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LEARNERS OF TOMORROW
Professional Learning Community – Topic 1
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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U.S. colleges and universities face declining enrollments by "traditional" 18-24 year old, recent high school graduates, living on or near a campus, who enter with aspirations and some preparation for higher education. Currently, this segment comprises approximately 24% of college attendees, and competition for this population is fierce in Oregon and nationally.   Ironically, most marketing and recruiting focuses on this limited applicant pool. SOU cannot count on traditional international students to increase enrollment in the current political climate.

Meanwhile, adult, part-time and off-campus students are a growing enrollment sector for most universities. Between 2007 and 2016, 26% to 30% of SOU students were 26 years or older. Although revealing, this "non-traditional" category masks significant distinctions. Jeffrey Selingo, in his work *College (Un)Bound: The Future of Higher Education,* terms two significant categories of non-traditional learners the "career switchers," who are returning to higher education seeking new skills and "career accelerators," who are returning to higher education for career mobility or higher earnings. Pearson (2016) found that 80% of adult learners cited tuition or program fees, class schedules, or program length as barriers. Healthcare, information technology, and company management are growing areas of interest for adult learners.

Southern Oregon University expresses a philosophy of diversity and inclusion that suggests looking at the fastest growing and most underserved populations within our six-county region, and outward from there. About 70% of SOU students come from the six counties of Southern Oregon (Coos, Curry, Douglas, Jackson, Josephine and Klamath), where less than 15% of the population aged 25 and older currently hold a Bachelor's degree. The Hispanic youth population of southwestern Oregon is growing significantly. The area is predominantly rural. SOU might better serve southwestern Oregon learners by addressing the needs of place-bound, rural, first-

generation and frugality-conscious learners, in addition to those of traditional students and others, usually older, motivated by career-related goals.

Regardless of age, the characteristics of potential learners among the underrepresented or underserved populations include one or more of these factors:

- lack of parent or guardian with a Bachelor's or higher degree (first-generation)
- rural setting or place-bound circumstances (family, employment, economics or other)
- membership in an underrepresented group, including male or racial identity
- perceived barriers related to accommodating a disability
- perceived social barriers related to age, ethnicity, veteran status or LBGTQ identity
- experience of trauma and need for support
- belief that the benefits of higher education are not worth the cost (frugality)

As SOU engages in developing a strategic plan, we are challenged to identify and meet the needs of underserved populations of our region who potentially make up a high proportion of future learners. By building on current precollege and pathway programs for youth and the Innovation and Leadership Program for adult learners, SOU has the potential to recruit, and subsequently, meet the needs of the nearby potential learners of diverse backgrounds and ages.

The body of this report, Section I, examines standard demographic characteristics of current and future learners, such as gender, race and age, as well as more nuanced characteristics. Section II explores mindsets and aspirations of learners. The role of pre-college pathway programs for bringing students to SOU is highlighted in Section III. The report concludes with a discussion.

<u>SECTION I: Student Characteristics</u>

<u>Age</u>

Research reveals that, nationally, adults age 24 and older are the fastest growing demographic in postsecondary education (Bauman, 2016). SOU's demographics match the national data. Between 2007 and 2016, 26% to 30% of SOU students were 26 years or older. In 2016,

35% out of a total student count of 6,100 were undergraduate transfers. (SOU Enrollment Report, Fall 2016, SOU Fact Book retrieved on-line February 2017)

Pearson (2016) surveyed 1,634 US adults aged 25-64 who were enrolled in a degree or certificate program or planning to enroll in the next 60 days. Respondents who plan to enroll in college within the next five year do so primarily to keep up with advancements in their field (72%), improve their earning potential (46%), prepare for a future job market (65%) or career change (46%). Healthcare, information technology, and company management are growing areas of interest for adult learners. 80% of adult learners expressed that tuition or program fees, timing of classes, and the length to completion are barriers to planning for future enrollment.

Jeffrey Selingo in his work *College (Un)Bound: The Future of Higher Education* states that a significant portion of college bound students are pursuing higher education for non-traditional reasons. Colleges must re-think who they are catering to. The traditional 18-year-old academically centered individual, is no longer the norm. *18*% of students surveyed are what Selingo terms "career switchers," meaning that they are returning to school with the purpose of re-tooling their skills sets so that they can change careers. 21% of students surveyed were "career accelerators," meaning that they were returning to school to increase their earning potential in their career or move up in their career.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

The US Department of Education used the term 'culturally and linguistically diverse' to define students who lack or who have limited English proficiency. (Gonzalez, Love, Pagan and Love, 2011, p. 12). Institutions have started to use this attribute to identify students who come from households where English is not the primary language. Students with this characterization will have diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. These learners may also be referred as "English language learners" (ELL's). This term is more than just a label; it demonstrates that "the needs of diverse students are broader than just learning English" (Gonzalez et al. 2011. p. 13).

