The University of North Carolina at Asheville
Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) Scholarship Program
DRAFT – V2

The Problem

National trends demonstrate a clear disconnect between aspiring first-generation students (FGS) and their peers in secondary education proficiency, particularly in familiarity with the rudimentary steps leading to college preparedness – SAT scores, application, retention and ultimately, college graduation. For the purposes of this document, “first generation students” are classified as those students whose parents have not earned a bachelor’s degree. The transition to college has substantial impediments for the FGS population that largely rests in the lack of college preparatory courses in secondary school as well as the “high stakes” decision-making linked to SAT scores at institutions of higher education. And the daunting reality is that while 42% of 2nd, 3rd, and 4th generation college students graduate within four years, only a mere 27% of 1st generation students are capable of completing college within the same timeframe; and evidence suggests significantly lower retention rates for these students. Interestingly, however, FGS’s are increasing at an astonishing rate as the business sector now demands unique and more sophisticated skillsets only acquired through completion of a college education. In 2007, the Higher Education Research Institute reported that only 17% of FGS were applying to college; however, data now suggests that one in three college students identify as a FGS (Greenwald 2012) and while that does reflect compelling growth, evidence still indicates that these students have lower retention rates (Duggan, 2001; 2002; Pike & Suh, 2005). UNC Asheville is cognizant that FGS’s are at a clear disadvantage compared with “traditional” students when it comes to retention and graduation rates; and despite acceptance and access, this is no way implies success!

The Need

Research indicates that institutionalized systems that work together seamlessly can improve college preparation, readiness, access and ultimately successful college completion. Cognizant that a continuum of support structures from K – 16 are necessary to ensure the academic success of FGS, UNC Asheville, the Asheville City Public Schools and the nationally acclaimed Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) Program have worked in tandem to teach critical thinking skills in not only exploring the crucial steps one must take to gain entrance to college but more importantly, assess one’s own individual uniqueness with respect to pursuing a college of choice. UNC Asheville AVID is a college readiness system for elementary through higher education that is designed to increase school-wide learning and performance. The AVID College Readiness System (ACRS) accelerates student learning, uses research based methods of effective instruction, provides meaningful and motivational professional learning, and acts as a catalyst for systemic reform and change. These goals fall squarely in concert with UNC Asheville’s strategic plan to “seek and serve North Carolina’s most promising students, regardless of need, and facilitate their path to graduation as a priority.”
In fact, comprehensive and holistic support measures are lacking in the majority of students' K - 16 trek through elementary, middle and high school resulting in fractured systems to best support FGS; and no one entity left accountable for issues related to a student’s transition from high school to college. To overcome these impediments, institutions of higher education must become active participants in preparing their future students for the rigors of college-level work. UNC Asheville’s liberal arts approach brings these pieces together by helping students explore how diverse disciplines influence one another. It’s about active collaboration to find innovative solutions to complex problems. It’s about an educational process that encourages debate and discussion guided by inspiring professors. UNC Asheville’s liberal arts curriculum, combined with a strong undergraduate research program and emphasis on creativity, prepares students not only to secure jobs in their fields immediately after graduation, but it also enables them to grow and adapt their careers as the global workforce evolves. UNC Asheville students ranked in the 98th percentile of all 1,200 institutions in the national Collegiate Learning Assessment -- this assessment measures improvement in critical thinking, reasoning and analysis. UNC Asheville is known for its culture of creativity and serious scholarship.

