

Executive Summary: The Duet-SNHU Formula Tackling Time, Cost, and Equitable Outcomes

Overview

Today's learners are juggling work, family, and multiple other responsibilities, and most U.S. higher education options are not designed to fit into their already busy lives. Learners are increasingly independent students (51%),¹ working (64%),² parents (22%),³ military-affiliated or veterans (6%),⁴ living with a disability (19%),⁵ first-generation college students (56%),⁶ and experiencing food or housing insecurity (3 of 5 learners).⁷ In fact, over 70% of today's learners are considered non-traditional because they are over the age of 25, a parent, working full-time, or first in their family to attend college.⁸

With over a million fewer learners enrolled in college than there were at the start of the pandemic,⁹ over 39 million learners with some college but no degree,¹⁰ and nearly 40% of full-time undergraduates taking out loans without receiving a degree after six years,¹¹ there is a clear mismatch between current higher education design and the needs of 'new-traditional' learners who are increasingly juggling complex sets of responsibilities. New models that bring together the flexibility of online learning with targeted and robust wraparound supports are showing promise in meeting learners where they are and bridging the gap between what the system currently offers and what learners need to succeed. The Duet-SNHU program provides a blend of in-person, personalized wraparound supports, low cost, and online AA and BA competency-based education. Duet offers enrollment support, academic coaching, career coaching, general 'life' coaching, other supports tailored to individuals, and safe study spaces with access to technology.

Outcomes for learner-centered programs like Duet-SNHU are pointing to higher rates of success. Duet's enrollments have been growing steadily since its inception in 2014 and were 1,120 in 2021. Its student body identifies as 64% women, 43% Black or African American, and 38% Hispanic or LatinX. According to a recent study conducted by the Harvard Kennedy School's Program on Education Policy and Governance, early data shows that graduation rates doubled (46%) for associate degree programs when compared to the state average at community colleges in Massachusetts (20%).¹² These improved outcomes appear even more promising when analyzed by racial group -revealing erased equity gaps- and alongside the low cost of the model. Additionally, Duet-SNHU learners generally complete their degrees at a faster rate than peers at other institutions. With the changing demographics of students, post-pandemic enrollment patterns, and increasing online offerings at institutions, policymakers should take into consideration learnings and outcomes from these models.

¹ Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018.

² Higher Learning Advocates, 2020.

³ Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2019.

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics, 2020.

⁵ National Center for Education Statistics, 2020.

⁶ Center for First-Generation Success @NASPA.

⁷ The Hope Center for Community, College, and Justice, 2021.

⁸ Gabrieli, John, Larned, Katherine, and West, Martin R. "College Re-Imagined." *Harvard Kennedy School*. 15 October 2021.

⁹ Nadworny, Elissa. "More Than 1 Million Fewer Students Are in College. Here's How That Impacts the Economy." *NPR*. 13 January 2022.

¹⁰ NSCRC, 2022.

¹¹ Siegel Bernard, Tara. "They Got the Debt, But Not the Degree." *New York Times*. 1 June 2022.

¹² Gabrieli, John, Larned, Katherine, and West, Martin R. "College Re-Imagined." *Harvard Kennedy School*. 15 October 2021.

*Please see CHEPP's white paper, *The Duet-SNHU Formula: Tackling Time, Cost, and Equitable Outcomes*, for complete citations.

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Key Takeaways

- The increasing proportion of new-traditional learners need more flexibility in terms of when and where learning happens. Six of the 17 million learners enrolled in higher education as of fall 2021, were over the age of 24 and studying part-time.¹³ Hybrid delivery is the preferred delivery model for many learners, with 82% of a recent survey sample stating it as their first choice.¹⁴ According to Strada Education’s Fall 2021 survey, over half of students rated cost and life balance as the top perceived challenges to getting more education and the top three factors most likely to increase the probability of enrollment are credit for prior learning, flexible schedule, and financial aid.¹⁵
- Early data indicate that the Duet-SNHU graduation rate for AA students was 46% compared to the MA state average of 20% among those attending traditional two-year institutions in 2019.¹⁶ This gap widens when the data are disaggregated by race/ethnicity:
 - Black students saw a 52% rate compared with a 12% average in MA
 - Asian students saw a 55% rate compared with a 24% average in MA
 - Hispanic students saw a 38% rate compared with a 15% average in MA
 - White students saw a 44% rate compared with a 24% average in MA
 - Students who identify as “Other” saw a 54% rate compared with a 16% average in MA
- On average, Duet-SNHU students tend to complete their degrees faster (18 months) than the national average for students enrolled in traditional associate degree programs (5.6 years).¹⁷
- The program costs \$2,333 per term with unlimited credits and no added costs for books or extra fees. The total average cost for the Duet-SNHU associate (\$11,665) is about half the average cost for tuition and fees (\$21,300) of a traditional associate degree program in MA.¹⁸ For learners eligible for the maximum Pell Grant, the cost is \$35 per term.
- Programs that blend robust wraparound supports with low-cost flexible academic delivery are showing promise in their ability to support learner success. Examples include:
 - Northeastern Technical College’s laptop lending program, internet connection support, and online advising led to a 12% increase in enrollment and an 8% increase in persistence in 2020.
 - California State University’s Educational Opportunity Program offers counseling, mentoring, advising, tutoring, and learning workshops.
 - Morgan State University’s College of Interdisciplinary and Continuing Studies offers supports designed to help adult learners succeed, such as online and interdisciplinary degree programs.
- Policymakers should consider including an evaluation of student supports as part of accreditation and other measures of success for institutions; building more flexibility into Title IV distribution and satisfactory academic progress rules; and more funding for and increased access to wrap-around supports and basic needs supports.

¹³ NSCRC, 2021.

¹⁴ Morrison, Nick. “If Students Had Their Way, Hybrid Learning Would Be Here To Stay.” *Forbes*. 27 May 2022

¹⁵ Strada Education Survey 2019-2021.

¹⁶ Gabrieli, John, Larned, Katherine, and West, Martin R. “College Re-Imagined.” *Harvard Kennedy School*. 15 October 2021.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

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