According to the Oregon Department of Education, approximately 22% of Oregon's K-12 students reported their language of origin was not English (2011-2012). 10% of these students were identified as having Limited Language Proficiency (LEP). Furthermore, only 60% of ELL students

in Oregon graduate from high school, compared to the overall graduation rate of 72%. In 2014-2015, these groups had lower graduation high school rates: Native American 45%, Pacific Islander 37%, and Latino 33%.

Students of comprise 19% of SOU's current enrollment. Latino students make up 12% of the student body, while Asian, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Pacific Islander make up approximately 4% combined. That some Jackson County school districts have disproportionally higher enrollments of students of color (e.g. 41% in the Phoenix-Talent school district) that SOU can be viewed as an opportunity for growing this demographic in learners of tomorrow.

Disability

Approximately 700 students at SOU currently request some sort of accommodation each term, and this number may grow in the future. Shawn Foster states there are probably more students who have disabilities, but who do not seek services. These students may worry about the stigma associated with having a disability or believe that they can regulate themselves better as they try to develop an independent self.

According to Wisbey and Kalivoda (2011), institutions of higher education have seen an increase of students with disabilities on their campuses over the past 20 years. This is likely due to provisions in federal laws, including the American Disabilities Act of 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Students with disabilities are heterogeneous, representing a spectrum of disabilities, and a range of racial, ethnic, sexuality, and socioeconomic groups (Renn and Reason, 2012). While some disabilities are more visible, others are subtle. Accommodations vary by individual. Disability services require sensitivity, understanding, and knowledge of disability law.

First Generation

A majority of students attending SOU come from the six county surrounding area (Coos, Curry, Douglas, Jackson, Josephine and Klamath). Within this region, only 13% of residents over the age of 25 have a bachelor's degree, 8% have a graduate degree, and 38% have taken some college level coursework. As a consequence, a substantial proportion of SOU students are first generation. Moreover, with predicted demographic shifts, both nationally and at the state level, the proportion of first generation students will very likely grow.

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First-generation students face an array of well-documented challenges that lead to a disproportionately higher rate of failure to succeed in college compared to their second-generation peers. Characteristics of first-generation students include being less likely to: (1) live on campus; (2) perceive that faculty care about their development and, therefore, to develop meaningful relationships with faculty, (3) develop strong relationships with fellow students, (4) be active in campus life outside of the classroom, and (5) be satisfied with the campus environment. First-generation students typically enroll in fewer credit hours, work more hours off campus, and have much stronger connections to home and workplace than to campus life. Pre-college experiences of many first-generation students result in their having been less engaged in high school and having lower aspirations post high school. First-generation students tend to enroll in colleges that, on average, are less academically selective.

Financially, first-generation students and their families tend to have fewer resources to contribute toward higher education, and are more likely to question the value of a four-year degree. Lower family income and socioeconomic status results in lower estimated family contribution (EFC) and greater financial need. Higher account delinquency rates have been shown to be related to lower EFC, which leads to lower persistence and completion rates.

Gender

Until about 1980 more men than women enrolled in college. Beginning in the 1980s a shift occurred as women outpaced men in college enrollment. Women graduating from high school are more likely than men to enroll in college the next year. Data from 2012 demonstrate this trend across all racial groups (Hispanic M 62% W 76%, Black M 57% W 69%, White M 62% W 72%, and Asian M 83% W 86%) (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014). In 2017 women account for 57% of all college enrollment (Conger and Dickson, 2017). Blackhurst et al (2008) found that more girls than boys see advantages in attending college and prepare themselves better. The trend appears by grade seven and increases through high school, suggesting a need for pipeline efforts focused on boys. This trend is true at SOU and the gap is widening.

Enrollment by men among first time, first year (FTFY) students at SOU declined over 2012-2016. Over 2012-2016, the FTFY gender gap has increased by 7 points (3 points for total

undergraduates. The data suggests that SOU applicant pools will be 60-65% female and 35-40% male in the near future. Total undergraduate enrollment at SOU is in line with the national trend, while graduate enrollment is more highly skewed toward women. In 2016, SOU's graduate enrollment was 66% female and 34% male.

