



ASSOCIATION OF
PUBLIC &
LAND-GRANT
UNIVERSITIES

California State University
Northridge

The Top 3 Benefits of an Associate Degree



CECE

INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY UNIVERSITIES
AWARDS PROGRAM

CASE
STUDY
2020

IEP CATEGORY – TALENT

**California State University,
Northridge:
CSUN Connections**

ABOUT CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY CONNECTIONS

CSUN Connections is a reverse transfer partnership among CSUN, UNITE LA, and three local community colleges (LA Mission College, LA Pierce College, and LA Valley College) that promotes degree completion and attainment, provides a pathway for students, and better integrates the student experience between community college and the university.

Claim What (They've) Earned

Nationally, reverse transfer is a concept gaining significant traction. Traditional transfer focuses on students moving with their units from a community college to a four-year university.

Data show that many of these students move on without claiming the associate degree that they have earned or were close to earning. Reverse transfer emphasizes the efforts to claim the associate degree, sometimes by transferring “back” units from the four-year institution to the community college to satisfy degree requirements.

CSUN Connections examined data of students who had transferred units from our partner community colleges and who, although in good standing, stopped attending CSUN. Through rigorous and mostly manual data analysis, comparing degree audits and transcripts at CSUN and at the partner community college, those students were identified, contacted and invited to “Claim What (They’ve) Earned!” to have their degree awarded or evaluate the few remaining courses. Through these contacts, dedicated advisors then engage the students in resolving the barriers to completing their degree at CSUN and returning to finish the baccalaureate.

ReRoute to Success

However, CSUN Connections has another track for which it is unique – leveraging the concept of reverse transfer to develop a pathway for students who started at CSUN as first time freshmen but struggle, resulting in academic disqualification within the first three terms. Through CSUN Connections, we offer an integrated pathway from CSUN to the community college and back again – offering concierge services, specialized advising and, most important, a continued sense of community and belonging through connection to CSUN. Advisors follow up with students who



Cover Image created by CSUN IntersectLA for “Reroute to Success” marketing materials

have received disqualification notice to offer the pathway – to divert to a community college, complete an associate degree and return to CSUN with special benefits such as application waivers, later deadlines and early registration. Through “ReRoute to Success,” CSUN addresses many of the challenges cited by students who disqualify: cost of attendance, transportation challenges, class size, and lack of community. The community colleges present solutions to many of these challenges while the students build self-efficacy and confidence.

OUTCOMES OF CSUN CONNECTIONS

Awarded a California Governor’s Innovation Award and designated a Lumina Talent Hub in 2017, CSUN Connections has been featured in several higher education outlets. CSUN Connections is also represented in the newest cohort of IHEP’s Degrees When Due, part of a team from California representing several Cal State University campuses and community colleges. The CSUN Connections team includes representatives from each of the partner institutions – both staff and faculty who are “on the ground” and senior administrators who have the authority and influence to help the program move forward. Additionally, the group is organized and supported by UNITE LA, a nonprofit organization that leads collaborative education reform efforts, promotes business-education partnerships, expands college access, and provides workforce development opportunities for youth in the Los Angeles area to ensure underserved youth have the opportunity to participate in LA’s 21st century economy.

The integration of high impact practices flows throughout the design of CSUN Connections. Graduate students in CSUN’s educational counseling program serve as outreach coordinators and interns to reach out to the CSUN students, to help them through the transitions, and guide them to appropriate resources. Additionally, all student and public facing communications about CSUN Connections have been designed by students enrolled in classes or employed through CSUN’s IntersectLA student-operated and faculty-managed strategic communications agency. With the guidance, input and approval of the CSUN Connections team, the student design team has launched a website, developed and implemented text, mail and email campaigns, and created social media content. They provide monthly reports on metrics for the campaigns, which are updated accordingly.

To date, more than 700 degree audits have been performed, identifying more than 150 students who had met all of the degree requirements for the associate degree,

and more than 50 of those degrees have already been conferred. Of those new associate degree holders, almost half have returned to CSUN to continue work on their bachelor's degree. Further, the ReRoute to Success pathway was launched in 2019-2020. This pathway proved more challenging. Unlike the Claim What You've Earned! Pathway, students were not offered (near) immediate diplomas. Also, the ReRoute students had not yet attended a community college and had initially chosen to attend a four-year university as a freshman. CSUN Connections and CSUN leadership realize the importance and value of de-stigmatizing the community college and celebrating the strong academic and community values of these partners in our shared goal of degree attainment.

CSUN is now working to expand the reverse transfer and CSUN Connections program to more of its community college feeders, as well as to advocate for improved systems and policies within the CSU, the California Community College system, and California Department of Higher Education. For example, a centralized data system for degree auditing would eliminate many current barriers. Next steps include working with the LA Chamber of Commerce and other employer groups to provide internships and career development training to the CSUN Connections students, especially while at the community college.

LINKS TO FURTHER INFORMATION

Additional Information:

- [Reroute To Success](#)
- [Claim What You've Earned](#)
- [CSUN Connections: from ideation to implementation](#)

Partnering Organizations:

- [California State University, Northridge](#)
- [UNITE LA](#)
- [LA Mission College](#)
- [LA Pierce College](#)
- [LA Valley College](#)
- [IntersectLA](#)

ABOUT APLU

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is North America's oldest higher education association. APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The association's membership consists of public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations.

APLU's mission is to: expand access and improve student success to deliver the innovative workforce of tomorrow; advance and promote research and discovery to improve society, foster economic growth, and address global challenges; and build healthy, prosperous, equitable, and vibrant communities locally and globally.

Based in Washington, DC, the association's work is furthered by an active and effective advocacy arm that works with Congress and the administration as well as the media to advance federal policies that strengthen public universities and benefit the students they serve.

ABOUT THE IEP UNIVERSITIES PROGRAM

APLU and its **Commission on Economic and Community Engagement (CECE)** established the Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) Universities Program to help higher education institutions codify, elevate, and advance their campus enterprise supporting economic and community development.

The **IEP designation program** recognizes institutions that have demonstrated a meaningful, ongoing and substantial commitment to economic and community development, growth, and economic opportunity.

The **IEP awards program** recognize exemplary and innovative projects in university-based economic and community engagement:

- **Talent** and workforce development
- **Innovation**, entrepreneurship, and tech-based economic development
- **Place** development through public service, outreach, and community engagement

Learn more at: www.APLU.org/IEP