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FIRST WHITE PAPER FROM AMERICAN TALENT INITIATIVE EXPLORES HOW TOP UNIVERSITIES CAN RECRUIT, ENROLL, AND GRADUATE STUDENTS FROM LOW- AND MODERATE-INCOME FAMILIES
White paper features examples of five colleges and universities whose committed leadership has used creative financial strategies to expand opportunity.

WASHINGTON, D.C. and NEW YORK, N.Y. -- The first white paper of the new [American Talent Initiative](#) (ATI), released today, outlines concrete examples of how five ATI member colleges have expanded opportunity for low-and moderate-income students (or “lower-income”) despite significant financial constraints. The first in a series of publications that highlight practices employed to expand opportunity, [Funding Socioeconomic Diversity at High-Performing Colleges and Universities](#) examines the financial strategies chosen by five top-performing colleges and universities with very different sizes, challenges, and geographic locations—Franklin & Marshall College; University of California, Berkeley; University of Richmond; University of Texas at Austin; and Vassar College.

This paper provides a roadmap for top educational institutions in the US to increase the number of talented lower-income students on their campuses. In academic year 2013-14, only 22% of students received Pell grants in the top-performing ~270 colleges and universities with six-year graduation rates exceeding 70%. By contrast, nearly 38% of students enrolled at all other four-year public and non-profit private schools receive Pell grants – a 16 percentage-point discrepancy that reflects missed opportunity for thousands of qualified and talented students.

The new research from ATI emphasizes that colleges and universities cannot successfully diversify their undergraduate populations without prioritizing the reallocation of financial resources. While these five colleges are, by no means, the only top-performing colleges that have reallocated resources to expanded opportunity for lower-income students, they provide important examples of how financial strategies are employed within various institutional contexts in the higher-education community.

Using the share of Pell grant recipients to measure progress, these five institutions all increased the number of low- and moderate-income students using a similar set of policies:

- Reallocating funds from merit-only aid to need-based aid;
- Making strategic use of one time grants and budgetary surpluses;
- Cutting non-instructional expenses;
- Increasing revenue; and

- Drawing from the endowment in strategic ways.

The American Talent Initiative, announced in December, is a partnership between Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Aspen College Excellence Program, Ithaka S+R, and a growing alliance of colleges and universities collaborating on a single national goal: educating 50,000 additional high-achieving, lower-income students at the 270 colleges and universities with the highest graduation rates by 2025. ATI members are working together to identify and share the best ways to attract, support, and graduate the talent pool that is now missing from these colleges, to make a national impact that no individual institution could achieve on its own.

“There is ample evidence that lower-income students with the talent to earn admission thrive at top institutions when their financial needs are met, and graduate at higher rates than they do at less competitive schools,” said Catharine Hill, managing director of Ithaka S+R and former president of Vassar College.

All of the five institutions profiled in the paper reported benefits when their admission and support priorities shifted in ways that deemphasized students’ ability to pay full tuition and increased focus on students’ academic talent. In addition, an extensive body of research explains why a more economically diverse student body is beneficial to the entire college or university community.

“Expanding opportunity at America’s top colleges and universities for talented students from all backgrounds sets those students on a pathway to leadership,” said Josh Wyner executive director of the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program and a member of ATI’s steering committee, “while at the same time making for a richer educational experience for everyone on campus. In these ways, ATI member colleges and universities are strengthening the vitality of our economy and our democracy.”

The white paper emphasizes leadership, concluding that the goal for increased opportunity must be embraced and communicated by college administrations to every audience—faculty, boards, funders, and students—framing this focus as benefitting both the institution and the broader public good.

“In each of the institutions profiled in this paper, leadership was a critical element,” said Martin Kurzweil, director of Ithaka S+R’s Educational Transformation Program, a member of the ATI steering committee, and one of the authors of the white paper. “The presidents and other leaders of these colleges and universities understand the value of expanding opportunity to talented lower-income students, made it a priority, and were willing to commit financial resources, political capital, and considerable communications efforts to making it a reality.”

The Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program (www.aspeninstitute.org/college-excellence) aims to advance higher education practices, policies, and leadership that significantly improve student outcomes. The Program is part of The Aspen Institute www.aspeninstitute.org, with a mission to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues.

Ithaka S+R (www.sr.ithaka.org) is a not-for-profit service that helps the academic community navigate economic and technological change. Its aim is to broaden access to higher education by reducing costs while also improving student outcomes. Ithaka S+R is part of ITHAKA (www.ithaka.org).