International Students

SOU currently enrolls 149 international students, of which 100 are degree seeking. Between AY2011 and AY2016 the number of international students increased 35% and the number of degree-seeking international students increased 48%. Saudi Arabia, China, and Japan are the top counties of origin. The majority of SOU's enrolled international students are business majors.

Nationally, enrollment of international students has grown steadily (Altbach, 2015), mirroring the trend at SOU. In AY2016, 1,043,839 international students comprised 5.2% of all college enrollment in the United States, compared with 3.4% 2008, and 1.6% 1970. In AY2014-15, China was the top country of origin (31%), followed by India (14%), South Korea (7%), Saudi Arabia (6%), and Canada (3%). Business management, engineering, and math and computer science are the top fields of study for international students. The U.S. is the top destination for international students. In 2014, 19% of all international students were enrolled in U.S. schools. The United Kingdom and Australia follow with 10% and 6% respectively. Universities are competing to attract overseas students and their tuition dollars.

The full impact of the latest, March 6, 2017, travel ban on international students, and on U.S. colleges and universities, remains unclear (Svrluga, 2017). The revised executive order may negatively affect up to 15,000 international students from six predominantly Muslim countries, including 12,000 students from Iran. While the order does not include students with valid visas, it may affect those who need to renew their visas. The pipeline of new students, many in the midst of the application process, is now cut off. The Trump administration policies toward refugees and immigrants, as well as the recent upsurge in race crimes, may lead international students to choose other destinations. The exclusion of Saudi Arabia from the ban may help ameliorate the ban's impact on SOU enrollment; 50% of SOU's international students are from Saudi Arabia.

Place-Bound Students

The characterization of the place-bound student refers to potential learners who may face inordinate challenges in leaving their immediate geographic area in order to attend college. Challenges can include familial responsibilities, attachment to family and romantic partners, attachment to place, and perceptions that investing in a college education does not necessarily improve future financial status and career outlooks, and the belief that college is for other people. Shields (2004) notes that, despite self-doubt, place-bound students enrolled in college were not at a disadvantage in term of academic performance or adjustment. Interestingly, men who reported highly satisfactory relationships with their parents perceived greater difficulty in relocating, while women who were higher on external control reported greater perception of difficulty in leaving the area.

Rural Students

Rural students, many the first in their families to attend college, are increasingly viewed as the new underserved minority. Rural students bring unique and valuable perspectives of political and social issues. At some universities, diversity offices provide services to rural students. The College Board has made rural students a priority, including them in their 2017 Access to Opportunity initiative. Competition is becoming fierce for this learner demographic. Rural high school students graduate at rates second only to suburban students (80%, compared with 81%), and perform at or above the median on standardized testing. However, they enroll in four-year degree programs at significantly lower rates. Pappano (2017) notes that just 29% of rural 18- to 24-year olds are enrolled in college, compared with 47% of their urban peers.

Locales designated as rural have higher poverty rates and lower education levels than those labeled urban, suburban or town. Rural schools may have less access to Advanced Placement courses and fewer or no visits from colleges. Rural high school students may place less value on higher education and perceive that they are under-prepared to compete with other students. Because rural communities may have limited career opportunities, the decision to attend college may be a decision to not return later. If a college degree does not guarantee a better-paying job, rural learners may choose to stay in their community and engage in farming or a trade.

Native American students are a unique sub-category of place-bound students. Native students show the lowest high school graduation rates in the nation. In Oregon, 55% of Native students

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enrolled in federally recognized Oregon tribes, who attend high schools with a high density of Native students, graduate from within four years. native students are behind their peers in third through eighth grade and in high school (ECONorthwest, 2014).

Nationally, only 25% of Native students between the ages of 18 and 24 enroll in a postsecondary institution, the lowest rate of any racial subgroup. Fewer than 25% of Native students who began a bachelor's program graduate in four years; 40% finish within six years. In Oregon, the rate is lower, with 30% of Native college students graduating in four years and 55% in six years. (Oregon Department of Education, 2016)

In rural and remote communities with only limited access to higher education, Native students leave behind close-knit families and communities. Those with commitments to jobs, families, and traditional roles in the community find this challenging, particularly when deeply rooted in traditional cultures. Distance education programs bring challenges accessing computers and the Internet and attrition due to feelings of isolation. Reliance on text-based learning can cause Native students to become disillusioned and disengage. For students from Native cultures who live in traditional, rural settings, community-based knowledge and lessons learned from elders are important sources of education and often ignored by mainstream educational institutions. (Rao, Eady & Edelen-Smith, 2011)

