State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION
80 Washington Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

Barbara Cottam
Chair

Council on Elementary and Secondary Education

Amy Beretta, Esq.

Colleen A. Callahan, Ed.D.

Karin Forbes

Jo Eva Gaines

Marta V. Martinez

Lawrence Purtill

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Mathies J. Santos

Joyce L. Stevos, Ph.D.

Council on Postsecondary Education

Michael Bernstein
Chair

Dennis Duffy, Esq.

William Foulkes

The Honorable Thomas Izzo

Judy Ouellette

Kerry I. Rafanelli, Esq.

John J. Smith, Jr.

Dr. Jeffery A. Williams

Enclosure 8a

May 20, 2015

May 20, 2015

To: Council on Postsecondary Education

From: Commissioner Jim Purcell, Ed.D.

Subject: Approval of a Proposal from College Unbound for initial approval to operate in Rhode Island for a period of five years and offer the Bachelor of Arts degree in Organizational Leadership and Change

Background

The Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) has been asked to grant initial approval for College Unbound (CU) to operate in Rhode Island and to offer a baccalaureate degree in Organizational Leadership and Change. College Unbound is a non-profit degree-completion higher education institution that targets low-income, underrepresented adult learners who have at least nine college credits but no degree. CU will be using the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met School) facility in Providence during the evening hours. If approved by the CPE, College Unbound will operate under the *Regulations Governing Institutions of Higher Education Operating in Rhode Island*.

College Unbound is an outgrowth of Big Picture Learning which is a non-profit organization committed to the redesign of education in the United States. For over 20 years, Big Picture has built and sustained a network of over 100 high schools in 27 U.S. cities and established schools in Australia and the Netherlands. College Unbound, intended as the adult learning initiative of Big Picture Learning, was launched in 2009. Since then, the CU model for the delivery of higher education for adult learners has been developed, tested, and tweaked. The current model, being presented in the proposal, uses a hybrid of online content and in-place learning support. CU describes the program model as: "College Unbound is a high-tech/high-touch institution in which academic progress requires both online instruction and on-ground action research, application and supports. This hybrid blends the best practice in distributed learning, off-site learning, and collaborative peer-to-peer learning. The program is interest-based, project-driven, cohort-supported, and workplace-enhanced." This model was developed specifically to meet the scheduling, learning, and support needs of adult learners from low-income and under-represented populations.

College Unbound has existed as a program within accredited colleges since 2009. College Unbound began as a curricular partner working within established, accredited institutions in New England. As College Unbound refined its mission and curricular model from a residency-based program for traditional-aged students at Roger Williams University (RWU) and Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) to a program designed specifically for full-time working adults who have started, but not finished a Bachelor's degree, it made sense for College Unbound to change institutional partners. Working with Charter Oak State College (COSC) has helped College Unbound further develop its delivery model and support structures for adult learners. Without its own accreditation, CU had to adapt the model according to the goals and populations of the partner institutions. While College Unbound has been successful, key features of the model have been altered, and as a single program within larger universities, growth has been limited. Beginning the process for accreditation and applying to operate as an independent institution is a natural next step.

The chart following shows that College Unbound graduated its first students in 2012 and each year since.

Year	Partner	Students	Degree	Concentration
2012	RWU	11	Bachelor of General Studies	Community Development
2013	RWU	8	Bachelor of General Studies	Community Development
2013	RWU	5	Bachelor of General Studies	Social & Health Services
2013	RWU	3	Bachelor of General Studies	Individualized Studies
2014	RWU	1	Bachelor of General Studies	Community Development
2014	RWU	2	Bachelor of General Studies	Social & Health Services
2014	COSC	7	Bachelor of Science	Individualized Studies
2014	SNHU	5	Bachelor of Arts	Integrated Studies
2015	COSC	12	Bachelor of Science	Individualized Studies
2015	COSC	2	Associate of Arts	
2015	SNHU	2	Bachelor of Arts	Integrated Studies

Of the students served, 73% are Pell eligible, over 70% are people of color, and nearly 80% work fulltime. While in a CU cohort, 38% were promoted or changed careers thus improving their lives. The college notes an 80% completion rate. After graduating CU reports that 80% are employed fulltime and 20% were accepted to graduate school.

