

# COLLEGE FOR AMERICA

BRINGING HIGHER EDUCATION TO WHERE STUDENTS LIVE AND WORK

“We’re extending higher education beyond the university. By bringing in employers, we’re trying to close the skills gap and involve the business community in ways they aren’t traditionally engaged.”

KATE KAZIN, SOUTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE UNIVERSITY INNOVATION LAB

## AT A GLANCE:

### Targeted Degree Program:

Associate’s Degree in General Studies

**Organization:** Private, nonprofit four-year institution

**Opening Date:** September 2013

**First Year Enrollment:** 500

**Anticipated Students Served in First Five Years:** 100,000

**Tuition Model:** \$2,500 per year, all-inclusive

**Geographies Served:** Nationwide

**Targeted Students:** Working adults with little or no college credit

**Project Partners:** Business Innovation Factory; Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts; RiverWoods Continuing Care Retirement Community; ConAgra; Cumberland Gulf; Sodexo; City of Memphis

When Southern New Hampshire University’s Innovation Lab sought to redesign the college model, students were at the core.

And not just any students—in particular, they wanted to find a way to reach, support, and empower “unconfident learners”—those who are familiar with educational failures, unsure of their abilities, or balancing the demands of work and family. These students often seek a degree but lack the resources, motivation, or confidence to enroll in a traditional program.

For them, SNHU has created College for America (CfA), a self-paced online program that helps students earn an associate’s degree at a cost of roughly \$2,500 per year. The program is designed to support students in their pursuit of a degree by en-

couraging them to seek mentors in the workplace or the local community and by using and measuring a set of key competencies defined, in part, by employers. The program is defined both by what it offers and what it doesn’t offer. There are no courses, no credit hours, no traditional faculty, and no grades. Instead, students develop an Academic Plan that outlines the key competencies they will master throughout the course of the program. (The program includes 120 key competencies arrayed across a Mastery Triad of Content Knowledge, Foundational Skills, and Personal and Social Skills, aligned with the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile.)

Students show mastery of each competency primarily by completing projects that are scored by expert graders using rubrics.

## HALLMARKS:

Competency-based model

Extremely low cost

Self-paced, self-directed

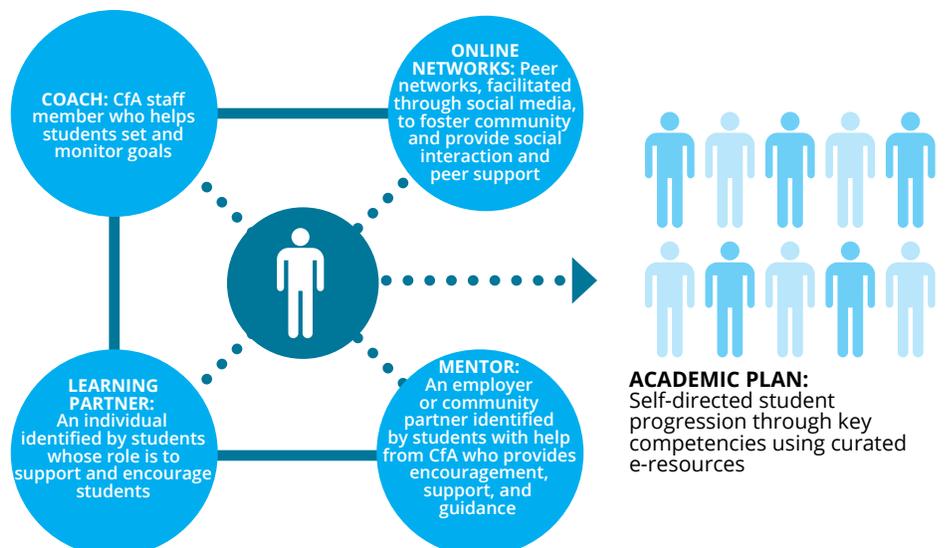
Year-round enrollment

Use of open educational resources

Community mentors and peer networks for student support

Clickable transcripts to demonstrate and document competencies and track progress

## STUDENT SUPPORT MODEL



## CFA COMPETENCY CLUSTERS



At the center of CFA's approach are the Competency Clusters, a set of 120 competencies influenced by both the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile and employer feedback. Competencies are distributed across three domains: Content Knowledge, Foundational Skills, and Personal and Social Skills. With the help of curated e-learning resources, students complete projects designed to demonstrate his or her mastery.

With the help of a coach, each student charts a path through the 120 competencies, accessing curated learning resources that accompany each project. Once a student has satisfactorily completed a project, his or her progress is immediately reflected in a dynamic, online clickable transcript. Evidence is key. The clickable transcript contains all student artifacts along with the rubrics used to score them. The result is a clear picture of a student's capabilities in terms defined not by course numbers but by skills employers understand. After graduation, those competencies can be mapped to traditional course credits for students who wish to transfer to a four-year institution.

The model hinges on the assumption that students can and will take control of their own learning. To ensure their success, CFA has designed a multilayered student support model. Students can interact with peers

using social media tools and virtual networks; a CFA coach helps hold them accountable to their academic plan; and each learner identifies a learning partner from home, the local community, employer cohort, or College for America community.

The university worked with the Business Innovation Factory and ZURB to design a user interface that makes sense from the student's point of view. The program combines high-touch support with self-determination to build participants' self-confidence to ensure they stay on track to degree completion.

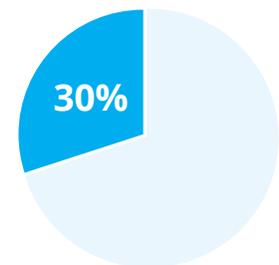
### Intended Outcomes:

- Reduce the cost of tuition to \$2,500 per year
- Reduce the cost of delivery below \$5,000 per year
- Graduate 5,000 low-income, minority students by 2017

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Institution: <http://www.collegeforamerica.org> | Contact: Yvonne Simon, [y.simon@snhu.edu](mailto:y.simon@snhu.edu)

### PELL-ELIGIBLE STUDENTS:



### PRICE TO STUDENTS PER YEAR:

\$2,500

### COST PER FTE PER YEAR:

\$2,000–\$3,500

### DELIVERY:

