



**Universal Admissions at
Northern Arizona University through
the Arizona Attainment Alliance**



November 2024

Admissions Redesign
Summary and
Logic Model

INTRODUCTION

Recent shifts in the postsecondary landscape, including the impact of COVID, changes to the FAFSA, admissions testing requirements, and rulings by the Supreme Court have caused significant disruptions, as well as an opportunity to rethink college admissions. Lumina Foundation is working to support the reshaping and simplifying of the admissions process to transform how potential students apply, enroll, and access institutions through [The Great Admissions Redesign](#). In partnership with the Foundation, Research for Action (RFA) is conducting an evaluation of the three implementation grantees to foster learning and continuous improvement. As an initial step in the process, RFA conducted interviews with leaders at Northern Arizona University (NAU) to gather foundational background on Universal Admissions and develop a logic model to capture the planned resources, strategies, outcomes, and impact of the initiative.

VISION AND IMPETUS FOR UNIVERSAL ADMISSIONS IN ARIZONA

Arizona's lagging postsecondary degree attainment rates are influenced by myriad factors, including socioeconomic disparities, access to quality K-12 education, and regional economic challenges. Less than half of high school graduates in the state immediately enroll in a postsecondary institution, placing Arizona below the national average. The shortfall in postsecondary access and need for greater attainment drove the creation of this admissions redesign, which is intended to provide all Arizonans, regardless of background, with a vehicle for upward economic mobility. To address these issues, the Arizona Attainment Alliance (A++), a partnership between Northern Arizona University (NAU), nine of the state's 10 community college districts, and the Arizona Commerce Authority (ACA), developed a **Universal Admissions** Program. Through this program, every applicant to NAU is either *admitted directly to the University or is given the opportunity to start their education at an Arizona community college before continuing at NAU when they are ready*. As one of many partnerships over more than a decade, NAU and Coconino Community College piloted this redesign in the fall 2023 semester and found promising results, which led to funding supporting the expansion of the program across nine of Arizona's community college districts.ⁱ This work has been supported by NAU's president, José Luis Cruz Rivera, who started in 2021 and brought a focus on expanding equitable access to postsecondary education.

CONTEXT FOR THE WORK: NAU AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN ARIZONA

[NAU](#) is a public, four-year postsecondary institution that offers bachelor's and graduate degrees and is overseen by the [Arizona Board of Regents](#); however, the three large universities in the state operate rather independently, and Universal Admissions is not required through policy. Based in Flagstaff, NAU has more than [20 sites](#) across Arizona and has a focus on postsecondary access, aligning it with the state's community colleges. Total fall 2022 undergraduate enrollment was over 23,000 students, the majority of whom were white (56%) or Hispanic/Latinx (26%).ⁱⁱ Arizona's 19 community colleges offer classes in 61 locations and are organized into 10 autonomous college districts.ⁱⁱⁱ In total, A++ community colleges and NAU serve about 270,000 students annually.

A++ UNIVERSAL ADMISSIONS: A LOGIC MODEL

Figure 1 below presents the logic model for A++ Universal Admissions program, with a discussion that follows. A logic model is a visual tool that helps clarify and communicate a program’s goals, activities, and intended results, and can be used to create a framework for an evaluation.



RESOURCES

The **A++ partnership** with NAU, community college districts & the Arizona Commerce Authority drives the work

The **Offices of Economic Mobility & Social Impact & Strategic Planning, Institutional Research, & Analytics & the Division of Enrollment Management** at NAU support the initiative

The **Arizona Institute for Education of the Economy** at NAU leads outreach to K12 districts

The **Data Labs Program** at Georgetown University supported the development of data systems

Funding and capacity from **philanthropic organizations**, NAU, and CCs resources the work

Technical assistance is provided by **Trendy Minds & the Data Quality Campaign**

Ongoing student and technical support is offered by **NAU & community college IT staff**



STRATEGIES

Create **single application process** between NAU & community colleges

Develop **systems to securely transfer student admissions files** from NAU to community colleges