Council members are invited to discuss the CU proposal and vote on the motion below.

Motions

It is recommended --

THAT the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) approve the proposal to grant initial approval to College Unbound to offer the Bachelor of Arts degree in Organizational Leadership and Change for a period of five years. This approval is contingent upon the institution remaining in conformance with the CPE's *Regulations Governing Institutions of Higher Education Operating in Rhode Island*; and further

THAT any additional academic programs or changes will be presented to CPE for approval in accordance with *Regulations Governing Institutions of Higher Education Operating in Rhode Island;* and further

THAT the CPE instruct the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (OPC) to review the program(s) annually to assess the extent to which the estimates and assertions contained in the original proposal have been fulfilled, and the extent to which appropriate progress is being made toward achieving NEASC accreditation; and further

THAT at the end of five years, the institution must apply for and the CPE may grant full approval if the school has secured accreditation from the regional accreditation agency (NEASC) and if the school demonstrates that it remains in conformance with the regulations; thereafter, periodic re-evaluations may be conducted to determine whether the school is financially stable and whether its approved program(s) are continuing to meet the review criteria and operating as proposed and authorized.

Attachment: College Unbound proposal summary and review

College Unbound Proposal Summary and Review

A summary and a review of the proposal, based upon the materials submitted by the organization, was prepared by OPC staff with input from an external reviewer.

Proposal Summary

College Unbound is seeking authority to operate as a nonprofit degree granting institution of higher education. College Unbound had operated previously as a program in conjunction with Roger Williams University and currently in partnership with Charter Oak State College (CT). It is out of a desire to develop its model fully without having to adapt to the goals of other institutions that motivates CU to request the authority to operate as an institution of higher education. As required by the *Regulations Governing Institutions of Higher Education Operating in Rhode Island*, College Unbound is pursuing accreditation through the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and has notified them of their intent to apply for candidacy status.

The CU High-Tech/High-Touch Program model

College Unbound is an interest-based, project-driven, adult degree completion college. CU students use online courses and resources as the basis for collaboration on ideas and theories that are tested by work and research accomplished in person. The majority of students' applied learning takes places through personalized projects in conjunction with their current work or community-based activities. The scholar/practitioner model of pedagogy, where classroom ideas are applied to real-life activities is often used in adult degree completion programs. In consultation with advisors, students determine courses, prior learning assessments, and credit and non-credit opportunities which will be the basis for a degree-long action research project and for the accumulation of skills and knowledge needed to earn the degree. Students have access to "curated" online courses and resources to develop content knowledge and skills.

- CU facilitates a real-life curriculum built around projects linked to students' interests and work. Through the learning experiences, field studies, and in-depth work on projects, students develop CU's Lifelong Learning Competencies and specific areas of knowledge and skills. The CU Lifelong Learning Competencies (the Big 10) are skills identified as essential by employers and regarded as essential for success in life: integrated and applied knowledge, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, accountability, collaboration, creativity, reflection, resilience, and advocacy for self and others.
- The curriculum was designed around competencies identified and promoted by the American Association of Colleges and Universities Liberal Education and American's Promise (LEAP) goals, the U.S. Department of Labor's competency models, and the Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP). The courses are designed so that students receive credit for acquisition of competencies by demonstrating the knowledge, skills, the application of theories, and problem solving. The competency statements are supplemented by indicators which allow students a variety of options in demonstrating mastery.
- Students meet weekly in person with their advisors and members of their learning cohort.
- A Learning Management System (LMS) is used to provide students with access to CU faculty-developed courses and materials, to allow interaction among the learning cohort, to maintain their learning plans, and to develop their action research projects. LMS analytics allow faculty and administrators to monitor student engagement and progress.

