Thoughts provided by Team 5...

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Acknowledgements

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Value Proposition

Increasing economic prosperity in the United States is dependent upon the educational attainment of its citizens. From 1990 to today, the U.S. has fallen from 1\textsuperscript{st} to 12\textsuperscript{th} in world rank for 4-year college degree attainment (White House, 2014). As far back as 2009, President Obama has encouraged Americans and the higher education community to reach what he termed the 2020 College Completion Goal. If achieved, the U.S. college degree attainment rate would increase from 40\% to 60\% equating to an additional 10 million Americans (U.S. Department, 2014). The U.S. would once again lead the world in the number of citizens who hold a college degree.

To achieve the president’s goal, affordable access to college degrees is essential; regardless of where students are in their journey to completion. While many students start college traditionally (e.g. right out of high school and persist to finish their degree), others stop out for a variety of reasons, leaving a segment of students who still need to complete their degree. According to an Eduventures (2014) report, adult degree completers account for 40\% of the total higher education market and that number will continue to rise through 2022.

Over 37 million Americans have some college credit but no degree (Lumina, 2010). The majority of these students are motivated to complete their degree to earn more money and advance in their careers (Eduventures, 2014). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013), college graduates earn almost twice as much as those without a degree and the unemployment rate for college graduates is significantly less than those without a degree.

Finding the best option, the shortest path to completion for degree completers, is critical for many reasons. There are three of particular importance: (1) reaching the president’s
2020 completion goal, (2) positively impacting the U.S. economy, and (3) enhancing the economic situation for individual students.

Connecting these students with the institutions that could provide them with the best option for completing their degree is difficult. Currently, students must shop around on their own to determine what options exist. They must locate all their transcripts, submit them to all the institutions they are interested in and wait to see what options are provided to them. Basically, they must learn and maneuver the systems of multiple institutions if they want to find the shortest, most economical path to completion. This amounts to a time-consuming exercise which most students are unwilling or unable to undertake. As a result, many either will not know where to start or just accept the first option they come across. What might they be missing?

*MyCompletionPath.org* is a project proposal aimed at addressing this market void by merging concepts found in services such as priceline.com and expedia.com with those in services like match.com to empower students to find the best path to completing their degree. Through this proposed web-based portal, students can provide their pertinent information, have their transcripts requested, find out which institutions are the best option for completing their degree and receive official awards of credit from matching institutions.
This is not just an information only site. We believe that every student deserves to be empowered to complete a degree that best serves their needs while maintaining high quality standards. We believe students should make that decision based on concrete facts.

Environmental Scan
There have been a number of degree completion initiatives launched or proposed in the last several years to address the urgent need to raise the number of degrees awarded in the United States. Among them are:

- *eVersity* – Under development by the University of Arkansas, this will be an online only program designed to reach out to University of Arkansas stop-outs. It will be ready to launch in October 2015 (Funding, 2014).

- *The Adult Learner Portal* – Under development by the Southern Regional Education Board (SERB), Atlanta, GA. This will initially target stop-outs in the South, with partial funding by the Lumina Foundation. It is not yet launched (Adult, 2014).

- *Non-traditional No More Project* – This project is funded by Lumina, in partnership with the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). It was a pilot effort, somewhat limited in scope, with participation from institutions in Arkansas, Colorado, Nevada, New Jersey, North Dakota, South Dakota. The report provided excellent hints for identifying barriers (Lane, et. al, 2012)

- *SUNY Complete* – State University of New York (SUNY) – This is a pilot project that included the University at Albany and Empire State College in the first round. It has limited funding, and is also limited to SUNY stop-outs (Dixon, personal communication).
• *Project Win-Win* – This project included 35 colleges in six states (Louisiana, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Virginia, and Wisconsin) – and was a pilot funded by the Lumina Foundation, in partnership with the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) (Project, 2014).

Compared to information found during the environmental scan, *MyCompletionPath.org* is different because we are putting the student in the driver’s seat.