Race & Ethnicity

Traditionally, higher achieving high-school students apply for college in their senior year and enroll in the fall following high school graduation. Typically, this population of students has been comprised of upper middle-class Caucasian youth. Recent reports describe a leveling off or decline in college enrollment for *traditional* college students (NCES; Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education). Although there has been a great deal of discussion regarding a diminishing applicant pool for higher education, the trends are more subtle. The National Center for Education Statistics projects a slight *increase* in projected public high school graduation numbers in 2023 compared to 2009-10 although changes in graduation numbers will vary by state. Oregon is projected to have a *less that 5% increase* in high school graduates in 2023 compared to 2009-10 and states from which SOU traditionally draws students are projected to *increase* with the exception of California (projected to be *less than 5% lower*). It is helpful to look more closely at the characteristics of high school graduates to truly understand what appears to

be a slow growth or slight decline. Declines are expected for public high school graduates who identify as White (13%), Black (14%) or American Indian / Alaskan Native (21%). Public high school graduates who identify as Hispanic (49%), Asian / Pacific Islander (3%), or two or more races (48%) are projected to increase.

Sexuality

Sexuality is a term with three components: sexual behavior, sexual identity, and sexual orientation (Ryan & Futterman, 1998). Often times these are used interchangeably, but in fact they have significantly different meanings. Sexual behavior refers to what one does sexually, one's actions. Sexual identity can incorporate several types of identity. Sexual orientation not only involves a person's choice to sexual partners, but also to emotional attraction to others. Sexual orientations encompass heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, omnisexual, asexual, and many variations among, within, and beyond these orientation categories.

Describing the trends in student characteristics regarding sexuality can be difficult in higher education. Often they are described as a "largely invisible minority group" (Fassinger, 1998, p. 15). While today there are researchers and campuses that are proving to count the number of students who openly identity as an underreported sexual minoritized group in higher education- lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer- among many other identity categories. Survey's and institutions are currently working to provide tracking of students by sexual orientation (Renn & Reason, 2013). Data regarding sexual orientation at SOU is forthcoming. Reporting is based on voluntary self-disclosure.

Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students

Gender is a socially created concept that consists of expectations, characteristics, and behaviors that members of a culture consider appropriate for males or females (Knudson-Martin, 2009). Transgender is defined as a "person who lives as a member of a gender other than that expected based on anatomical sex. Sexual orientation varies and is not dependent on gender identity" (Center for Gender Sanity, 2010). Understanding the complexities of gender is the first step to creating an inclusive environment for all students, especially those whose identities exist beyond the gender binary.

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Institutions and communities of higher education are becoming aware of the needs, concerns, and barriers for transgender students. Cisgendered, or "gender conforming" students, whose roles, expressions, and identities match society's expectations of biological sex as defined by Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn., 201, p. 56), are beginning to build communities with transgender students who are increasingly open about their identities (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005). Transgender students face barriers to academic success. (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn et al., 2005). Colleges continue to conform to the gender binary as reflected in policy, facilities, visibility, institutional records systems housing, and restroom assignments (Beemyn, 2003) that do not allow for individuals transitioning across genders The lack of awareness about the transgender student experience is a contributing factor to the continued barriers and fractures in relationships that non-gender conforming students face (Beemyn, 2003).

Transgender students are entering institutions of higher education with a more in-depth understanding of their own gender identity than their gender conforming peers (Beemyn, 2003, 2005). Pusch states that as transgender students navigate institutions of higher education, they may "experience isolation and rejection from family and friends" (as cited in Beemyn, et al., 2005, p. 50). Beemyn's (2003, 2005) studies indicate the impact that gender expectations, and restrictions generated by the current binary structure, have on an individual. However, literature discussing transgender issues and challenges in American society is limited.

Data on the numbers of transgender and gender nonconforming students nationally and at SOU remains elusive and is based on voluntary disclosure. Privacy is protected under Title IX of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender.

Trauma Exposure

Colleges increasingly recognize the necessity of responding to psychological and emotional needs of students suffering the acute effects of trauma associated with exposure to violence, abuse, and disaster. Trauma-informed practice is a theoretically grounded framework for addressing those needs in an ethical and effective manner. This approach includes ensuring that personnel understand how trauma can affect individuals, can recognize signs of trauma, and respond to indicators of trauma in ways that do not inadvertently re-traumatizie. SOU's nationally

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recognized policy on sexual abuse reporting, which gives victims voice and control over how and to whom information is disclosed, is an exemplary standard of trauma-informed practice.

