the University of Utah’s Bureau of Economic and Business Research stated, “Utah women are slightly less likely to have college degrees than are

¹ Langston, L.P. (2009, September 18). *The facts about women in Utah*. Retrieved from the Utah Department of Workforce Services website at <http://jobs.utah.gov/wi/pubs/womencareers/factsheet.html>

² Utah Foundation Research Brief (October 29, 2009). *Educational attainment: Utah falling behind national trends*. Retrieved from http://www.utahfoundation.org/reports/?page_id=532

women in the rest of the nation. This lower overall rate is the result of significantly lower educational attainment of Utah's younger women...So, while Utah young women start college studies at above average rates, they are less likely to complete their degrees."³ The bottom-line is that this is a trend that Utah cannot afford to see continue – the resulting negative impact on the care of young children and upon the economy of the state will be long-lasting and pervasive.

Both men and women with postsecondary degrees and certificates, whether they participate in the paid workforce or not, are better prepared for roles as community members, homemakers, and caretakers. As noted by Dr. Susan Madsen and colleagues, "A college education is more than a gateway to an affluent lifestyle. Earning a college degree has implications far beyond the workplace. The non-tangible benefits of receiving a college degree are, at minimum, equivalent to the monetary ones, and they extend from individuals to families and communities."⁴ Among other benefits, Dr. Madsen cites research that shows the following advantages for college educated women: a healthier lifestyle, increased life satisfaction, better lifelong learning skills, expanded knowledge, enhanced analytic skills, deeper creative thinking, better decision making, increased civic and community engagement, strengthened leadership skills, more developed social skills, heightened self-esteem, and stronger reasoning. These benefits are felt tangibly as women help mold the next generation of Utah children and strengthen our society.

Utah's men and women rank seventh in the nation for high school graduation rates.⁵ Utah residents also enter college at about the same rate as their national peers, yet Utah women drop out far more frequently than women nationally. Those women who initially choose to serve solely in the roles of wife and homemaker and do not complete baccalaureate degrees forego the many benefits to themselves, their spouses, and their children. For those women who have not completed baccalaureate degrees and must be employed due to economic necessity, too few have the education needed to earn a livable wage. Clearly, Utah must address the non-completion of women if it is to achieve the "Big Goal."

In-depth research conducted within Utah identifies several reasons why women do not complete postsecondary degrees and certificates. Often, they do not see the correlation between postsecondary educational achievement and benefits to their children and families. Many do not understand that women more often than not are employed in wage-earning positions during certain times of their lives – either by choice or necessity – and that the ability to earn a livable wage can make a significant difference to the quality of life for them and their families. According to the Utah Department of Workforce Services⁶, almost 59% of married Utah women, 74% of Utah's mothers with school-age children, and about 59% of Utah's mothers of preschool-age children work outside the home.

The challenge for Utah is to create a college-going culture for Utah women AND men and to lower the barriers to completion. Financial support from the legislature will be necessary to meet this challenge. Comprehensive and coherent strategies will lead to Utah having a more educated population – poised to meet the family and employment demands of 2020 and beyond.

³ Perlich, P. S. (2009). *Long term demographic trends impacting higher education in Utah*. Salt Lake City: Bureau of Economic and Business Research, University of Utah, p. 5.

⁴ Madsen, S. R., Hanewicz, C., & Thackeray, S. (January 2010). Research and Policy Brief: *The Value of Higher Education for Women in Utah*, p. 4.

^{5,6} Langston, L.P. (2009, September 18). *The facts about women in Utah*. Retrieved from the Utah Department of Workforce Services website at <http://jobs.utah.gov/wi/pubs/womencareers/factsheet.html>

CHARGE

The Utah Women's College Task Force was created and charged with taking action with partners across the state of Utah to increase, within five years, the number of Utah women holding postsecondary certificates or degrees in relation to the national average. The Task Force was given responsibility to recommend the courses of action needed to produce the following four outcomes:

1. Raise awareness with key stakeholders and with Utah women of the need for women to seek postsecondary certificates and degrees for livable wage careers, successful family- and home-building, participation in society as an educated community member, and personal satisfaction.
2. Engage opinion leaders and influential Utahns to advocate for women's preparation for and participation in postsecondary education.
3. Collaborate with the college and university campuses and other organizations to identify the range of successful actions that can increase the participation and completion rates of Utah women in postsecondary education, including raising the educational aspirations of Utah women to the level of a postsecondary certificate or degree. Make recommendations and advocate for the most effective actions for Utah.
4. Assess effectiveness of actions taken in increasing the number of Utah women completing a postsecondary certificate or degree.

