



DIRECT ADMISSIONS INITIATIVE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

DIRECT ADMISSIONS WORK GROUP

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Communications Plan Summary

For about half a decade, Washington's community and technical college system has looked at ways to increase enrollment at each of the state's colleges. Now, in a world overshadowed by the COVID-19 novel coronavirus, colleges have a unique opportunity to reach out to high school seniors who may have not considered attending a community or technical college.

This document will outline communications messages, strategies and tools as community and technical colleges implement their own Direct Admissions Initiative. It will also detail steps taken at the state-level to encourage graduating seniors to enroll in a community or technical college.

Objectives and Desired Outcomes

The Direct Admissions Initiative communications plan supports direct admissions efforts at each of the community and technical colleges and at the system level. This plan will:

- provide suggestions for colleges to communicate directly with students and the families
- outline ways for colleges to work with their service area high schools and school districts
- give recommendations to the State Board, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Washington Student Achievement Council on ways to best work together

For 2020, the Direct Admissions Initiative will take three forms:

- A letter from Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal and State Board Executive Director Jan Yoshiwara will be included in seniors' graduation packets. This will require the least amount of work from colleges.
- In combination with the letter sent to seniors, provide colleges a Direct Admissions Initiative checklist and toolkit to implement in a modified form. This will require a moderate amount of work from colleges.
- In combination with the letter sent to seniors, support colleges if they fully undertake the Direct Admissions Initiative. This will require the most amount of work from colleges.

Colleges may decide to which level they would like to take on the initiative. The Work Group hopes to learn from colleges that do try the initiative to improve its elements for subsequent years.

Communications considerations

As we approach the turbulent end of the 2019-2020 school year, high school seniors face many unknowns. Because of interventions and restrictions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, seniors will finish their last year in the K-12 system online, without experiencing traditional milestones like graduation ceremonies, prom, and senior honor days.

The state's response to COVID-19, furthermore, will upend the state's economy. Record unemployment coupled with uncertainties of if, when, and how colleges, universities and businesses will reopen mean students and their families may have to reassess their plans of how they would

continue their education beyond high school. Additionally, students who may not have considered going to college or starting an apprenticeship may now be weighing their options, especially given the poor job market.

We must acknowledge students' and their families' uncertainties and associated fears. For that reason, all communication should recognize the strong emotions — like stress, grief and anxiety — people may be experiencing.

Community and technical colleges, however, can serve as a point of certainty. Our colleges are familiar. They are known and trusted entities, rooted in community and comforting in an unstable world. Colleges should use that to their advantage in their communication and outreach efforts.

Key Messages

- Community and technical colleges are affordable and accessible
- Community and technical colleges are welcoming, academically challenging, and supportive
- You are college material

On-the-Ground Work Group

Those interested in ongoing collaboration about strategies to implement the Direct Admissions Initiative, contact Nicole Faber, outreach manager at Lower Columbia College, at nfaber@lcc.ctc.edu.

Audience and Tools

Audience

The Direct Admissions Initiative affects three main groups. Messaging and tools will need to be tailored accordingly.

Students and families

High school seniors and their families are the target of the Direct Admissions Initiative.

Communication should be positive while acknowledging the uncertainty of the environment in which we live. Students may fall into one of the following categories:

- Already accepted an admissions offer from an in-state or out-of-state college or university, with plans to attend in person beginning fall quarter 2020. These students will be the least receptive to the direct admissions initiative. Colleges should be aware these students may use this communication to mock the sending college.
- Already accepted an admissions offer from an in-state or out-of-state college or university, but reconsidering given new financial situation driven by COVID-19. These students will be slightly more receptive than the previous category to the direct admissions initiative, but will still be challenging to reach.
- Already accepted an admissions offer from an in-state or out-of-state college or university,

but reconsidering given possibility of continued remote operations. Similar to the previous category, these students will be slightly more receptive than the first category to the direct admissions initiative, but will still be challenging to reach.