Recent neuroscience and public health research indicates that the prevalence and impact of trauma is vastly greater than previously realized. Groundbreaking work related to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) sheds light upon the lingering effects that chronic exposure to stress, abuse, neglect, and other forms of family dysfunction. Neuroscience enables us to understand the causal link between chronic exposure to stress in early childhood, brain development, and resulting psychological and behavioral adaptations, which negatively impact outcomes ranging from educational attainment and employment to health and longevity.

For schools, the implications are profound. Fully 65% of learners now enter schools with potentially underdeveloped executive function and hard-wired psychological and behavioral response mechanisms. Higher incidence of ACEs are predictive of lower achievement on standardized tests, higher rates of absenteeism, suspension, risk behaviors, and lower rates of high school graduation and college participation, persistence and completion. Students exhibiting the effects of trauma often "seem unmotivated, hostile or lost…" (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016, p.3). Inhospitable and/or unresponsive educational environment can compound the adversity.

A trauma-informed perspective helps college personnel reinterpret and reframe challenging behaviors, and equips them to respond in ways less apt to trigger response mechanisms that exacerbate the situation. Evidence-based intervention strategies include greater focus upon metacognition and social-emotional learning, wrap-around services, and robust cross-sector partnerships. A widespread commitment to trauma-informed practice is essential to enhancing institutional efforts to support student success, well-being, persistence and completion.

Veteran Status
At SOU, 269 students completed the Veteran's Certification Process at SOU for AY2017. Our students who seek certification tend to have slightly higher retention rates, which reflects national trends (Marco, 2017). Student veteran enrollment is increasing nationwide. In 2009, there were 500,000 student veterans nationally and in 2013 over 1,000,000. Veteran college enrollment is projected to increase by 20% in the next few years. According to the Department for Veteran
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Affairs (2014), 73% of student veterans are male, and 27% female. Female veterans only make up 10-12% of the student veteran population. 62% of student veterans are first generation. Only 15% of student veterans are age 18-24; the majority of the veteran's ages fall between 24 and 40.

Lighthall (2012) highlighted things that we should know about today's veteran. Veterans are a diverse population. Combat trauma is an injury, not a mental illness. Campus compassion and respect will facilitate veterans' success. Veterans may have mild traumatic brain injuries, of which they are unaware. Veterans do not see themselves as victims. Veterans can feel isolated on campus and female veterans may suffer silently. Combat veterans may miss combat if their combat experience was positive. This article can inform campus services to enhance veterans' educational experiences and services at SOU.

SECTION II: Student Aspirations, or Why Go to College?

According to Selingo (2013), what we often characterize as "traditional" students (recent high school graduates, attending college full-time and living on or near campus) now account for a mere 24% of enrollment at many colleges. Marketing and recruiting efforts at universities remain predominantly aimed at this declining and fiercely competed for pool of applicants. Meanwhile, adult, part-time and off-campus students are a growing enrollment sector. This "non-traditional" category masks significant distinctions among students which profoundly impact how, where and why they participate in higher education. As "would be" students become more varied and discerning in their choices about whether, where, and how to participate in higher education, colleges must become more nuanced in how we identify and categorize students so that we better account for their discrete circumstances and improve our ability to recruit, retain, graduate, and serve them well. Selingo (2013) offers a more refined lens for viewing important distinctions within the groups of students conventionally regarded as "traditional" and "non-traditional."

Traditional students include three groups with distinct sets of motivations and expectations:

- Young academics: academically oriented and successful students, recently graduated from high school, coming from largely middle and upper income families. Selingo estimates that these comprise 24% of current enrollment.
- Coming of age: view college as a rite of passage and opportunity for self-discovery, and may not have a clearly defined sense of direction (estimated 11% of enrollment).

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- Career starters: view college as a means to an end, focused on the benefits afforded by college degree but also keenly attuned to the cost (estimated 18% of enrollment)

Non-traditional students, meanwhile, include:
- Career accelerators: view college as an opportunity to get ahead and advance within their chosen profession. Attracted by readily accessible "professional development" offerings (online, self-paced, evening, weekend, etc.). Potential for employer-based incentives or supports (estimated 21% of enrollment).
- Industry switchers: whether by choice or necessity, returning to college in order to "re-train" or gain qualifications within a new field or industry. Know or believe they need a degree in order to become competitive within the job market (estimated 18% of enrollment).
- Adult wanderers: attracted by the allure of continued learning in an area of interest, or lacking direction but believing that a college degree would help signal a higher level of personal or professional achievement (estimated 8% of enrollment).