Develop **systems to seamlessly transfer students** from community college to NAU **without application**

Conduct **outreach with K12 districts** about the universal admissions program

Update academic advising protocols and training at NAU and community colleges to incorporate universal admissions

Build **automated systems** for application processing, transcript evaluation and data sharing across campuses



BENEFICIARIES

All Arizonans, **especially those who stand to benefit the most from a high-quality postsecondary education** designed to promote lives of purpose and careers of prosperity

NAU and community colleges looking to increase enrollment & transfer rates

Arizona employers in need of additional workforce capacity

The **residents of Arizona** through increased economic mobility & social impact



SHORT TERM OUTCOMES

Scale-up of Universal Admissions across Arizona community college districts, with automatic and seamless processes between NAU and community colleges

Elimination of multiple applications as barriers for student admission/transfer

Increase in **student enrollment and retention** at NAU & participating community colleges

Increase in community **college certificate & associate degree attainment**

Increase in **students transferring** from community colleges to NAU



OVERALL IMPACT

Increase in **bachelor degree attainment** to more closely reflect the national average

Increase in **highly skilled members** of the state workforce

Reduction in the **achievement & attainment gaps** among underrepresented students

Greater **economic mobility & prosperity** in Arizona

Increasing **social impact** on Arizona communities





A++ UNIVERSAL ADMISSIONS:

*Every student who applies to Northern Arizona University (NAU) is either **admitted to the University** or alternately **admitted to a pathway to NAU through the Universal Admissions program**, meaning that they will automatically be accepted to NAU as a transfer student from the community college of their choice when they are ready, without an additional transfer application. **No applicant is denied access to a bachelor's degree pathway at NAU.***

RESOURCES

The **Arizona Attainment Alliance (A++)**, led by the **Office of Economic Mobility and Social Impact** at Northern Arizona University (NAU), is a collaborative effort involving NAU, nine of the ten **Arizona community college districts**, and the **Arizona Commerce Authority**. This partnership leads the universal admissions initiative and drives its implementation. While NAU and the community colleges focus on educational outcomes, the Arizona Commerce Authority ensures that the program aligns with the needs of the state's business community. Additionally, the **Arizona Institute for Education and the Economy** is set to launch K-12 outreach efforts to promote universal admissions; however, this initiative had not begun at the time of our data collection.

A++ has also benefitted from technical assistance from outside Arizona. The **Data Labs Program at Georgetown University** provided consulting on the state's data systems and how to best utilize existing systems to support the development of a single application and transfer process across the community colleges and NAU. Two Lumina Foundation partners have also provided technical assistance: **Trendy Minds** has provided support on parent, student and counselor communications and marketing, while the **Data Quality Campaign** has helped NAU address issues around data sharing and security.

Funding is also a critical resource for the Universal Admissions program. The **Lumina Foundation** has provided A++ with financial support in order to amplify and scale the work.

At the end of the day, it is the **staff at NAU and the community colleges** who make the Universal Admissions program happen. The work has been led by the **Office of Economic Mobility and Social Impact and the Division of Enrollment Management** at NAU and developed by **IT staff**, who have created new systems for student file transfer to move from manual to automated processes. While those systems are being implemented, staff in **enrollment management and admissions** continue to provide outreach to students, communicating about the program on a "one-on-one" basis. **Academic advisors at both NAU and the community colleges** also need to provide support to transfer students. The **Office of Strategic Planning, Institutional Research, and Analytics** at NAU also offers data analysis services.