- Decided to join the military. These students are under contract and therefore not part of the direct admissions initiative pool.
- Decided to take time off from school, but plans to enroll in college after a gap year. These students will be the most receptive to the direct admissions initiative.
- Decided not to continue education past high school for financial, academic or personal reasons. These students will be slightly less receptive than the previous category to the direct admissions initiative. With extra attention addressing why they believe they're not college material, though, they could change their minds.
- Has not yet made a decision. Similar to the previous category, these students will be slightly less receptive than those who decided to take time off from school but plan to enroll in college at a later date. Extra attention here may help these students decide to enroll.

High schools and school districts

High schools and school districts are the target circle just outside of students and their families. For the Direct Admissions Initiative to be successful, colleges will need their support and assistance. Communication to this audience will need to show the practical benefits of students attending a community or technical college. This can include cost to families, strong academics, benefits of continuing education beyond high school, assurance of being close to home during a volatile time, and a supportive campus environment.

Of the two groups in this audience, building strong relationships with high schools will prove most important in the Direct Admissions Initiative work. Most importantly, colleges will need the support of high school principals. Colleges should take care to ensure principals understand the purpose and value of the Direct Admissions Initiative so they, one, provide colleges students' contact information, and, two, advocate for the initiative's value among their own staff and faculty.

People working in high schools — teachers, counselors, and principals — already have established relationships with seniors built over the course of their students' high school careers. They know their students and, harnessing the trust already in place, can encourage them to enroll at a community or technical college. Additionally, peer-to-peer contact will be the most effective and efficient means of communication to students, especially given the short timeframe of this initiative for 2020.

Many high school faculty, staff and administrators are already supportive and champions of community and technical colleges, and others are not. Colleges will need to find inroads among those who are not supportive or who do not know the benefits of a community or technical college.

School districts can support the Direct Admissions Initiative work by communicating by providing arguments for the value of community and technical colleges and advocating for seniors' contact information sharing. This relationship will become especially important as districts can work directly high schools who may be wary of the value of community and technical colleges or who do not want to share contact information.

State-level entities and educational service districts

State-level entities and educational service districts are the last and widest target circle. This group consists of:

- State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
- Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction
- Washington Student Achievement Council
- The nine educational service districts around the state

Work at this level will support information sharing and advocacy amongst colleges and high schools.

Tools

Colleges and state-level entities will employ the following tools in support of the Direct Admissions Initiative. Messages will need to be reinforced using a variety of tools at each level of the effort; no single method will suffice to achieve the initiative's goal of enrolling high school seniors. Personal communication from trusted sources will be most effective in reaching seniors and influencing their decision whether to apply at a community or technical college.

Letters

- Graduating seniors will receive a letter from Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal and State Board Executive Director Jan Yoshiwara congratulating them on their achievement and encouraging them to apply at a community or technical college if they have not yet made other higher education plans.
 - This letter will be sent to all high school principals and district superintendents with a request to distribute to their graduating seniors.
- If colleges undertake the Direct Admissions Initiative, letters to high school seniors from their local community and technical college should invite them to apply and enroll at that college. The letter would be preferably signed by the president and should include information about applying for financial aid. Make the letter as inviting and “exciting” as possible, e.g. use official stationary, include college-themed swag or gift certificates to the bookstore, etc.

CRM or CRM-type tools

- Follow students using the college's CRM or CRM-type tool, reaching out for follow-up.

Email

- If available, use email as a means to follow up with prospective students.
- Colleges, preferably presidents, should contact high school principals for a data sharing agreement to include seniors' contact information, including address, email and phone.
 - If principals do not provide contact information, consider using the College Bound Scholarship enrollment roster.
 - Your regional College Bound Scholarship roster is available through the Washington

Student Achievement Council. Contact collegebound@wsac.wa.gov for more information.

- College recruiting offices should use their contacts in high schools to communicate about the Direct Admissions Initiative and ask for their help in encouraging students to apply.

Texting

- If available, use texting as a means to follow up with prospective students.

Social media

- Promote the initiative through the college's social media channels.
- Associate a hashtag for the initiative and encourage all students to use it.
- Create short videos showing different parts of campus life, e.g. videos from Champions (see below) welcoming students to campus and virtual tour or tours.