TASK FORCE PROCESS

The plan to form the Women's College Task Force was discussed and recommended to the Governor by the Governor's Education Excellence Commission in May of 2011. A planning team was then formed to work during June and July to draft the Task Force Charge and provide a list of potential Task Force members to the Governor. The Governor made final committee selections and approved the letter of invitation in August. In early September, invitation letters were mailed and acceptances tracked by the Governor's staff (see appendix for list of Task Force members). The Honorable Olene Walker (former Utah Governor) and Bonnie Jean Beesley (Vice-Chair of the Utah Board of Regents) were invited and accepted invitations to co-chair the Task Force.

The Task Force held four meetings: September 28, 2011; October 26, 2011; November 30, 2011; and January 4, 2012. The membership recommended that three working committees also be formed to move the charge forward in this limited timeframe:

- Awareness Committee (Chaired by Mark Willes, President and CEO of Deseret Management Corporation)
- State Policy Committee (Chaired by Lynne Ward, Executive Director of Utah Educational Savings Plan)
- Educational Policy Committee (Chaired by Alan Hall, businessman and Weber State University Board of Trustees)

The membership of these committees included Task Force members and other critical stakeholders in the community (see appendix for member list). The committee chairs presented preliminary recommendations at the November 30 meeting and gave their final recommendations at the meeting on January 4, 2012. The following recommendations emerged from the work of the committees and overall Task Force.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Utah Women’s College Task Force recommends that action should be taken in 10 key areas. The Task Force believes these recommendations contain the strategies for achieving state goals. These recommendations will help provide the support and resources necessary for the women and families of Utah to receive the benefits of education and for Utah to reach its economic and employment goals by 2020. These recommendations fall into two broad categories: *Process and Accountability* and *Big Gear Initiatives*. Details of each recommendation are provided below:

Process and Accountability

1. Enlist Key State Change Agents to Lead in Implementing Recommendations
2. Create a “Hub” for Continuing Efforts to Increase Women’s Completion of Postsecondary Certificates and Degrees
3. Develop and Fund a Long-Term Social Change Media Campaign to Create a “College-going Culture” in Utah

Big Gear Initiatives

4. Expand Guidance and Counseling and Advisement Resources to Create a College-Going Culture
5. Create Women-Focused Mentoring Programs
6. Implement Strategies for Retaining Existing Female Students through Certificate and Degree Completion
7. Create Additional Flexible Attendance and Credit Maintenance Options
8. Identify Increased Support for Campus-Based and Community-Based Women’s Resources that Support College Completion
9. Support Enrollment Growth Funding
10. Identify Additional Financial Support Focusing on New and Continuing Female Students

RECOMMENDATION DETAILS

1. Enlist Key State Change Agents to Lead in Implementing Recommendations

“Big Gear” change requires “Big Gear” leadership. It is recommended the Governor gather and mobilize state change agents who can implement the recommendations. These individuals will issue a “Call to Action” and identify those accountable for implementation. Key change agents to be called to action include (but are not limited to): (1) the Utah System of Higher Education Board of Regents, agency staff, and institutional Presidents; (2) the Utah State Board of Education, agency staff, and K-12 Superintendents; (3) business leaders, and (4) community representatives and opinion leaders from foundations, religious communities, non-profits, government, schools, and neighborhoods.

2. Create a “Hub” for Continuing Efforts to Increase Women’s Completion of Postsecondary Certificates and Degrees

The Task Force has generated great excitement and gained momentum within education and the community at large. It is our recommendation that the Governor’s office create and sponsor (initially through base-level legislative funding) a Utah Center for Women and Higher Education

which can be used as a “hub” for coordinating future work. The purpose of the center is to provide an on-going structure with state-wide presence and accountability for working with partners to achieve the goal of having more Utah women complete postsecondary certificates and degrees. The key partners would be the Governor’s Education Excellence Commission, Utah System of Higher Education, Utah State Office of Education, and Prosperity 2020. A host of additional affiliated agencies and entities throughout the state will also be involved (e.g., Utah Business Education and Schools Trust, UtahFutures, Utah Educational Savings Plan, United Way and other nonprofits and foundations that support the completion agenda) through an advisory board comprised of members who can assure the best ideas are implemented and assessed for effectiveness. The hub for women would be part of a larger organization focused on the completion agenda for ALL Utahns (men, women, underrepresented groups, etc.) that would be housed in and coordinated by the Utah System of Higher Education.

Initial ideas for Center tasks include: identify community resources; work with partners on related efforts; connect volunteers with related, meaningful opportunities; lead public relations efforts; speak to a variety of groups; raise additional funds for future efforts (e.g., a social media campaign, grants to community to assist in related programs); assist doctoral students and faculty who are conducting related research; write grants; provide opportunities for colleges/universities to facilitate dialogue on campus programs and efforts, and other (to be determined). The Task Force recommends the Utah System of Higher Education act as the fiscal agent for the Center to determine the best physical and reporting location for the Center.

