Texas OnCourse Project Overview

CHALLENGE: In 2013, just 35 percent of Texans ages 25-34 held an associate or bachelor's degree. Texas seeks to almost double this number with the 60x30TX higher education strategic plan. Despite improvement over the last several years, almost 80% of the 329,095 Texas students who began 8th grade in 2004 had *not* received a certificate or degree from a Texas college or university within six years of their high school graduation date. The Texas Legislature responded by passing HB 5 in the 83rd session which created career pathways for high school students to help them get off to the right start and successfully pursue and earn postsecondary credentials.

However, based on a Texas OnCourse survey of over 1500 educators, less than half agree that "students at [their] school understand the implications of [their] graduation plans and endorsements." Only 37% believed parents understood these implications. Educators have also shared that they themselves need more information on the implications for graduation plan selection to effectively advise students and families.

SOLUTION: The Texas State Legislature passed HB 18 in the 84th session, which directed resources to advancing college and career knowledge, and initiated the work of Texas OnCourse, the nation's most comprehensive initiative for improving college and career advising in secondary schools.

Counselor and advisor professional development in Texas has traditionally been provided via in-person, face-to-face training, limiting learning opportunities for districts and schools constrained by resources and/or location. Now, regardless of their district location or resources, learners can access and complete Texas OnCourse training, receive verifying micro-credentials (in the form of badges and extended transcripts), and go back and review key concepts and skills at their discretion.

UT Austin, in partnership with Learning Objects and Extension Engine, has designed, developed, and is now delivering OnCourse with an explicit focus on the attainment and application of key competencies by middle and high school counselors and advisors. OnCourse was designed as a novel (perhaps only one of its kind) competency-based, stackable, micro-credentialing learning ecosystem that provides holistic, personalized, self-paced learning experience across a historically disaggregated training and development environment.

LEARNING IMPACT OUTCOMES: To ensure that the implementation is accomplishing desired goals, it has been rolled out in stages to increasingly larger groups of learners. At each stage, data is collected, reviewed, and incorporated into curriculum and delivery environment improvements. Feedback from the first 400 counselors and advisors using OnCourse to complete the initial three modules has been overwhelmingly positive.
- 94% of participants agreed that the modules are of high quality;
- >85% of participants agreed that the modules included information they did not know;
- 98% of participants agreed that modules contain practical information they can readily use.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT: The implementation team continues to evaluate the impact and efficacy of OnCourse as it is rolled out statewide. It will take years to see the ultimate impact on the 60x30 goal, but better prepared counselors, advisors, parents, and students are an essential start.

Moreover, The OnCourse team and UT Austin leaders also envision opportunities to leverage their collaboration with Learning Objects and Extension Engine to extend the infrastructure, learning model, and lessons learned to other more traditional learning contexts.