Students will initiate the process and *MyCompletionPath.org* will match students and their interests and background with those institutions that seem most likely to provide the students with the fastest path to completion. The service will be institution-agnostic and nationwide. We will also provide advisors who can guide the student through the process. Most notable is that *MyCompletionPath.org* will provide official awards of credit from multiple institutions so the student may make an informed decision. This is not being done through any other available service.

**Service Details**

*MyCompletionPath.org* will be a web-based portal. Students will gain access to the site through a student portal, while subscribing institutions will enter through a portal designed to meet their needs. Specific details for each aspect of the service are described in the following sections.
**MyCompletionPath.org - Details**

- Website would be hosted in the cloud, such as Amazon
- Website development would be outsourced to a third party
- Student/Institution matching would be done by electronic matching
- Strategic partnerships would be explored for efficiencies
  - Parchment’s Send and Receive services may be a viable option to explore for handling transcript requests. Parchment currently is involved with the Midwestern Higher Education Compact and has initiatives and partnerships in 13 states.
  - Matching analytics technology already exists for sites such as match.com and priceline.com

**Student Experience - Details**

- Students (prospective degree completers) go to MyCompletionPath.org website
- Student pays for the service (nominal fee)
- Profile wizard walks the student through creating their profile. The profile includes the following information:
  - Demographic information
  - Previous College Credits earned
  - Military Experience
  - Certifications / Professional Licenses
  - Credit for life qualifying experience
  - Dual credit qualifying courses
- Via simple to follow process the Student selects matching criteria for a degree search:
  - Institution demographics
  - Online vs Face to Face instruction
  - Degree/Certificate types
  - CBE program
  - Weekend/Evening offerings
  - Program interest (business, education, etc.)
Students have the choice to “opt in” to a pool and allow institutions to choose them even if they are not matched through the web service.

Official student transcripts are requested from institutions they have previously attended.

Matching results are sent to student with 48 business hours.

- Results include official awards of credit from institutions able to provide the shortest path to completion using official transcripts of institutions previously attended by the student.

Students are provided contact instructions for Institutions that match up with their criteria.

**Institution Experience - Details**

- Institutions pay a yearly fee to participate (subscription).
- Institutions provide the following information:
  
  - Open admission policy
  - Dual credit policy
  - Credit for life experience policy
  - Advanced placement (AP) credits policy
  - Distance learning opportunities
  - Weekend/evening class options
  - Placement services for completers
  - On-campus daycare for student's children
  - Assessment guidelines for matching students,
  - A list of the of degrees with course requirements
  - A link to their online admissions application and Institution website

Institutions would be sent a monthly report listing the number of students that were matched to their institutions compared to the total number of students using the service (the report would include non-PIP information on why they were matched to each student).
To simplify the process, universal policies for admissions, transfer credit, etc. will be explored as an option. Subscribing institutions would join a consortium and agree to the policies instead of each individual institution having their own unique policies.

Big Idea

Universal policies would require a change in thinking about the higher education industry but the benefits could be huge.

The Market Place

In most cases, organizations are driven by the market they operate within. The current market “rules” are followed and the organization determines how best to meet the needs of their market within the system that has been established. For example, someone who sells chewing gum knows they must create gum, offer it at a competitive price to stores who can then resell it to consumers. Gum creators are driven by the rules already established by the gum market.

However, there is another option. Sometimes there are opportunities to instead drive the market. Jaworski, Kohli and Sahay (2000), describe ways in which a market can be driven. One of these is particularly fitting for the business model proposed here. The success of MyCompletionPath.org depends upon creating a new set of market players that are willing to participate in a way that is different from the current market system.

In the current higher education market, each institution individually reaches out to potential students or the potential students individually contact institutions they are interested in. Information regarding available academic programs, transfer credit and costs is exchanged.
Each institution has its own set of transfer policies governing what they will accept. These are the rules of the market.

Maybe a change is needed. Driving a market is done because it enhances customer value (Jaworski, et.al., 2000). Consider a marketplace where institutions agreed to a universal set of transfer policies, receipt of official transcripts from a 3rd party, awarding of official credit by a 3rd party, and offered their academic programs centrally through a 3rd party system like MyCompletionPath.org. These institutions become a set of market players that are driving a new market concept that enhances value for students. Potential students subscribing to the site become a new market pool for subscribing institutions. The value for institutions is enhanced also. Students are matched with institutions who best meet their needs from a pool of options – not just who they decided to contact.