3. Develop and Fund a Long-Term Social Change Media Campaign

To create the sustainable change needed in Utah, a long-term social marketing campaign must be implemented. A marketing plan and target populations and strategies have already been developed and identified through the combined efforts of the Task Forces’ Awareness Committee and LOVE Communications. To enact the current marketing plan as outlined, financial support is required; it is our recommendation that the Governor’s office, in partnership with private donors, provide the initial seed capital essential to execute this plan. Through creating this social change campaign, the Governor will increase awareness of the benefits of degree completion for women, their families, and their communities in Utah. It will increase awareness of the resources available to support women in any phase (e.g., thinking about college, going to college directly from high school, staying in college, or even returning after dropping out). It will also reach and inform influencers to create a supportive environment for girls and women.

4. Expand Guidance and Counseling and Advisement Resources to Create a “College-going Culture”

Each Utah high school counselor currently serves an average of 363 students with some counselors providing what support they can to more than 500 students. This is far above the recommended 1:250 ratio suggested by the American School Counselor Association. A lower ratio could provide more effective and meaningful interactions with the next generation of college students. We recommend that additional funding be provided specifically for high school-based college counselors who can encourage students to attend college. With these counselors in place, students will have direct access to a counselor prepared to assist with specific college-related questions and concerns. These college-focused counselors have the latest information to assist college-going behavior and have specific knowledge about the benefits of college for both women and men attendees for the entire array of career and life goals. The Task Force also recommends that an investment be provided for technology to expand the resources and important supplementary tools available on www.UtahFutures.org.

5. Create Women-Focused Mentoring Program Resources

The implementation of mentoring programs is important for all young women, but particularly vital for minority and underrepresented populations in Utah. Research, and personal experiences of several Task Force members, indicates that one of the most effective methods of helping minority and underrepresented students succeed in college is to have a mentor to help them navigate the education system and processes. Many students need assistance with each step of their college journey because they, as well as their family members, are unfamiliar with requirements, available resources, and even basic terminology (e.g., scholarships, financial aid, grants, class sections).

First, it is recommended that both scholars and practitioners assist in developing relevant formal mentoring programs (e.g., curriculum, resource materials, and implementation strategies) that can then be provided to high schools, colleges, and universities around the state. It is also recommended that funding in the form of grants and/or stipends be provided through an application process to individuals, faculty members, or institutions of higher education that would be willing to coordinate and implement these mentoring programs. Finally, the Task Force recommends that informal mentoring opportunities be expanded. These may include such efforts as increased career days, campus tours, student services interactions, and increased efforts specifically related to increased recruitment of women to STEM fields.

6. Implement Strategies for Retaining Existing Female Students through Certificate or Degree Completion

Utah colleges and universities do well at recruiting new students to their campuses which has allowed Utah to keep pace with national enrollment averages. The college completion rates of women in Utah, however, are below those of their national peers. For this reason the Task Force recommends that targeted efforts be made to retain existing female students and, through these retention efforts, focus on the need for every resident (i.e., mother, father, single parent, homemaker, etc.) to enroll in a certificate or degree program and continue through completion. Key to this work is creating a coordinating council with representatives who coordinate efforts for women on all college campuses. The purpose of the newly created coordinating council would be to brainstorm solutions, coordinate pilot tests of interventions, share best practices, and combine efforts to achieve maximum effectiveness. In addition, the coordinating council could support and enhance the efforts of the existing College Access Network of Utah (CANU), a council representative of all campuses (including private, not-for-profit). CANU focuses on under-represented populations and could, within the scope of their work, enhance the focus on under-represented women.

7. Create Additional Flexible Attendance and Credit Maintenance Options

Currently there are too few options available to students who juggle their education, family, and/or work. As the student demographic has evolved to include more individuals who support themselves and families throughout their educational endeavors, it has become more important to adjust the educational settings in which they participate. The Task Force recommends that additional measures be taken to include and incorporate more early morning, evening, and weekend classes throughout Utah's public institutions. Furthermore, the development and execution of quality, fully online courses and degree programs should be implemented, and the use of advanced educational technology programs and strategies should be utilized to ensure academic rigor and student engagement. In addition to measures within higher education, concurrent enrollment programs should be expanded to include more opportunities for students to complete quality courses with college credits while in high school. Marketing strategies should

then be developed so students, guidance counselors, advisors, parents, and the general public will be aware of these changes and improvements. Finally, the institutions of higher learning should give consideration to whether policies that control whether credits “lapse” are overly restrictive.

8. Identify Increased Support for Campus-based and Community-based Women’s Resources that Support College Completion

The Task Force and associated committees have acknowledged the challenges women in Utah seem to identify in many settings (e.g., research studies, anecdotal information from campus leaders) related to attending college. Many of these challenges are often referred to as “women’s issues.” For example, availability of childcare seems to be a serious concern for women at all public institutions. We recommend that a coordinating council (see recommendation 6) with appropriate representatives from all campuses be formed to share existing efforts related to women’s success at each campus. This should include the creation of strategies related to such issues as child care, women’s support groups, campus retention efforts, campus centers (e.g., UVU’s new Women’s Success Center), part-time financial support ideas, outreach to high school students and community members, and so forth.