SECTION III: Bringing the Learners of Tomorrow to SOU

Colleges are under great pressure to meet the needs and expectations of an increasingly complex and diverse student population. These students seek validation and services across an endless spectrum ranging from LBGTQ to military veterans and trauma exposed students. Underserved demographic groups face challenges and barriers as they transition from high school to college. Low-income status, lack of family support, academic under-preparedness, legal status, and being a first generation college student can impact the social and academic adjustment to college. Many of these hurdles can be addressed before college enrollment.

Whether seeking to recruit rural, place-bound, transgender, first generation, or other underserved students, SOU can build on our existing exemplary pre-college and pathway programs. Pre-college and pathway programs, including summer residential camps, academic competitions, and advanced placement, plant the seed of college aspiration. Students who do not participate in pathway programs may receive limited or late college counseling. (Probst & O'Hara, 2015) Research shows that the "level of academic achievement that students attain by eighth grade has

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a larger impact on their college and career readiness… than anything that happens academically in high school" (ACT, 2008, p. 2).

As we grow pre-college and pathway programs, it is critical to identify the needs of our students. Mann and Martin (2016) identify three groups of students: 1) Students who test below college ready; 2) Students who meet college readiness benchmarks; and 3) Students who exceed college benchmarks. Pathway programs focus on bridging academic gaps and simultaneously offer academic opportunities. Students who fall below academic standards receive academic assistance to bring their competencies up to the necessary levels. Engagement is maintained for students already on track. Students who exceed benchmarks can participate in early college credit and other early entry and engagement opportunities (Mann & Martin, 2016).

SOU offers a variety of pre-college youth programs. These include summer residential programs, academic competitions, Advance Southern Credit, early entry, and summer enrichment courses. The office of Minority Outreach Programs offers pathway programs at two schools and two educational conferences for Latino students. Students who participate in SOU pre-college programs show higher rates of high school enrollment, college enrollment, and specifically, SOU enrollment. 31% of students participating in any Academy program between 2007 through 2016 enrolled at SOU. Latino students who participated in the summer Academia Latina between 2006-2016 had a 90% high school graduation rate and 17% came to SOU. 33% of students in the pathway program Pirates to Raiders enrolled at SOU. Data is still pending for participants in Bulldogs to Raiders, the Caesar E. Chavez Leadership Conference, and Konaway Nika Tillicum. We have established exemplar pathway programs in only two schools in the Jackson County ESD. This model could expanded to include many more schools, and eventually to schools in adjacent counties, to recruit Latino, rural, and other underserved students.

<center>DISCUSSION: An Opportunity</center>

Enrollment projections, trends in admissions, and changing views of the value and purpose of higher education reflect greater ethnic diversity, diversity of gender expression and identity, diversity of experience, a greater age range, and shifting timelines for college completion. High school to college transitions have been built around the *traditional* first year college student; changing demographics may leave students who are historically underrepresented without a clear

path to college. Colleges are now challenged to commit to and invest in recruiting and retaining currently underserved student populations. Admissions offices are competing for these demographic markets, which rural students, ethnic minorities, or veterans.

SOU has a unique opportunity to build on its philosophy of diversity and inclusion in a region where some of the fastest growing and most underrepresented student populations reside. Our region contains industries identified as gaining in interest for adult learners (e.g., healthcare, tourism, business management, and tourism).

There is no magic formula. The ethnic breakdown of learners of the future is more diverse than ever. Adults return to school if they can see a value and a path to completion. Increasingly, a connection between degree and career is a motivator. Fundamentally, all students seek respect and validation while on campus. Various groups, such as students of color and rural and place-bound students, are considered underserved because we have the opportunity to grow this demographic. We need to commit to continued adaptation to a changing student profile, with varied aspirations, concerns and needs, if we hope to maintain existing student populations while improving access to the learners of the future.

SOU has already committed to act on these shifts with programs such as Pirates to Raiders and Bulldogs to Raider. Designing programs which increase access and clarify connections between the middle, high school and college pathways will create abundant opportunities to guide this changing demographic toward successful matriculation into higher education. SOU's Innovation and Leadership Program focuses on supporting mid-career adults endeavoring to complete a degree or update job skills. A growing Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program alongside a dedicated administrative focus on Diversity and Inclusion promotes the wellbeing of the campus community in important ways.

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