- Full-time students take a minimum of 12 credits per semester; many students take 15 credits. Most of the 3-credit courses are run in 8-week intensive modules and therefore students take 1-2 courses in each module plus a semester-long 3-credit course in Workplace and World lab.

Authority and Accreditation

College Unbound is seeking authority to operate as a nonprofit degree granting institution of higher education.

Purposes and Policies

CU has submitted a clearly expressed mission statement. Given the centrality of the mission statement in explaining, supporting and controlling the education provided, the mission statement is provided:

College Unbound Mission

> *Our mission is to reinvent higher education for underrepresented returning adult learners, using a model that is individualized, interest-based, project-driven, workplace-enhanced, cohort-supported, flexible, supportive and affordable. College Unbound integrates the students' own purposes for learning with the needs of their workplaces and communities, improving the lives of students and the lives of those they touch. As a degree completion college, College Unbound provides access, support through completion, and career placement, ensuring that students get in, stay in, and move forward.*

CU notes that the mission and related guiding principles are the basis for organizational and curricular development and evaluation. As such, they guide the institutional decisions, ensuring that priorities, processes, and resources are focused on achieving the mission. These central governing documents are made public by inclusion on the CU website and in the Policy Manual, Academic Catalog, Student Handbook, Advisor Handbook, Instructional Faculty Handbook and Administrative Policies.

Organization and Governance

College Unbound is legally-incorporated as a non-profit organization. CU will be governed by a Board of Trustees; the college has developed Board of Trustee Bylaws, including a conflict of interest policy for trustees, which has been reviewed for compliance with Rhode Island IRS laws and regulations.

Course-based and Instructional Faculty and Advising Faculty have an opportunity to participate in shared governance including program development and maintenance of standards. A shared governance structure has been established and will involve students, administrators, course and advising faculty (full and part-time). Faculty are involved in the Academic Committee, Assessment Committee, Distance Learning Committee, General Education Committee and the Faculty Evaluation Committee.

Program

Bachelor of Arts in Organizational Leadership and Change program prepares graduates to be change leaders competent in lifelong learning, leadership, and developing and sustaining effective organizations and communities. Many colleges and universities use Organizational Leadership as the degree for their adult learner program.

Curriculum:
The degree requires 120 credits:

- 36 in the major: In addition to courses in organizational leadership, students elect courses in communications, learning science, community studies, participatory action research, labor relations and management.
- 40 credits in general education as required by NEASC
- 18 credits for bachelor of arts requirements: Credits in cultural diversity, global citizenship, ethics, Workplace and World Lab
- 26 credits of electives

At least 30 credits must be upper-level courses. The curriculum requirements are flexible to meet the needs of the target student population and the goal of being a degree-completion college. Students must complete at least 30 credits in residency at College Unbound. Up to 90 credits may be transferred in from other accredited postsecondary institutions. Other credits may be accepted through a portfolio review and assessment process.

Employment Outlook:
CU cites data from the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training's 2022 Occupational Outlook which reports expected increases of 10% in the fields of management, business, and community and social services. The proposal cites careers as community leaders, chief executive officers, management analysts, general/operative administrative managers, human resource specialists and social and community services managers. While it may be possible to enter these fields without a degree, the proposal notes there are no opportunities for advancement without a bachelor's degree.

Interinstitutional considerations:
The proposal notes that other Rhode Island colleges and universities make efforts to accommodate adult learners but that CU would be the only college designed for adult students. The public postsecondary institutions have programs to assist students with credits from their institution to complete their degrees (*Finish What You Started* at the University of Rhode Island, *Finish Strong* at Rhode Island College, and *Finish Now* at the Community College of Rhode Island). Roger Williams School of Continuing Studies has developed a program for adult learners and provides support to students developing portfolios to gain credit through prior learning assessment.

Students

Tuition for the bachelor's degree will be $330 per credit hour. Since most students will enroll in two semesters and take 15 credits per semester, their yearly tuition would be $9,900. There is a $100 application fee.