STRATEGIES

Under the A++ Universal Admissions program, every student who applies to Northern Arizona University (NAU) is either admitted to the University or alternately admitted on a pathway to NAU through the Universal Admissions program, meaning that they will automatically be accepted to NAU as a transfer student from the community college of their choice when they are ready, without an additional transfer application. The following implementation strategies have been or will be completed for this redesign:

- **Creation of a single application process between NAU and community colleges:** In order for universal admissions students to transfer seamlessly to NAU from a participating community college, the program utilizes NAU's admissions application.
- **Develop systems to securely transfer student admissions files from NAU to community colleges:** NAU will transfer admissions data to community colleges through the development of data-sharing agreements and agreed upon data fields while also working to improve data transfer process efficiencies.
- **Develop systems to seamlessly transfer students from community college to NAU without application:** The program will develop a seamless transition process for students from participating community colleges to NAU without reapplying for transfer. This may be as simple as allowing student data systems to automatically "turn a flag back on" to indicate that a community college student "is now at NAU." Until the process is automated, a process ticket is used so that students are given NAU admitted status and can enroll in classes at the University once they are ready to transfer.
- **Conduct outreach with K12 districts about the Universal Admissions program:** A++ partners will communicate with both K12 districts about the Universal Admissions program, marketing the benefits of the program and encouraging students to take advantage of the opportunity.
- **Update academic advising protocols and training at NAU and community colleges to incorporate universal admissions:** Academic advisors and other student support staff will be oriented to the new admissions and transfer processes so they can facilitate student success at both community colleges and NAU.

- **Build automated systems for application processing, transcript evaluation and data sharing across campuses:** NAU and community college partners currently process, convert, and combine the data collected for Universal Admissions manually, each using a different student information system on each campus, but this initiative provides an opportunity to build an automated system across campuses. At the same time, bridging data systems across institutions with different technological infrastructure, staff levels, and IT support requires a customized approach for each community college as they work through the transition.

BENEFICIARIES

A++ is committed to serving Arizonans from all backgrounds, with an emphasis on generating disproportionate impact. In so doing, NAU and its partner community colleges have a unique opportunity to reconfigure themselves in ways that foster greater access and success, ultimately strengthening their capacity to fulfill their distinctive missions, visions, and values. Through this collaborative approach A++ is poised to further benefit Arizona residents and propel forward an ever evolving economy by meeting the needs of government, the private sector, and civil society.

SHORT TERM OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Short-term outcomes for the A++ Universal Admissions program include both implementation and outcomes metrics, specifically:

- **Scale-up of universal admissions** across Arizona community college districts;
- **Elimination of multiple applications as barriers** for students admission/transfer;
- **Increase in student enrollment and retention** at NAU and participating community colleges;
- **Increase in certificate and associate degree attainment** at community colleges; and
- **Increase in students transferring** from community colleges to NAU.

Stakeholders involved in the work hope that the longer term impact of universal admissions will include **an increase in bachelor's degree attainment** to more closely reflect the national average; **an increase in highly skilled members of the state workforce, a reduction in the achievement and attainment gaps** among underrepresented students, and **greater economic mobility and prosperity** in Arizona as evidence of an **increased social impact** in the state.

Acknowledgments

This research was made possible with the generous financial support of Lumina Foundation. We want to thank Lumina Foundation's team for their ongoing input and feedback, especially Melanie Heath, Ph.D. and Wendy Sedlak, Ph.D. We also want to thank the research advisory team and those who participated in data collection activities in Arizona, California and Illinois for their assistance. Many colleagues at Research for Action contributed to this report, including project team members Kri Burkander, Ph.D., Mark Duffy, Molly Pileggi, and Alita Robinson, as well as Kim Glassman, project advisor.



Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. We envision higher learning that is easy to navigate, addresses racial injustice, and meets the nation's talent needs through a broad range of credentials. We are working toward a system that prepares people for informed citizenship and success in a global economy.

ENDNOTES

ⁱActive A++ Universal Admissions community colleges include: Coconino Community College (Fall 2023), Arizona Western College (Fall 2024), Central Arizona College (Fall 2024), Cochise College (Fall 2024), Mohave Community College (Fall 2024), Pima Community College (Fall 2024), Maricopa Community College District (Fall 2025), Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Phoenix College, and Scottsdale Community College.

ⁱⁱ<https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=northern+arizona+university&s=AZ&id=105330#enrolmt>

ⁱⁱⁱhttps://arizonacommunitycolleges.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/FINAL-AC4_Infographic_Jan2022-1.pdf