The UNC Asheville Solution

The UNC Asheville AVID Program is a widely regarded flagship program in Western North Carolina and nationally. The UNC Asheville AVID Program has experienced a higher four-year college application rate (100%) and acceptance rate (90%) than the AVID National rates of application (90%) and acceptance (76%). AVID began 30 years ago in San Diego, CA in one teacher’s classroom. The program is now international in scope and is widespread across the United States. Asheville City Schools adopted the AVID program in 1997 and invited UNC Asheville to become an AVID partner in 1999. For the past 12 years, Asheville City Schools and UNC Asheville, and more recently, the City of Asheville and Mission Hospitals have collaborated to support hundreds of students as they graduate from high school and go on to attend the college or university of their choice. AVID students from Asheville City Schools have attended Howard University, Johns Hopkins University, UNC Chapel Hill, the University of Alabama, North Carolina A &T, and UNC Asheville, among many other colleges and universities. Since its inception at UNC Asheville, 100% of AVID graduates advance toward postsecondary education with many remaining in the Asheville region, contributing to the economic viability of Western North Carolina. LET’S FIGURE OUT A STRATEGY TO FIND OUT HOW MANY KIDS HAVE PARTICIPATED IN OUR PROGRAM SINCE INCEPTION. KIM – WHAT YOU HAVE SENT IS GOOD BUT IT WOULD BE GREAT TO HAVE A LARGER NUMBER PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF THE ASTOUNDING PERCENTAGES OF APPLICATION AND ACCEPTANCE RATES—WOW! Through UNCA’s AVID Program, students are taught to use critical thinking skills in not only exploring the crucial steps one must take to gain entrance to college but more importantly, assess one’s own individual uniqueness with respect to pursuing a college of choice bolstering retention rates. Many of UNC Asheville AVID graduates receive scholarships to attend college, and Dell Scholarships have been awarded to several Asheville High School AVID graduates. UNC Asheville’s AVID Program students have consistently maintained a “weighted” GPA of 3.1; however, SAT scores have largely been a barrier for students who would otherwise benefit from and excel in an environment replete with small classroom sizes and one-to-one interaction with distinguished faculty. Therefore, the UNC Asheville AVID Scholarship Program will not simply use the SAT calculation as the sole basis for making admissions decisions nor consider it as the primary predictor of a student’s long-term success. Working in tandem with an Admissions Selection Team, promising applicants will be selected using a holistic and comprehensive approach taking into consideration other key characteristics that offer a more comprehensive
student profile as an indicator of college successfullness, including high school activities (attendance, number of honors or challenging courses taken), student participation in civic, social, and community engagement, high-school class ranking, official recommendations from schools, community leaders, and the like, GPA, as well as a host of other factors that are much better predictors of success. These inventive approaches will open the door to those students who have been historically underrepresented at the University of North Carolina, Asheville, a prestigious “liberal arts” university close to home. The time has never been more pressing to create a UNC Asheville AVID Scholarship Program, particularly since the university serves as the intellectual and creative hub of the Asheville region yet it extends beyond academics. According to a recent economic impact report, the university has added value to the community, the city, the region and the state of North Carolina. More than 2,590 jobs have been supported by the presence of the university, and its impact totaled $268 million in fiscal year 2012 alone. Moreover, studies show that most FGS (18.3%) who choose a college close to home were more likely to persist than those who chose colleges farther away from home. In addition, FGS (12.3%) who attend private institutions are less likely to persist than those attending public universities. The Gates Foundation publication “With Their Whole Lives Ahead of Them” (2009) found that the main factor in selecting the college students attended was based upon geographic convenience in forty-five (45%) percent of those who graduated.

The UNC Asheville AVID Scholarship Award will be awarded to promising students who are current attendees of Asheville City Public Schools, current Asheville AVID participants, qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program, maintain at least a B average, are civically, socially and/or community engaged and considered rising juniors or seniors. AVID Scholarships will be conditioned upon successful graduation from high school, and acceptance to UNC Asheville (they should be encouraged to apply for financial aid for other college costs, books, etc. – seems reasonable. The UNC Asheville AVID Scholarship will cover the complete cost of college tuition, including housing and will be awarded annually to a cohort of three to four students. Acceptance of the first cohort is anticipated in the fall of 2014 with scholarship renewals reviewed and assessed on an annual basis to gauge individual student progress. Scholarships recipients will be required to participate in supportive programs to facilitate their path to graduation, including FGS student forums, FGS faculty mentoring programs, serve as UNC Asheville Admissions Ambassadors, participate as tutors at Asheville Middle School, Asheville High School or SILSA as part of the UNC Asheville AVID Program in addition to maintaining a satisfactory GPA and meeting all course requirements. The cost to fund one student per year is estimated at $14,000 (in state tuition) per student reflecting a total investment of $42,000 - $56,000 each year. Opportunities exist to establish a permanently named endowment that will perpetually benefit the AVID Scholarship at UNC Asheville. An endowment is a donation whose invested interest generates the funding for annual scholarships; and there are many ways a donor may choose to make a gift: cash donations, wills, trusts, insurance policies, real estate, or other opportunities. Gifts can be made as a one-time contribution or may be made over a five-year pledge period. An endowment can be named in honor or memory of an individual, foundation, organization or corporation with an initial gift or pledge of $25,000. Payment terms are flexible. Gifts of any amount are welcome for new or currently established endowments.