CU has developed plans and policies to support students with documented disabilities and students who are English Language Learners. CU offers on-ground and e-tutoring for writing and other subjects. A weekly Writing Lab is available to all students. Childcare can be arranged and food is provided for students attending the weekly advisory sessions.

Admission to CU is open to all individuals who have a high school diploma or a GED, nine-credits of college credits and a career GPA of 2.0 or higher. The nine credits must include credits for Composition I and may

include credits earned at an accredited college, through the armed services or through prior learning assessment. Students with less than a 2.0 GPA may be conditionally accepted; students accepted conditionally have one semester or 12 credits to earn a career 2.0 GPA or they will be dismissed. The conditional admission policy is intended to allow students the opportunity to demonstrate that they are capable of being successful in higher education.

The proposal notes that CU has identified its target student population as adult learners with some credit with an additional focus on adults who are from traditionally underrepresented populations in higher education. In the market analysis completed by The Capacity Group, it is reported that that in Rhode Island there are 110,617 adults who started but did not finish and 106,499 adults between the ages of 25-64 without a degree representing 19% of Rhode Island's population. The proposal reports that the percentage of Latino students in the current bachelor's degree cohort at CU is significantly higher than at other Rhode Island colleges and universities. CU has established relationships with social, health and education agencies and organizations as a means of recruiting their staff or participants as students; these include the Providence public school system, early care and education centers, health organizations, social services and arts organizations, Native American tribes, and the Rhode Island Department of Corrections. CU established target cohorts for the first year of 120 for the Organizational Leadership Change degree and projects that by 2020-2021, 500 students will be enrolled in the degree program.

Faculty

College Unbound has two designations for faculty: Course-Based Instructional Faculty and Advising Faculty. It is expected that Advising Faculty will live within commuting distance to CU while Course-Based Instructional Faculty may live at a greater distance.

Course-Based Instructional Faculty have a Master's degrees or higher or the requisite experience for practitioners in their field. Members of this faculty may be hired to develop CU courses. Part-time faculty may be hired on a contingency basis for advisory or evaluative services to augment expertise of the Core Faculty. Core Faculty are members of student learning teams and may fulfill roles as professional mentor and or content expert. Course-Based Instructional Faculty must be approved by a committee of the Core and Associate Faculty of the CU.

Advising Faculty are responsible for a full student load of no more than 36. They meet with students individually each week to develop a Personal Learning Plan, assist students toward their achievement of goals and help assess their progress toward their objectives. Due to the integration of curricular student supports, the CU model requires that advising not be relegated into a Student Services division since there is extensive interaction between student, advisor, faculty and community mentors. In addition, Faculty Advisors act as a liaison between student and Bursar, Financial Aid Office and Course-Based instructional Faculty.

Initially, CU will work with a small core of full-time faculty and supplement advising and instructional core with part-time faculty. The initial part-time to full-time faculty ratio is 12:1. It is CU's stated intent to increase both full-time Advising Faculty and Course-Based Instructional Faculty over the first five years.

Instructional Resources

Library Resources: CU hired a recently retired chief librarian and director of academic technology from a community college in the CUNY system to design and develop library services that would meet NEASC

Standard 7 and meet or exceed the standards of the American Library Association (ALA) and Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). The CU Digital Library uses a robust "discovery service" to facilitate discovery, access, evaluation, creation and the use of high quality information. Through this system, students, faculty, and advisors have access to thousands of e-books, e-journals, websites, streaming videos covering all subject areas. This system also offers embedded library instruction and information literacy instruction that has the capacity for direct communication with digital librarians; the emphasis is not only on supplying access to information but on information literacy skills that instruct students on how to evaluate and use information ethically. The digital librarians collaborate with the faculty in integrating information lifelong literacy skills throughout the curriculum. By using this system, every member of the college has access to library services and resources in keeping with ACRL standards. The Digital Library can be accessed 24/7 from anywhere that internet is accessible. There is also a small print library of professional literature in the CU space at the Met School.