9. Support Enrollment Growth Funding

For several years now Utah’s legislature has not funded enrollment growth in higher education. The result is that many of Utah’s colleges and universities have experienced soft enrollment caps because students cannot get into the classes required for graduation due to full programs or not having enough sections for a particular class. The lack of access to needed courses delays or stops students from graduating. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the Task Force that separate funding be provided to both K-12 and higher education in an effort to offer the support needed to hire more faculty, expand class offerings, and improve concurrent enrollment options and offerings.

10. Identify Additional Financial Support for New and Continuing Students

Utah is currently 48th in the nation for state grants and federal work study programs. This lack of state and federal support is reflected in Utah’s poor graduation rates. It is well known that one of the major contributing factors for student attrition is lack of financial support. It is, therefore, the Task Force’s recommendation that additional funding be identified to support new and continuing students in the form of need-based success stipends, additional need-based and academic scholarships and grants, a greater allocation of federal work study opportunities, and funding supplements in order to alleviate the need for student loans. Increased financial support for new and continuing students will not only provide an opportunity for them to remain in college long enough to graduate, but it will also reduce the reliance on student loans. Special effort should be made to identify funds that would benefit women in their unique situations (e.g., support for women with children to return to school part-time).

CONCLUSION

The Utah Women’s College Task Force has proven to be a passionate group of individuals who are dedicated to improving educational access, resources, and support to the women and families of Utah. In order to provide the greatest change in attitude and behavior and to improve the education attainment of the women of Utah, these community leaders advocate for the funding and implementation of these ten recommendations.

APPENDIX

TASK FORCE AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Task Force Co-Chairs

Bonnie Jean Beesley, *Board of Regents*
Olene Walker, *Former Governor of Utah*

Task Force Members

Patrice Arent, *Utah House of Representatives*
Deborah Bayle, *United Way of Salt Lake*
Elaine Dalton, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*
Patricia Dark, *El Observador de Utah*
Pastor France Davis, *Calvary Baptist Church*
Amanda Dickson, *KSL News*
Jack Draxler, *Utah House of Representatives*
Alan Hall, *Marketstar Corp.*
Elizabeth Hitch, *Utah System of Higher Education*
Jennifer Hogge, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*
Matthew Holland, *Utah Valley University*
Paul Johnson, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*
Christine Kearn, *Office of the Governor*
Susan Madsen, *Utah Women and Education Project*
Ronda Menlove, *Utah House of Representatives*
Pam Perlich, *Bureau of Economic and Business Research*
Debra Roberts, *Utah State Board of Education*
Victoria Thompson, *University of Utah Graduate Student*
Lillian Tsosie-Jensen, *Utah School Counselor Association*
Vicki Varela, *Salt Lake Chamber*
Lynne Ward, *Utah Educational Savings Plan*
Mark Willes, *Deseret Management Corp.*

Awareness Committee

Mark Willes, *Deseret Management Corp.* (Chair)
Deborah Bayle, *United Way of Salt Lake City*
Elaine S. Dalton, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*
Patricia Dark, *El Observador de Utah*
France Davis, *Baptist Church and Board of Regents*
Amanda Dickson, *KSL News*
Jennifer Hogge, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*
Nicolle Johnson, *Student Representative, Utah Valley University*
Paul Johnson, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*
Susan Madsen, *Utah Women and Education Project*

Gerilyn Merrill, *Community Member*
Jana Scott, *Prosperity 2020*
Vicki Varela, *Salt Lake Chamber*
Tanya Veal, *KSL EVP Cross Platform Development*
Nadine Wimmer, *KSL News*

Education Policy Committee

Alan Hall, *Weber State University Board of Trustees* (Chair)
Pamela Denicke, *SingleParents.org*
Rich Kendall, *Former Commissioner of Higher Education*
Debra Roberts, *Utah Office of Education*
Lillian Tsosie-Jensen, *Utah School Counselor Association*
Matthew Holland, *Utah Valley University*
Ronda Menlove, *Utah House of Representatives*
Isabel Rojas, *United Way of Salt Lake*
Jana Scott, *Prosperity 2020*
Victoria Thompson, *Student Representative, University of Utah*

State Policy Committee

Lynne Ward, *Utah Educational Savings Plan* (Chair)
Patrice Arent, *Utah House of Representatives*
Jack Draxler, *Utah House of Representatives*
Pam Perlich, *Bureau of Economic and Business Research, University of Utah*
Vicki Varela, *Salt Lake Chamber*
Olene Walker, *Former Governor of Utah*