

## A model for President Obama

Last week, President Barack Obama visited Macomb Community College in Michigan. He used his visit to announce the “American Graduation Initiative,” a sweeping \$12 billion plan to increase the number of associate’s degrees granted by the nation’s community colleges. Given his goal, President Obama would be well served to look to the example of Weber State University. He could learn some lessons that would put his investment to good use.

The key points of Obama’s proposal are creating a range of online course offerings to serve the needs of students, successfully moving students toward graduation, and preparing students for the workforce. Weber State University excels in each of these areas.

For more than a decade, WSU has been a national leader in online education. Almost one in five WSU enrollments are online enrollments. I have spoken with Clinical Laboratory Science graduates who earned their entire degree online; their first trip to the WSU campus was for the graduation ceremony. WSU’s Bachelors of Integrated studies program is presently expanding its online degree offerings to meet the needs of the U.S. military. If the president wants to meet the needs of working students, supporting online education is a good decision.

To successfully move students toward graduation, WSU offers a comprehensive range of degrees. A significant number of entering college students have not decided which major they wish to pursue. These students may ultimately choose either an associate’s degree program or a bachelor’s degree program. At many colleges, students may be forced to transfer to another institution after they select their major because the degree they ultimately desire is unavailable.

At WSU, students may move into either associate’s or bachelor’s degree programs without having to transfer to another institution. Last year, of WSU’s 3,801 graduates 1,684 earned a two-year degree,

Many of these students will go on to attain a bachelor’s degree, and a significant number will ultimately earn a master’s degree from WSU.

Does WSU’s model for degree completion work? One piece of convincing evidence is found in the rankings of the magazine

Community College Week which annually evaluates the nation’s colleges and universities based upon the number of associate’s degrees awarded. The ranking includes degrees granted by both two-year and four-year institutions.

In the most recent Community College Week ratings, based upon the number of associate’s degrees awarded by four-year institutions, WSU ranked fourth nationally

in nursing, sixth nationally in science, seventh nationally in health professions, eighth nationally in general associate’s degrees, and 16th nationally for all disciplines. Within the state of Utah, WSU is the largest provider of both nursing and health professions associate’s degrees.

The final component of Obama’s initiative is training students for jobs which will contribute to the economy now and in the future. WSU excels in technical and professional education. More than 70 percent of WSU’s 21,000 students are enrolled in technical and professional programs such as manufacturing engineering technology, dental hygiene, accounting, logistics and supply chain management, and teacher education. Because of the high demand for these professions, many WSU students have a job before they have a degree.

When you are pursuing a goal, it is helpful to have a model. For decades, WSU has fulfilled a multi-dimensional mission by serving as northern Utah’s community college and also offering a comprehensive range of bachelor’s and master’s programs. If President Obama’s goal is to create online education programs, move students toward graduation, and prepare students for the workforce, he could not find a better example than Weber State University.

### Top of Utah Voices



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### Michael Vaughan

#### Commentary