Tutoring and E-Tutoring: are staffed by advisors, faculty, community members, alumni and paid volunteers and is provided as needed. Students can leave specific questions and expect an answer in 48 hours.

Writing Lab: The Writing Lab is open for one and a half hours before and after every evening seminar and for four hours on Saturdays. Currently it is staffed by Advising Faculty and alumni. CU states its intent to hire additional staff for the Writing Lab as needed.

Advising Faculty: Each student has a Faculty Advisor who supports the student's learning and achievement of academic goals by responding to the learning plan; encouraging meaningful work; identifying experts and resources including training and courses to meet learning goals; and facilitating the shared assessment of learning products. The advisor meets each student weekly, meets student's professional mentor three times per semester, evaluates and produces a narrative of student' progress at mid-semester and end of semester, meets with field experts to facilitate student learning, and shares facilitation duties for Lifelong Learning Seminars.

Technology Resources: CU leases space and technology resources from The Met School. Laptops and modems are loaned to students who do not have their own.

Facilities and Capital Equipment

Much of students' learning takes places during the day at the workplace or in a community setting. Facilities are used for students to attend seminars, participate in workshops, access tutoring, meet with cohort members and study. They need access to instructors, advisors, tutor and access to childcare while engaging in these activities. To meet this need CU is leasing the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met), a public high school in Providence, RI. CU administration and staff have offices in the Justice Building of The Met campus. The facility consists of four building which include a gymnasium, health center, and theatre/auditorium. Each building has 20+ classrooms, a commons, kitchen, lab space and offices. Each building is equipped with WIFI and each classroom and common is equipped with projection and display capabilities. Each classroom has desktop computers although most students bring their own laptops. In addition, there is another campus on Peace Street in Providence and in Newport giving a combined capacity for over 600 students per night. Since each cohort attends one night per week, there is more than sufficient capacity for 4,000 students

The facility is currently used as a state-operated public high school. It has obtained the appropriate fire, ADA, building department certifications.

Fiscal Responsibilities

Big Picture Learning was founded in 1995 and the proposal states that the company has $3 million in reserve funds after balancing the 2014-2015 budget. Since 2009, College Unbound has been Big Picture Learning's adult education initiative; CU states that during this time, it has operated under a separate budget and has remained within its budget each year. CU's budget has included revenue from Big Picture Learning, grant funds, and a share in tuition from partner higher education institutions. The college will enter the next fiscal year with $156,000 in carryover funds. CU will begin operating as an independently incorporated non-profit entity in 2016-2017.

CU hired the Capacity Group to conduct a feasibility study to project the viability and sustainability of the college as a separate entity, and to prepare a business plan and a five-year budget. The college notes the positive assessment by the Capacity Group in citing a solid growth trajectory and confidence in the ability of the team to raise start-up funds and operate within its budget going forward. Capacity Group did comment that given the timing of federal financial aid disbursements; there could be a two month shortfall of approximately $166,667 in year 1. However, they classified this as a low-risk shortfall because of the option of using a line of credit co-signed by the Big Picture Learning and with pending financial aid as collateral. This was not expected to be a problem in future years but CU was advised to develop a solid plan and banking relationships. In response to this advice, CU requested and received a guaranteed loan from Big Picture Learning; a letter from Saul Kaplan, Board Chair of the Big Picture Learning outlining the terms of the loan was submitted with the proposal.

CU is incorporated and is a tax-exempt organization under Section 501-(c)-(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The college's revenue is derived from foundation grants, consulting revenue, and student tuition and fees. One anticipated source of revenue is student assistance in the form of grants, scholarships and loans from federal and state government, private organizations and agencies, and Veterans benefits. The Board of Directors will establish board designated reserve funds which will be invested by a Finance Committee; investments will be reviewed on a monthly basis and at annual board meetings. An annual audit will be performed and will be reviewed and approved by the Executive Committee. The budget is proposed annually and approved by the Board. The Chief Financial Officer will review the "Budget to actual" reports on a monthly basis.

Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness

The Academic Vice President oversees the institutional effectiveness plan which is designed to insure that the faculty, student and staff voices are heard. The goal of the plan is to ensure that there is a quality learning experience, participatory learning and work environments in keeping with CU's mission and vision. The following key areas will be monitored:

- Mission/ Purpose: alignment of resources, processes, and priorities
- Students: monitor access, retention, completion, job placement and demographics
- Faculty: track hiring, retention, student satisfaction
- Organizational Efficiency: examine enrollment, cost/credit hour, graduation/completion rate, and resource utilization rate

Data to assess institutional effectiveness will be gathered from course and instructor evaluations, advisor and seminar evaluations, student exit interviews, alumni surveys, faculty surveys and all-faculty meetings,

national norms and comparisons to other to Rhode Island colleges, student grades, demographic data, graduation/completion/placement data, employer feedback, and NEASC reviews.

Three governing board committees will have oversight of institutional effectiveness: the Executive Committee, Academic Committee and the Assessment Committee. The perspectives of faculty, alumni, and current students will be represented on these committees. College Unbound also will use its ongoing relationship with the Lumina Foundation, the Capacity Group, the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE) and the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) to monitor and assess aspects of the institution's effectiveness.

Public Disclosure and Institutional Integrity

CU has provided copies of its major publications including the Policy Manual, Academic Catalog, Student Handbook, Course-based Instructional Faculty Handbook, Faculty Advisor Handbook and website.

College Unbound Proposal Review

Following customary procedure for the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner, the three Rhode Island public postsecondary institutions and the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Rhode Island (AICU Rhode Island) were given the opportunity to review and comment on the proposal. This review incorporates the comments received from the institutions, an external reviewer and the evaluation of OPC staff.

Areas of Concern

During the review, OPC staff noted areas of concern and recommended changes to their implementation plan to provide greater clarity and assurances.

Staff asked CU to clarify its current and anticipated relationship with the Big Picture Company. CU was asked to make clear that it is a separate entity with sole control of the academic program by having a limited presence of Big Picture Company on the College Unbound Board of Trustees.

CU made this by providing a list of Board members and their affiliations. CU also discussed this with NEASC staff to insure future compliance with standards.

The Finance and Management unit of OPC sought assurances regarding Big Picture Learning's agreement to provide a guaranteed loan to CU to cover a possible first-year shortfall.

A letter from the Chair of the Board of Big Picture outlining the terms of the loan was submitted. In addition, audited financials for Big Picture were submitted which provided assurance regarding financial stability.

The Finance and Management unit of OPC recommended the acquisition of an irrevocable letter of credit in lieu of a bond if this application results in approval for operations from this Office. This letter of credit will secure a successful cash flow for the entity's early operations.

The senior staff of College Unbound has met with the Associate Commissioner of Finance and Management to discuss the type of financial vehicle that should be put in place. Dr. Littky indicated that he would be consulting with his financial advisors and those of The Big Picture Company about the options that are available to College Unbound with the goal of achieving this letter of credit as soon as possible.

CU had originally considered offering a Medical Assisting certificate; however, OPC staff suggested that the curriculum of this certificate program was more in line with introductory healthcare training.

CU decided to withdraw the certificate and reconsider the role of certificates within in its program mix in the future. Any additional program proposed by CU would require prior approval by the Council.

Comments from a postsecondary institution questioned how CU was insuring rigor in its academic standards, in development of the curriculum.

OPC has recommended and CU has agreed to participate in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). This survey will provide nationally normed comparisons of students' active learning and engagement in learning experiences. The information provided to the institution can be used as a diagnostic tool to assess the achievement of the institution's academic objectives.

