

## WSU's innovative programs help students succeed in college

In many regards, the undergraduate college experience resembles a utopian existence.

Students read classic and modern literature. They discuss the fundamental concepts of liberty, equality and justice, and countless other ideas. Every type of music imaginable is performed on campus. Renowned authors, business leaders and politicians speak on campus.

Whether a student's interests lean toward billiards or bicycle racing, they will find dozens of students with similar tastes to share their passions. If some students want to broaden their social network, they can socialize with students from Shanghai, Riyadh and Moscow.

What fate awaits someone who spends a few years in this idyllic experience? The answer is better health, greater wealth and deeper contentment. Across the country, college graduates have greater life expectancies. Utahns with a bachelor's degree earn more than twice the average income of high school graduates. Surveys that ask people to list their greatest regrets in life often find that the most common regret is the failure to pursue more education.

The benefits of a college education are enormous, so you might believe that most people would choose to attend college. This is not the case. The proportion of Utah's population who hold a bachelor's degree is declining. Of 1.5 million working-age Utahns, 66 percent have not completed either an associate's or bachelor's degree. This represents more than a million Utah adults without any college degree.

What prevents high school graduates from attending college? There are many answers to this question, but two factors are consistently cited as obstacles to entering college and completing a degree. The first obstacle is finances; many simply lack the funds to attend college. The second obstacle is lack of preparation. High school graduates often don't acquire the necessary skills to succeed in college. In particular, many high school graduates struggle with basic mathematics.

This month, Weber State University unveiled two innovative programs to address these two common obstacles to college completion.

Last week at the Utah State Capitol, WSU announced a new program aimed at helping

Utahns cover the cost of college. The Dream Weber program is a bold initiative that will provide free tuition to any bona fide Utah resident whose annual household income is equal to or less than \$25,000 and who is Pell Grant eligible. The program is made possible through private donations coupled with other sources of student financial aid.

Only 20 minutes after the program was announced, WSU was already receiving inquiries from applicants. It is anticipated that as many as 2,000 students may participate in the Dream Weber program. This means that WSU's Dream Weber program will improve the economic circumstances of many individuals in the community.

A second initiative, also started this month, is aimed at those students who need extra assistance with math. WSU has adopted a totally new way to teach math using a Web-based computer program which allows students to more effectively learn math at their own pace. In this new program, students meet each week for one hour in a classroom and spend the remaining time in a computer lab. In both the classroom and the lab, students work on math using the Web-based program, and faculty and tutors provide individualized assistance. Students also are able to work on the program from their home computers or anywhere they can access the internet. This individualized curriculum also enables students to either move ahead and finish a course early, or complete two or more courses in a single semester. All quizzes and exams may be repeated until the student masters the material. This curricular structure removes most, if not all, of the math anxiety for students.

Even though the program only began on January 4, it is already a big hit with students. WSU student Taylor Sniffen says, "if more classes were like this, students would be more successful." Another student, Ren PleBarrus, simply described the program as "genius."

U.S. research universities take deserved pride in leading the nation in research and innovations which lead to economic development. All universities should place a similar emphasis on student success. With these two programs, WSU has moved to the forefront with innovative programs that help students attend college and earn a degree.

### Top of Utah Voices



Michael Vaughan is Weber State University's provost. He accepts e-mail from readers at [MVAUGHAN@Weber.edu](mailto:MVAUGHAN@Weber.edu)

### Michael Vaughan

#### ■ Commentary