Big Idea

In the model proposed here, MyCompletionPath.org is driving a market that has remained relatively unchanged, that is in need of change, where a change would increase value to degree completers.

Marketing Strategy

MyCompletionPath.org is a service-oriented website as previously described. Many e-commerce businesses have employed marketing strategies in order to promote their service. In a study by Shama (2001), marketing practices of 136 e-commerce companies including Priceline.com, Cheap Tickets, Inc. and Amazon.com were studied. Results showed that the main promotion tools utilized by these companies are advertising and personal selling. Because
MyCompletionPath.org is an innovation that is driving the market, it is not like a new flavor of gum. As a result, reaching the target markets through advertising and personal selling will be critical. Consumers know what to do with gum. Potential degree completers will not intuitively know that this service site is driving a market to think differently about how they are served and the institutions who subscribe to it. Subscribing institutions must also think differently about the degree completer market.

**Target Population: Degree Completers**

Degree completers are typically over age 24 with the largest group ranging from 24-29. As reported by Hagelskamp, Schleifer and DiStasi (2013), most are concerned with balancing work and life while completing a degree that relates to their work and does not require the accumulation of debt. Advertising should be geared towards this age group.

In a Performics blog article (2013), several major market research studies were summarized. It was noted in a Deloitte study from 2013 that 88% of 24-29 year olds multitask while watching TV and a Kantar Research study reported that 80% of all ages check their cell phones within 15 minutes of waking each day and continue checking all day long. Interestingly, participants in the study indicated they trust what people they know say more than brand names. Given these findings, reaching this target market should include an aggressive advertising approach combining TV and the use of social media through success stories of early adopters of MyCompletionPath.org. The campaigns must explain why this service is like no other and how it directly meets the needs of this student segment including the ability to lower cost to completion, offer options for work / life balance and make connections to their work.
Target Population: Subscribing Institutions

The target population for institutions is broad. Mainly, they should have established means for serving adult degree completers. Some specific characteristics include:

- Public, 4 year and above
- Private, not-for-profit 4 year or above
- Public, 2 year
- Private, not-for-profit 2 year

These institutions will match the following criteria:

- Degree-granting
- Title IV eligible
- Institution size 1000+
- Non-traditional criteria (at least one, maybe more)
  - Open admission policy
  - Dual credit
  - Credit for life experience
  - Advanced placement (AP) credits
  - Distance learning opportunities
  - Weekend/evening college
  - Placement services for completers
  - On-campus daycare for student's children

Personal selling, as mentioned previously, would likely be the best way to reach potential institutional subscribers. This could be accomplished through direct campus visits and conference presentations at admissions/recruiting events. In the beginning, attention would be focused on institutions who currently serve adult learners.
**Business Model**

Careful consideration was given to the problem being addressed, how the solution solves the problem, the unique value propositions, customer segments, channels, cost structure, revenue streams and key metrics. This is detailed in a business model canvas included at the end of this document.

Estimates on startup costs were developed from the expertise of team members who have participated in technology startups. An initial investment of around $1 million is needed to launch the portal. This assumes that a minimum of 20 institutions join at $5000 per year. If around 31,000 students subscribed annually at $50 each, within 3 years *MyCompletionPath.org* would break even.

*This is only a tiny fraction (.084%) of the potential market of 37 million potential degree completers.*

An initial investment recovery break-even analysis is included on the following page. An explanation of the units used for the model and assumptions are explained in the notes section.
Solve for:  Product Name: MyCompletionPath.Org

Fixed Costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initial Marketing</td>
<td>$200,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year One Hosting</td>
<td>$5,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 Salaries</td>
<td>$500,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. Exp</td>
<td>$50,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 Institution Setup (20 @ $10K)</td>
<td>$200,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Institutional Maintenance Fees @20 x 5K/Year</td>
<td>($300,000.00)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fixed Costs</strong></td>
<td><strong>$905,000.00</strong></td>
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Variable Costs per Unit

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<th>Item</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Advertising</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incremental Hosting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Direct Salary</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Var. Costs/Unit</strong></td>
<td><strong>$21.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pricing and Contribution

| Unit Price                        | $50.00 |
| Unit Contribution Margin          | $29.00 |

Volume

| Break-Even Volume                  | 31,207 |
| Expected Sales Per Month           | 867    |

Notes:
For purposes of this calculation, institutional membership (institutional maintenance fees) over the course of the break-even period are deducted from the initial investment. The current break-even analysis assumes 20 universities are subscribed for the first 3 years at $5000 per year per institution.

The unit in this analysis is a student subscription for $50 per year per student.
**Potential Roadblocks**
Understanding roadblocks is critical to success. Those identified are described below.

- Institutions typically want to be the final arbiter of what credit will be transferred in to one of their degree programs. The institutions that work with *MyCompletionPath.org* will be required to accept the transfer credits that *MyCompletionPath.org* certify as transferable.

- If *MyCompletionPath.org* were to convene a council to develop standardized admissions and transfer of credit policies common to all subscribing institutions, again the shift in mindset would be a roadblock for many institutions. However, a consortium of institutions working in tandem under common policies as described here, would represent efficiencies in service and operations difficult to identify currently in higher education. This may be a roadblock worth trying to conquer.

- In addition to participation from institutions, students are key. *MyCompletionPath.org* would be responsible for getting students to use the site. This will require aggressive marketing campaigns.

**Concluding Thoughts**
The higher education industry has been charged with raising completion rates to ensure we have an educated workforce in the future. Through the environmental scan, we found no other service like the one we are proposing. There are over 37 million opportunities out there to positively impact the completion rate and we believe that every one of them deserves to be empowered to complete a degree that best serves their needs while maintaining high quality standards. *MyCompletionPath.org* has that potential.
Imagine connecting the 37 million people in our country who have some college credit but no degree with their shortest path to completion. Using technology similar to priceline.com and match.com, we could connect potential students with institutions offering them the shortest path to completing their credential through a web-based portal. Through a subscription model, institutions could choose to be a part of the service. No such service exists and it is overwhelming for students to think about contacting multiple institutions, sending transcripts to each one, navigating their systems and waiting for replies. These students have no easy way to know if they are choosing the best option for completion. This project has the potential to change the landscape of degree completion in our country.


References


### Problem
Adult student degree attainment is low
Adult Students do not know all options available to them
Adult students do not have the time and resources to find the quickest path to degree completion

### Solution
**MyCompletionPath.Org**
- Quickly connects students to multiple institutions
- Official award of credit
- Affordable & Student Centered
- Nationwide
- Institution agnostic

### Unique value proposition
We help students find the quickest path to desired degree completion
Priceline meets Match.com for adult centered education

### Unfair advantage
First of its kind, started by education and system experts and supported by Educause

### Customer Segments
**STUDENTS**
- Adult learner stop outs
- New adult learner

**INSTITUTIONS**
- Adult serving colleges and universities

### Key metrics
- # Partner Institutions
- # Programs
- # Portal visits
- # Student profiles
- # Student matches
- # Student Starts
- # Students graduate

### Alternatives:
- Informative Education portals
- University specific initiatives
- Students’ own research and resource capabilities

### Channels
**STUDENTS:**
- Social Media
- Blogs
- Employment Agencies
- Local Ads

**INSTITUTIONS**
- Conferences
- Personal selling

### Cost Structure
- Initial investment in Portal Design @ $250K
- People costs - $500K /Year
- Hosting @ $10K/Year
- Marketing $200K
- Initial investment break even point at 31,000 Student Subscriptions

### Revenue Streams
- Student subscription at $50/year
- Member Institution subscription at 5K/year (to cover program alignment)
- Portal Advertising

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Ash Maurya's lean canvas adaptation of the original google draw template by scrumology.net based on the work of Alexander Ostenwalder . Lucas Cervera