In response to the questions on academic/college-level of the curriculum, CU responded:

"The core content of the College Unbound degree program is comparable to Organizational Leadership and Change programs at Southern New Hampshire University and the University of Bridgeport, among others. Seventy-six percent of the College Unbound submitted curriculum has been taught, as is, at one of its accredited higher education partners by College Unbound associated faculty. Those syllabi were approved by faculty according to the partner institution's curriculum approval process. The remaining 24% of the syllabi were designed by College Unbound faculty to enhance the Organizational Leadership and Change degree program, reflecting elements commonly found in similar degree programs."

As an institution that is focusing on adult completion, the criteria for appropriately awarding credit through prior learning assessment is another indicator of quality control and CU was questioned on the quality control used. OPC recommended that CU adopt and publicize the standards for awarding credit developed by the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and ensure that credit evaluators were trained in applying these standards

CU responded that they are contracting with CAEL as a Learning Counts Institution. Learning Counts provides portfolio assessment of students' learning by faculty experts for college-level equivalency credit. In addition, Learning Counts will provide training to CU staff and faculty.

Areas of Strength

National grant support

CU's leadership has established a track record in attracting support from national and regional resources to support the CU model and for an evaluation of its effectiveness. College Unbound will use its ongoing relationship with the Lumina Foundation, The Capacity Group, the New England Resource Center for Higher

Education (NERCHE) and the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) to monitor and assess specific aspects of the institution's effectiveness and thereby demonstrate the value of the model.

Digital library

The development of the College Unbound digital library is based on a clear vision of what learning resources are needed to support the mission of College Unbound. The resulting collection meets or exceeds all Association of College and Research Libraries and American Library Association standards. The digital collection is available to the college community 24/7 and, in addition to providing access to a targeted collection of quality resources, provides reference services and tutorials on the evaluation and appropriate use of the materials. The Digital Library emphasizes information literacy instruction, which supports students' lifelong learning skills of finding, using, creating, and managing information.

Feasibility study of CU's sustainability

College Unbound hired The Capacity Group to develop a feasibility study to determine the viability and sustainability of the organization going forward. The Capacity Group found that CU meets the needs of students who need to work while pursuing higher education which is the vast majority of adult learners. Further, the study concluded that CU enabled students to advance in their careers while in school and to find jobs upon completing CU. This "scholar-practitioner" model allows adult students to learn while applying theoretical knowledge and apply learning to real-world experiences. The study attributed this success to elements that are key to the CU model:

- *Real world experience which is required and which is integrated into the student's learning plan.*
- *Mentors from the world of work are actively involved in the student's learning plan.*
- *The CU curriculum is flexible by using online courses, course work completed in conjunction with work, and cohort and advising meetings at convenient times.*
- *As an adult completion college, CU students are able to transfer credit and receive credit by prior learning assessment which moves them forward toward degree completion.*

By providing a flexible curriculum and wraparound supports for students, CU provides a vehicle for adult students and specifically students traditionally underrepresented in higher education, to attend and complete a postsecondary degree or credential and thereby obtain or advance in their career and personal goals.

Site visit observations

As required by the Regulations Governing Institutions of Higher Education Operating in Rhode Island, a site visit was conducted on April 29, 2015. CU currently uses a building of The Met School, a public school in Providence, Rhode Island; the building was well-maintained with appropriate facilities to meet current needs and with the understanding that other Met campus buildings would be available as needed in the future. During this visit, we observed the opening group meeting and then sat in on two cohort advisory sessions. We also observed students meeting informally with advisors, fellow students, and tutors. It is clear that CU creates a supportive community for learners and that for these adult students, the support networks are an important factor in their successful participation and completion of the program. This community of support is extended outside of the classroom through networking and the relationship with personal mentors. Students are expected to apply and demonstrate to their workplaces and communities their learning beyond

the school through their action research project as part of their demonstration of the Big 10 Competencies and in conjunction with learning gained through coursework. Listening to the discussion of the impact of their participation in the CU program, the consistent message from students was that the learning experiences were transformative not only in their academic lives but in their personal lives, communities and workplaces.