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Winthrop Recognized in Beating the Odds Report to Improve Student Success

Winthrop University

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Winthrop Recognized in Beating the Odds Report to Improve Student Success

Quick Facts

- Winthrop is one of 32 postsecondary institutions – and the only South Carolina institution -- singled out for its efforts to improve college completion rates and prepare students for successful careers.
- Winthrop is creating a comprehensive effort to engage and retain students and improve retention/graduation rates.



Anthony DiGiorgio

ROCK HILL, S.C. – **Winthrop University** is recognized nationally for “beating the odds” in helping students most prone to dropping out of college stay on track toward graduation. In a new report developed with support from the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), **Winthrop University** is one of 32 postsecondary institutions – and the only South Carolina institution -- singled out for its efforts to improve college completion rates and prepare students for successful careers.

The unfortunate reality is that approximately 2.2 million students will enroll as full-time freshmen in America’s colleges and universities this fall, but less than 60 percent will earn a four-year degree within six years and less than 30 percent will earn a two-year degree within three years. It is even worse for low-income and minority students, putting America further behind in meeting future workforce needs.

According to the [Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce](#), nearly two-thirds of available jobs by 2018 will require some sort of postsecondary education. Employers are expected to need nearly 22 million new workers with postsecondary degrees, but colleges will fall short of meeting that need by 3 million graduates.

Beating the Odds: What It Means and Why It’s Important, published by **HCM Strategists**, a Washington, D.C., public policy advocacy firm, is the result of a series of conversations with leaders from 32 postsecondary institutions about what colleges must do to help students – particularly low-income, minority and adult students – successfully earn a degree. **Winthrop University President Anthony DiGiorgio** was one of 32 leaders nationally who were invited by the **Gates Foundation** to participate in the conversations, which were held in Washington, D.C., in fall 2010. Each of the colleges and universities featured in the report is considered a national model for their approaches to boost completion rates.

“The odds of a low-income American completing college haven’t changed in at least 20 years,” said **Kristin Conklin**, founding partner at **HCM Strategists**. “Winthrop University is demonstrating how to beat those odds, ensure student success and help our economy recover. Today these campuses are the exception. The Beating the Odds provides a blueprint for others to follow and help change the exception to the rule in postsecondary education.”

Winthrop's efforts

At Winthrop, the university is creating a comprehensive effort to engage and retain students and improve retention/graduation rates. Current programs begin with a transition to college class and involvement with residential learning communities, and include a writing center and a pilot program

for African-American and other under-represented and first-generation students in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) fields.

Also, Winthrop officials continue to put in place strategies to enhance residential learning and academic support services for all students. The university is developing and assessing new programming, such as increasing student performance in core curriculum classes; creating intervention strategies that will decrease the instances of academic probation, suspension, or dismissal; enhancing freshman and transfer student advising. These programs support academic and personal development success in preparation for the world of work or further study in a global society.

Winthrop’s approach for several years has recognized that faculty and student development professionals have the same goal – student success, both personally and academically. DiGiorgio said: “Winthrop some years ago created University College to bridge what is often an organizational divide between residence hall staff and classroom faculty, so everyone is on the same page. Our students benefit from that coordinated approach, and so it is wonderful to have the Gates Foundation recognize Winthrop in this way.”

Four key approaches

The institutions featured in the **Beating the Odds** report represent different sizes, sectors and programs, but share a similar focus on serving a low-income, minority and mobile student population and improving persistently low degree attainment rates. The report identified **four key approaches** that are necessary for postsecondary institutions to dramatically improve student success:

- Help students prepare for the rigors of college, including summer-bridge and dual-enrollment programs, career and college-ready coordination and better credit-transfer policies.
- Focus on retention through student support, including redesigning courses, and providing targeted and comprehensive support services like academic advising and counseling.
- Find new and innovative ways for students to access postsecondary education by more effectively serving the unique needs of today’s students and keeping them on track to graduation.
- Demonstrate leadership in creating a culture of completion by uniting the campus in a shared responsibility for student success and completion.

Future conversations are expected to continue the **Beating the Odds** effort and share strategies and policies aimed at improving the odds of success in higher education. A video of the September 2010 convening is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=nby7bs99XuQ. An additional platform for sharing resources and best practices is available.

For more information about Winthrop’s efforts, contact **Rebecca Masters**, assistant to the president for public affairs, 803/323-2225, or at mastersr@winthrop.edu.

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