Phone and remote meetings

- Use remote platforms like Zoom for virtual events for students and parents to provide more information about the college or specifically for applying. Encourage participation with incentives like gift certificates to the bookstore or to local restaurants.
- Colleges, preferably presidents, should contact high school principals for a data sharing agreement to include seniors' contact information, including address, email and phone.
 - If principals do not provide contact information, consider using the College Bound Scholarship enrollment roster.
 - Your regional College Bound Scholarship roster is available through the Washington Student Achievement Council. Contact collegebound@wsac.wa.gov for more information.

Champions

- Use high school counselors, student ambassadors, faculty and others to spread the word and promote the direct admissions initiative. Peer-to-peer contact is most preferable.

Tools in practice

Tool	Audience	Description	Timing and duration	Responsible party
Letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students and families 	A congratulatory letter and invitation to apply at a community or technical colleges will be included in seniors' graduation packets.	Completed May 2020, mailed June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Board • OSPI
Letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High schools and school districts 	Cover letter to the congratulatory letter and invitation asking principals and superintendents to distribute that letter to their graduating seniors.	May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Board
Letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students and families 	Send an "official" letter to high school seniors inviting them to apply to their local community or technical college.	June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College recruiting offices
CRM or CRM-like tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students and families 	Use the college's CRM or CRM-like tool to follow students' engagement in the Direct Admissions Initiative and follow up as needed.	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College recruiting offices
Email: Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students and families 	If available, use email to follow up with students.	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College recruiting offices
Email: Principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High schools and school districts 	Colleges, preferably presidents, need to reach out to high schools to explain the Direct Admissions Initiative and ask for seniors' contact information.	May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presidents' offices • College recruiting offices
Email: Counselors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Schools and school districts 	Use established contacts between college recruiting offices and high school counselors to reach out to seniors and encourage them to apply.	Monthly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College recruiting offices

Texting	• Students and families	If available, use texting to follow up with students.	Ongoing	• College recruiting offices
Social media	• Students and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ the college’s social media channels in support of the Direct Admissions Initiative. Content can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hashtag campaign • Photo/video submissions from students • Photo/video submissions from Champions 	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College communications and marketing offices • College recruiting offices
Phone and remote meetings: students	• Students and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use remote platforms to engage students. Content can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sessions • Virtual tours of campus • Applying 	• Monthly	• College recruiting offices
Phone and remote meetings: principals	• High schools and school districts	• Colleges, preferably presidents, need to reach out to high schools to explain the Direct Admissions Initiative and ask for seniors’ contact information.	• May 2020	• Presidents’ offices
Champions: Students	• Students and families	• Use people in trusted roles (high school counselors, peers, faculty) to encourage students to apply to community and technical colleges. This can be through direct contact or through means like social media.	• Ongoing	• College recruiting offices
Champions: principals and district superintendents	• High schools and school districts	• Use people in trusted roles (high school counselors, faculty, administrators) to promote the Direct Admissions Initiative within their own high schools and school districts.	• Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College recruiting offices • Presidents’ offices

Key Dates

The following dates represent key milestones in communicating with seniors and their families, high schools and school districts, and state-level entities and educational service districts about the direct admissions initiative. This key dates table is not an exhaustive list of all points of contact with each audience; colleges will need to decide additional dates and activities best suited to their own communities.

Date	Tool(s)	Activity
May 1, 2020	Social media	Better Make Room: College Signing Day
May 2020	Email and phone	College presidents contact high school principals and district superintendents to inform them of the Direct Admissions Initiative and ask for seniors' contact information.
June 2020	Letters	Send admissions letters to high school seniors
June 5-19, 2020		High schools' last day of school
June 5-23, 2020		Colleges' spring quarter ends
Late June 2020		Colleges' summer quarter begins
Late September 2020		Colleges' fall quarters begin

Work Group Members

Name	College/SBCTC
Suzy Ames	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lake Washington Institute of Technology • Instruction Commission
Jonathan Barnett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wenatchee Valley College • Admissions and Registration Council
Bill Belden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clark College • Student Services Commission
Deb Came	Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction
Scott Copeland	State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
Britny Covert-Avilla	Skagit Valley College
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Carli Schiffner	State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
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Name	College/SBCTC
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Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges