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Fall 2013

## *Fast and focused*

Accelerated degree programs  
keep students locked in on learning





P-TECH

IVY TECH

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**Editor's note:** The three stories in this issue of *Focus* were reported and written by Steve Giegerich. Giegerich, a former education writer for the Associated Press and a onetime journalism instructor at Columbia University, is a staff writer for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.





Buddy system in Brooklyn: Page 2



Intensity in Indianapolis: Page 11



Knuckling down in Knoxville: Page 18

**On the cover:** Savannah Crilly and Derrick Johnson, both of Indianapolis and both students in Ivy Tech Community College's Associate Accelerated Program (ASAP), are captivated by their music appreciation instructor, classical cellist Geoffrey Lapin.

**"Be quick, but don't hurry."**

That bit of seemingly contradictory wisdom, offered decades ago by legendary coach John Wooden, still resonates far beyond the basketball court.

At its core, it is a plea for thoughtful action — for movement that is swift, but not sloppy ... activity that combines pace with purpose.

Negotiating that tricky territory — balancing the dual imperatives of quickness and quality — is a common challenge. And it's a challenge that is particularly evident and especially important in higher education. Simply put, the system needs to "be quick" about producing many more college graduates, but without "hurrying" or cutting corners as we educate them.

Labor economists and other experts are united — and increasingly vocal — in calling for urgent action to increase college attainment. Social scientists point to the enormous societal and cultural benefits that flow from college attainment, particularly among growing populations of those who are traditionally underserved in higher education: students of color, low-income students, first-generation students and adults.

Employers point to a large and growing "skills gap," saying thousands of jobs are already going unfilled because applicants lack the skills and knowledge they need. Forecasters say that, by the end of this decade, two-thirds of all jobs will require some form of high-quality postsecondary credential such as a degree or certificate.

Clearly, we can't wait to address this problem, and we can't properly address it by taking a traditional, business-as-usual approach. The higher education system — and those who have a stake in the success of that system (which is to say, *all of us*) — must embrace a change agenda, and we must do so now.

We must find innovative ways to help millions more students — all types of students, from all backgrounds, in all life situations — earn college credentials more quickly and more affordably. Just as important: We must make sure that those credentials are genuinely valuable, that they point directly to rigorous and relevant learning, that they represent the knowledge and skills that graduates need to thrive — in their careers and their lives.

In short, we need to move rapidly but wisely, with pace *and* purpose.

This issue of *Lumina Foundation Focus* throws the spotlight on three innovative programs that are doing just that — accelerated courses of study that are helping students earn highly valuable associate degrees more quickly than ever before.

In this *Focus*, you'll read about:

- Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) in Brooklyn, N.Y. In P-TECH, students begin in ninth grade and — thanks to peer learning and other innovations, including ongoing mentorship from professionals at IBM Corp. — earn both a high school diploma and an associate degree in as little as four years.
- The Associate Accelerated Program (ASAP) at Ivy Tech Community College in Indianapolis. ASAP, which will soon expand to all Ivy Tech campuses in Indiana, uses block scheduling and an intensive approach to help at-risk students earn "two-year" degrees in just 11 months.
- The Accelerated Higher Education Associate Degree (AHEAD) program at Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville, Tenn. AHEAD features compressed, sequenced courses and extensive, cohort-based peer support — all to enable full-time, working adults to be full-time students as well.

Beyond these pages, there's also a wealth of information on our website, [www.luminafoundation.org](http://www.luminafoundation.org), where *Focus* offers extra features, including a slide show of artwork from a promising ASAP student and a profile of a longtime classical musician who's found a new calling as an adjunct professor.

The three programs featured in this issue of *Focus* don't tell the whole story, of course. The drive to increase college attainment is gaining speed and traction in institutions all across the nation — as it must.

Still, it's our hope that these few examples will contribute to that acceleration in a thoughtful and meaningful way.



Jamie P. Merisotis  
President and CEO  
Lumina Foundation

P-TECH

***Brooklyn-born dual-enrollment program has 'technology' as its middle name***

Not that he doesn't appreciate a shout-out from the leader of the free world, but Rashid Davis plays the presidential card lightly when describing his innovative urban school, Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH). In fact, Principal Davis barely mentions Barack Obama's praise for P-TECH in the 2013 State of the Union address





Rashid Davis is the founding principal at Pathways in Technology Early College High School in Brooklyn. He points out that, unlike elite charter schools in the New York City public system, P-TECH does not screen students for academic proficiency prior to admission.





and took in stride the president's highly publicized late-October visit to the Brooklyn, N.Y., school. He also discounts recent visits by CNN and the Chinese state news service, and he all but ignores the fact that P-TECH's unique dual-enrollment approach will soon be scaled up and used at 16 other sites throughout New York state.

Instead, Davis points to a few numbers. First, he cites the above-average scores that 15 of his students earned on a complex, college-level logic and problem-solving exam administered as a pilot over the summer. Next, he points to the average math score posted by P-TECH's sophomore class early in 2012-13 on the math portion of the PSAT.

That score, 41.5, was better than the state average in New York and was competitive with students nationwide.

"When we saw those results, it was a different world," Davis recalls, "because this wasn't just a New York (City) exam or a state exam. This was a national measure."

P-TECH is located in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn — on the second floor of the Paul Robeson High School for Business and Technology, a building it shares with two other secondary schools. Technically, P-TECH is a New York City public high school, but that designation is a bit misleading. The objective of the program is to keep students around for as long as six



Victor John, P-TECH's assistant principal for administration, chats with a student near the school's entrance. P-TECH shares the impressive building, located in Brooklyn's Crown Heights section, with two other secondary schools in the New York City system.



**Math teacher Jamilah Seifullah clarifies a geometric point for students Tyreek Brimfield and Shellie Moore. Seifullah, a former software engineer with Verizon, left the corporate world eight years ago to become a teacher in the New York City schools. She's been at P-TECH since the school opened in 2011.**

years — long enough to earn a high school diploma *and* an associate degree in one of two subjects: electromechanical engineering or computer information systems.

The mere fact that P-TECH is a dual-enrollment program isn't what's causing the buzz, however; early-college programs are fairly common these days. What sets the program apart are its four variations on the dual-enrollment model: an intense, accelerated education in the highly valued STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics); a public/private alliance in which the school's corporate partner plays an unusually active role; the same corporation's pledge to provide jobs to P-TECH graduates; and finally, an embrace of peer-based learning.

Davis was named P-TECH's founding principal in 2011, after serving more than four years as head of another technology-focused charter school, the Bronx Engineering and Technology Academy (BETA). Though his work at BETA demonstrated that high school students are capable of understanding college course work, Davis says P-TECH differs in a significant way: At BETA, as in many elite charter schools, students are screened for proficiency in math, English and other core

subjects prior to admission. Not so at P-TECH.


Davis frankly admits that he wasn't sure what to expect from "academically unscreened" students. And that wasn't his only concern when the program was launched. Because the system encourages each year's crop of eighth-graders to apply for admission to up to 12 of the city's magnet high schools, P-TECH represented the "13th choice" for many students, Davis notes acidly.

The program began with 103 ninth-graders and now includes approximately 300 students in three classes. It will grow by one class a year until it reaches a full complement of six grade levels in 2016-17, though Davis expects a fair percentage of students to graduate in four or five years.

Tyreek Brimfield might well be one of those over-achievers. On a recent late-September morning, just three weeks into high school, the 14-year-old freshman was in math class — but not at his desk where one might expect. Rather, he and instructor Jamilah Seifullah stood together at a smart board at the front of class, leading 12 other students in a geometry review.

As Seifullah and Brimfield helped their group locate the triangles in hexagons, pentagons, octagons and





Sophomore Alyssa Sandy is the picture of concentration in her P-TECH math class. Should that focus ever waver, however, she knows she can depend on her classmates for help, particularly sophomore Kevon Cambridge, who is seated behind her. The school's emphasis on peer learning allows them — even encourages them — to confer and cooperate.



decagons, two other pods of students were independently deciphering algebra problems. Leaving Brimfield to continue the geometry lesson, Seifullah occasionally checked the progress of the students in the algebra pods. And just as often, she simply stepped back to allow the instructional circles to function without adult interference. "She's orchestrating the learning without playing an instrument," marveled Brandon Cardet-Hernandez, a Carnegie Foundation NYC Leadership Academy principal-in-training who is spending a semester observing and assisting Principal Davis.

Seifullah was a Verizon software engineer until she had a mid-career epiphany that "teaching was the best fit" and landed, eight years ago, in the New York City school system. She has taught at P-TECH since its inception. The program's emphasis on math is unmistakable. In fact, the principal makes it abundantly clear that calculus is, not a barrier, but the "gateway" to everything a P-TECH student is expected to accomplish.

Students also are made to understand that peer mentoring is pivotal. Davis contends student-to-student interaction and peer pressure are synonymous. "They need to see that someone sitting next to them is willing to change," the principal says. Rather than shying away from the change, P-TECH students have embraced the dual role of learner and tutor — as demonstrated by Brimfield's geometry lesson.

A student with "so-so" grades in middle school, Brimfield had no idea that enrolling at P-TECH meant he'd soon be co-teaching a math class. An affinity for computers, along with the opportunity to play prep basketball, initially drew him to the start-up high school near his home in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. (P-TECH students compete in the uniforms of Paul Robeson High School alongside athletes from the two other schools occupying the building.) P-TECH's proximity to home — coupled with a heart-to-heart in which his mother pointed out the financial advantages of a program that paid for two years of college — cemented the decision.

So it happened that young Tyreek Brimfield, a high school student for all of two weeks, wound up teaching in tandem with Jamilah Seifullah. And it didn't take him long to grasp the value of peer learning.

"You can see both points of view," he says. "The teacher's point of view and the student's point of view.

You can learn both ways." To Seifullah, peer-to-peer instruction is innate. "Most students at the core want to help each other," she says. "They seem to learn the material better when they have to teach it."

The school-wide devotion to self-directed tutoring explains why sophomores Kevon Cambridge and Alyssa Sandy were allowed to confer quietly yet continually as their calculus teacher ran through an endless stream of equations. In P-TECH parlance, Cambridge and Sandy have each other's back. "If I don't understand something, I can ask her; and if she doesn't understand something, she can ask me," says Cambridge.

Sandy and Cambridge have another resource as well: the volunteer counselor that IBM Corp. pairs with every


student in the P-TECH program. The cramped schedules of students immersed in school and professionals immersed in their careers limit personal encounters between advisers and advisees to once or twice a year. But that doesn't stop P-TECH students from communicating with their IBM mentors by e-mail, text or telephone at least once a day, and often much more.

Davis says the interaction helps shrink the barriers that have traditionally separated young people living in the city's poor neighborhoods — the bulk of P-TECH's enrollment — from the professionals who work in Manhattan's skyscrapers.

"We're breaking cycles of poverty," he says. "And getting them to talk with someone of a different class can sometimes be a challenge."

Tenth-grader Shellie Moore communicates with her adviser at least once a day, shooting off e-mails that can veer from reflections on high school life to pointed questions about the career that awaits beyond the classroom. At 16, Moore already has a road map to the future. Step 1 is earning an associate degree in 2016 (2017 at the latest). Step 2 is moving from P-TECH directly to the IBM building in midtown Manhattan. And IBM has given Moore reason to believe the plan will work just as she envisions. Beyond the advisory role of its employees, the corporation has pledged that P-TECH graduates will get top priority when entry-level jobs become available.

The title on Temeca Simpson's IBM business card identifies her as a program manager in the Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs division. The kids at P-TECH just call her "the IBM lady."



**"Most students at the core want to help each other. They seem to learn the material better when they have to teach it."**

Jamilah Seifullah  
P-TECH math teacher



Simpson, a former teacher herself, spends a great deal of time shuttling between midtown and the second floor of Paul Robeson High School. In addition to coordinating the IBM mentoring program, she consults with faculty and staff on work-based learning projects designed to launch P-TECH students on a “career trajectory” that will hopefully culminate with a job offer from the tech giant.

IBM’s participation in developing P-TECH’s core curriculum supports a mandate that the school function as an academic model that can help address the oft-lamented “skills gap” among today’s graduates, says Davis. He says P-TECH strives to “work backward to make sure there is no mismatch between the degree and the skills needed for the industry.”

This drive to produce graduates with high-level skills has helped create an academic model that demands a lot — from students and staff. P-TECH breaks each day into 10 class periods, compared to eight at most New York City high schools. Students who don’t participate in sports programs are encouraged to remain after classes for two-hour enrichment sessions that end at 6 p.m.

(soon to be 8 p.m. if Davis gets his way). The staff also accommodates students who need extra tutoring by maintaining a weekend presence at the school. Finally, P-TECH promotes year-round learning by demanding that students spend the better part of the summer months in class rather than at the pool, park or in front of an Xbox console.

And, should anyone suggest he’s a taskmaster, Davis notes that P-TECH’s regimen is his as well. When asked how many hours a week he personally devotes to the education of P-TECH students, the principal has a one-word response: “All.” And his look makes it clear that Davis isn’t kidding.

For all of the importance P-TECH attaches to structure and time management, Davis insists that flexibility is a vital component of the scholastic agenda. “We have to strike a balance,” he points out. “Not only do we need to be innovative, we have to make sure that the students who leave after year four have the same competitiveness as students attending traditional high schools.”

IBM’s Simpson applauds P-TECH for “making its expectations known” to the students “from day one.” In doing so, she says, the school delivers a clear message



**Temeca Simpson, a program manager in the Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs division of IBM Corp., has a special role at P-TECH. It’s her job to supervise the mentoring program that pairs each student with a volunteer adviser from the corporate ranks of the technology firm.**





**P-TECH junior Cletus Andoh was among the innovative school's original ninth-graders back in 2011. After two full years in the program (and countless subway miles logged in commuting 90 minutes each weekday from his home in the Bronx), Andoh knows what he's talking about when he says: "This isn't a regular high school."**

that students "are not limiting themselves" but in fact are setting themselves up for success — often in areas they may not even have considered. The level of commitment required to succeed in the program is spelled out on the P-TECH website and reinforced for incoming students during group and individual orientation sessions.

"It's strictly about work," says Tyreek Brimfield. "We stick to the script."

Davis says that most P-TECH freshmen don't appreciate what lies ahead until they've actually experienced the culture of accelerated learning.

"This isn't a regular high school," insists Cletus Andoh, who was a member of the original ninth-grade class two years ago. Now a P-TECH junior, Andoh commutes by subway 90 minutes each day to Crown Heights from his family's apartment in the Bronx.

Kevon Cambridge shares Andoh's assessment of the program's uniqueness — an assessment that's confirmed whenever Cambridge encounters students who attend traditional city high schools. "None of my friends have had a college class, and I've taken four already," he says. And if an acquaintance questions his claim, Cambridge

says, he's quick to provide the proof. "If they don't believe me, I pull out my report card."

P-TECH junior Monesia McKnight confesses that the members of the inaugural class understandably felt like "guinea pigs" during the school's first two years. But overall, her class has handled everything that Davis and his staff have tossed their way: Only three of the original 103 students have left the program.

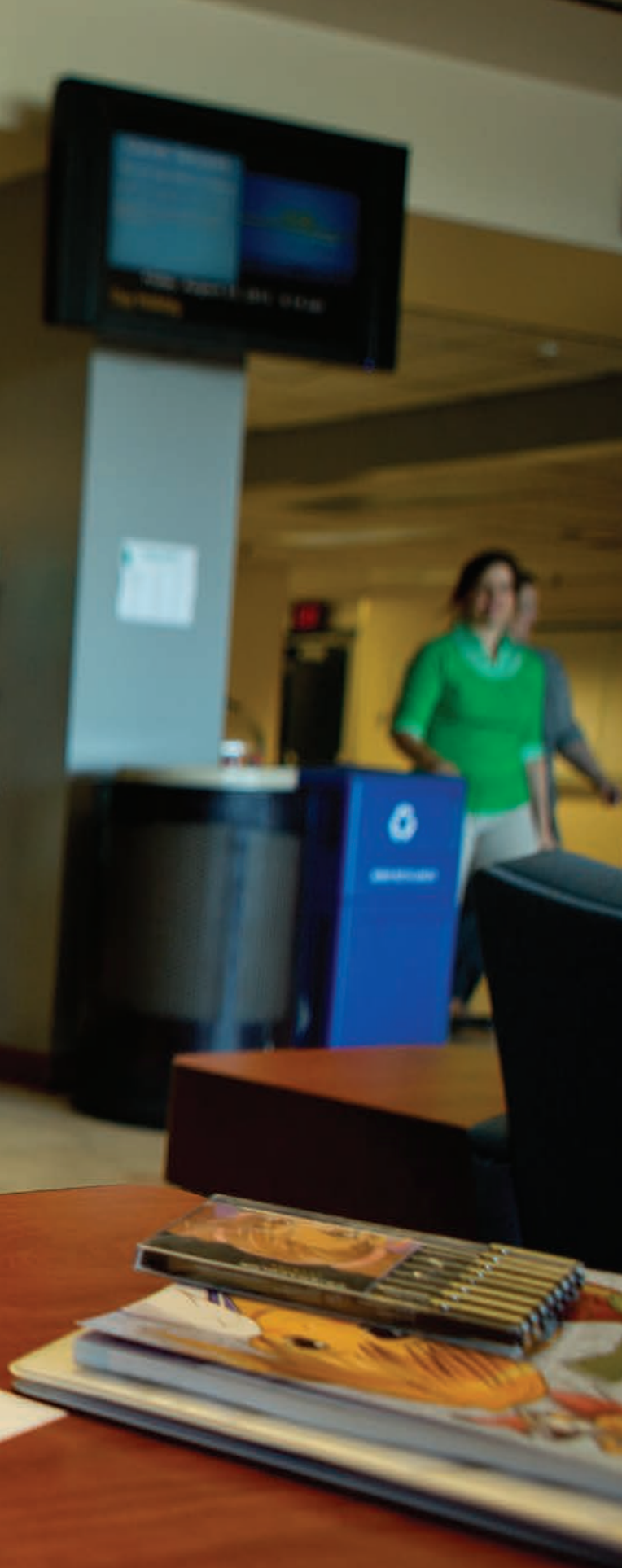
Just as impressive: 80 percent of this year's eleventh-graders have completed at least one college course. In total, 17 P-TECH juniors have racked up 15 college credits (earning at least a 2.0 grade-point average in the process), and another seven have transcripts reflecting 21 credits of college work.

Still, Rashid Davis takes nothing for granted as P-TECH heads into year three. He vows that the program will continue to measure success one day at a time, in the progress of each student. Content to let others sing P-TECH's praises, Davis goes no further than to concede that "people are paying attention."

He needn't elaborate. His "Obama-Endorsed P-TECH" button says it all. ●







## IVY TECH

### *Indiana program takes students from trouble to triumph in just 11 months*

In their final year of high school, while future-focused classmates filled out college applications and financial aid forms, Indianapolis teenagers Savannah Crilly and Derrick Johnson were forced to take things day by day. Crilly desperately needed to escape a troubled home. Johnson required something more basic.

Ashamed and embarrassed,

After earning her associate degree in the ASAP program, Savannah Crilly plans to earn a four-year degree in graphic design and pursue a career as an animator. "My art is everything about me," she explains. "I do music, too. But if you hand me a piece of paper, it'll have doodles all over it."



**Like many ASAP students, Derrick Johnson receives Pell funding. He benefits not only from the program's brevity, but from what program coordinator Jeffrey Jourdan calls the "holistic support" that ASAP provides. "We want to eliminate as many barriers as possible," Jourdan says.**

he told no one last October when the local utility acted on a delinquent bill by shutting off the electricity to the family apartment.

It wasn't long before dusk became the enemy of homework. "Studying after dark was a little hard," Johnson says softly. Then it got cold — so cold that layers of blankets offered little comfort through the long nights of a brutal Indiana winter. Arsenal Technical High School was both a place to learn and a temporary haven from the chill. That Christmas passed without gifts or a holiday meal. "All we did that day was stay under the covers to try to stay warm," Johnson recalls.

The cold, the hunger and the worry suffered during that final year of high school have now taken their place in Johnson's memory bank. He tries not to dwell on the past, or on a daily existence still touched by hardship. But the past remains a reservoir of motivation now that he finds himself moving toward a more prosperous future in an environment he once thought hopelessly out of reach: college.

Johnson and Crilly are in the postsecondary fold because of the Associate Accelerated Program (ASAP), an Ivy Tech Community College initiative that compresses the course work for an associate degree — a process that normally takes two years or more — into 11 months.

ASAP is more than a clever acronym to Johnson, who reported to an Ivy Tech classroom the morning after receiving his high school diploma. He's been working, essentially nonstop, ever since — and that's the norm for ASAP students.

"It's intense. I don't think I could do it," says Meredith Cummings, an ASAP English instructor on Ivy Tech's Indianapolis campus. "But if (students) treat it like a job and treat it seriously, they can do it." She and other Ivy Tech officials call that commitment transformative.

"The students gain a lot of confidence here," says Paula Birt, the system-wide ASAP director. "If you can (earn a two-year degree in 11 months) you can do anything. It's a win-win. It means they can do college work."



Introduced on the Indianapolis and Fort Wayne campuses in 2010, ASAP has since expanded to two other sites and will be offered across the Ivy Tech system beginning in 2016. Organized into cohorts that support one another in and out of class, ASAP students learn, study and strive together before emerging triumphant, associate degrees in hand, 11 months later.

The structured pathway that students follow is rigorous, regimented and — because most ASAP enrollees are the first in their families to attend college — required. “Low-income, first-generation college students arrive at college with little knowledge of how college works,” points out Mina Dadgar, a policy research associate with San Francisco-based WestEd. “The structure helps to reduce the confusion.”

Just as important, she adds, the highly structured program puts support services directly in the path of these students, who are traditionally reluctant to seek help if problems arise with enrollment, scheduling or academic performance. Ivy Tech has made access to services a central feature of the program, setting aside an entire wing of its main building on North Meridian Street for ASAP students to attend class, study and consult with staff.

Mason Voge hasn’t the slightest inhibition when it comes to explaining how he wound up in the ASAP

wing when the 2013-14 cohort gathered for orientation last June.

“I basically blew off high school,” Voge says, admitting that, as a senior, he only attended the ASAP informational sessions offered by his school’s guidance office because he “wanted to get out of class.” Still, though he may not have known it then, Voge was — like all ASAP students — targeted. Someone at his school — a guidance counselor, teacher or administrator — identified him as an untapped reservoir of intelligence, curiosity and grit: a college-capable student, but one flying off course or under the radar.

“The purpose is to get middle-of-the-road students who are not on the road to college for whatever reason,” says Jeffrey Jourdan, a former sports psychologist and Arena Football League player who now serves as ASAP’s Indianapolis coordinator. “These are not low-hanging fruit. We are looking at the top of the tree.” Jourdan and his team rely heavily on what he calls “our gatekeepers” — local guidance counselors — to scour the higher branches for students such as 18-year-old Savannah Crilly.

“I was kind of going about my everyday business in high school, kind of wondering what really was the point in (attending college) anymore,” Crilly says. “My counselor pulled me aside and said: ‘I found this really cool program. It’s right up your alley, and you’re a



English teacher Meredith Cummings makes no bones about the rigorous nature of the ASAP program. “It’s intense,” she insists. “I don’t think I could do it. But if (students) treat it like a job and treat it seriously, they can do it.”



**Jeffrey Jourdan, a former Arena Football League player and sports psychologist, now helps young people over the collegiate goal line — as the coordinator of the ASAP program on Ivy Tech’s Indianapolis campus. He says Ivy Tech relies heavily on guidance counselors at local high schools for referrals to the program.**



shoo-in to get in.'” Though skeptical, Crilly accepted the counselor’s invitation to attend the introductory meetings. Two weeks later, she knew his instincts were right.

At that juncture, the turmoil of living in a conflicted home had depleted any hope of financing a college education straight out of high school.

Desperately searching for an alternative living situation, Crilly, as always, found solace in art. Crilly was 7 when she discovered that her talent as an illustrator exceeded the scrawls of friends and classmates. By 13, she was perfecting the anime characters that have since become her signature in still art as well as self-fashioned cartoons.

“My art is everything about me,” she explains. “I do music, too. But if you hand me a piece of paper, it’ll have doodles all over it.” Rare indeed is the moment that Crilly’s head isn’t buried in a sketchbook or the tablet where she’s stored her computer-generated cartoons. To the delight of classmates and staff, her work also shows up regularly in the corridors and classrooms of the ASAP wing.

The doodles are a rare diversion in a program that allows nothing to distract students from learning. Until this year, ASAP required students (or their parents or

guardians) to sign a pledge promising they would neither seek nor accept part-time employment while enrolled in the program. The restriction has since been loosened to allow weekend part-time jobs. (Ivy Tech in 2013 eliminated a \$100 weekly stipend that ASAP students had received in the program’s first three years.) The elimination of work and other distractions keeps the focus on academics, and on the other element of ASAP that officials view as the key to student success: the cohort.

“It’s what helps them get through,” says Birt, citing follow-up studies in which ASAP graduates have labeled “support from the cohort” as the main reason they were able to earn an associate degree in 11 months. On the flip side, however, Birt notes that four-year institutions are reporting that ASAP transfer students often struggle to adjust in traditional academic models.

For her part, Crilly is a firm believer in cohort education, but she’s also realistic, noting that responsibility for learning lies ultimately with the individual. “Programs like this are a steppingstone, and you have to want to do it,” Crilly says. “If you don’t want to do it, then nothing will change for you. (ASAP) gives you the opportunity



**Paula Birt, system-wide director of Ivy Tech’s ASAP program since it was launched in 2010, has seen the effect it has had on many young lives. “The students gain a lot of confidence here,” Birt says. In fact, she says, earning a two-year degree in just 11 months shows the students that they “can do anything.”**

to do anything. But it all depends on you taking advantage of that opportunity."

The stories of "hunger, neglect (and) terrible living situations" that students bring to Jourdan's office tell him all he needs to know about why the cohort is such a powerful learning tool. Very similar biographies land on Birt's desk. "These are kids who are on the edge; we understand that," she says.

As a consequence, Ivy Tech designed ASAP so that the classroom lessons are just part of the educational investment made in young people such as Crilly, Johnson and Voge. "Holistic support was not the original intent of the program," Jourdan admits, "but it's morphed into that. We want to eliminate as many barriers as possible."

And that means assembling a faculty dedicated to educating the whole student — one that includes instructors such as Geoffrey Lapin, who teaches an eight-week music appreciation course. Lapin admits he's no pedagogical paragon. In fact, he's an adjunct who confesses, "I never taught a college class in my life" until one morning in late summer 2012, when he stepped in front of an ASAP cohort. Still, his professional resume makes Lapin an ideal candidate to introduce young people to the classical canon; he's been a cellist with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra for 43 years.

Hired 48 hours before the start of the 2012-13 academic year, the "woefully unprepared" Lapin strolled into his first class sporting a classic "deer-in-the-headlights look." His early nerves weren't calmed by the student who, during Lapin's introductory lecture, used his laptop to view boxing videos. At the first break that morning, Lapin bolted into Jourdan's office. "I don't think I can do this," he told the program director. Give it a chance, Jourdan advised. Lapin followed Jourdan's counsel and hasn't looked back.

The first week of the 2013 fall term found Lapin working with the confidence of a seasoned professional, as if he'd spent 43 years performing for students rather than symphony patrons. Adapting to the times, the instructor leans heavily on YouTube concert performances, streaming videos and other forms of 21st century technology to help members of the Beyoncé generation appreciate Berlioz. And there's no mistaking when a Lapin class is in session; strains of Wagner, Mendelssohn and other composers thunder through every corner of the ASAP wing.

"I've found to engage kids you have to use all the learning tools," says Lapin. "I remember what it's like to be taught by a teacher droning on and on." Seasoned musician that he is, Lapin knows his audience: "Many of

these kids are first-generation high school graduates or first-generation college students," he says. "These are kids who didn't have childhoods because a lot of them were forced into assertive roles as kids."

Today, just a year after threatening to end his teaching career barely an hour after it had begun, Lapin can't imagine a world that doesn't include his students. "I'm turning 64, and to teach in the silver or golden years of my life has been a shot of adrenaline," he says, clearly moved that Savannah Crilly thought enough of him to sketch his caricature on the classroom whiteboard.

With the Ivy Tech summer semester completed and a successful start to the second ASAP term under way, Crilly has every reason to believe she'll earn her associate degree next May. And early ASAP tracking data indicates that her confidence is justified.

Last year, ASAP graduated 63 percent of its students, and 90 percent of students who fail to earn the associate degree in 11 months choose to stay in the program rather than dropping out of college. ASAP's statewide graduation and persistence rates — 85 percent — are five times the average for traditional students.

Birt says program officials help produce these impressive success rates by delivering a consistent message to ASAP students. "The conversation is always *transfer*," she says. "This doesn't end at Ivy Tech. We want to know what they are going to do afterward." And this focus on the future represents a quantum shift from what many of these students experienced while in high school.

"I always ask them what they'd be doing if ASAP wasn't around," says Jourdan. "Six or seven out of 10 say they'd probably be home, doing nothing, milking the system." Precisely.

"It's worth it because I'm not sitting home playing video games right now," says Voge. "I'm doing something fun." And to a young man who never took high school seriously, "that is surprising."

Adds Crilly: "I would probably be sitting at home because I hadn't really planned to go college. But because this opportunity threw itself at me, I didn't want to waste it." The comparatively low cost of an ASAP degree figured prominently in Crilly's decision to seize the moment.

She knew she'd have to incur significant debt to continue her schooling, and she "really didn't want to spend \$36,000 right off the bat" on a college education. She considered waitressing, thinking it would be a way to earn enough money to enroll in college when the time was right — should that time ever materialize.



**Alma Razo found her way into the ASAP program, thanks largely to advice and encouragement from Savannah Crilly, her best friend and former classmate at Warren Central High School.**



The plan began reshaping itself after her Warren Central High School counselor steered Crilly toward ASAP, a program that made postsecondary education possible financially as well as academically. The average Ivy Tech tuition, \$6,668, is a bargain compared to the \$12,000 average tuition (not including room and board) assessed by Indiana's four-year public universities.

Obtaining an associate degree in an accelerated program brings with it another reward: the opportunity to slice 12 months off the price of a baccalaureate education. As it turned out, Crilly could more than afford to enroll in the program; a financial aid package that includes a Pell Grant is covering all but her living expenses. The majority of ASAP students, including Derrick Johnson, benefit from similar assistance.

Crilly, who has escaped her troubled home and is now

living with a friend's family, plans to live on her own and work for a year after graduating from Ivy Tech. After that, she expects to transfer to a four-year institution, earn a bachelor's degree in art or graphic design and pursue a career as an animator.

Meantime, she's so sold on ASAP's transformative potential that she's become a recruiter. She convinced best friend and fellow Warren Central graduate Alma Razo to join the program as well. On an overcast afternoon in late August, Razo sat in a downtown pizzeria, listening intently as Crilly and Johnson told her how ASAP has altered their lives by making them what they thought they might never be: college students.

When it was her turn, Razo spoke not so much about herself as she did her friends: "I hear both of their stories and I think: 'Anyone can get an education if you want it enough.'"



**Geoffrey Lapin, a cellist for 43 years with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, has found another kind of harmony in his role as an adjunct instructor for ASAP. Though he admits he was "woefully unprepared" when he taught his first music appreciation course last year, he now likens his teaching experience to "a shot of adrenaline."**

PELLISSIPPI

## *Tennessee program helps working adults earn their degrees and get AHEAD*

Josiah Stanfill begins his workday as dawn breaks over a gravel pullout at the foot of Buffalo Mountain, seven miles northwest of Oak Ridge, Tenn. He and his co-workers form a caravan and snake their way up the rutted switchback road that leads to their job site, an installation of wind turbines owned and operated by Invenergy Corp.

Josiah Stanfill, 21, spends a lot of time aloft, but his future certainly isn't up in the air. Stanfill works full time for Invenergy Corp., maintaining the wind turbines on Buffalo Mountain near Oak Ridge, Tenn. But he's not just a windmill cowboy; he's also a full-time student, thanks to the Accelerated Higher Education Associate Degree (AHEAD) program at Pellissippi State Community College.









Weather-permitting, 21-year-old Stanfill rides his motorcycle, occasionally navigating the off-road trails that criss-cross rugged terrain harboring elk, bear and rattlesnakes.

The caravan pauses near Buffalo Mountain's 3,330-foot peak, and a crew member unlocks the gate to the site — a collection of 15 high-tech windmills whose combined efforts generate enough electricity to power 4,000 homes a year. Assigned to turbine maintenance, Stanfill is entrusted with the upkeep of the 138-foot-long blades attached to towers that reach 262 feet.

The daily trek up Buffalo Mountain is not the only uphill challenge for Stanfill, a young man the energy business calls a “windmill cowboy” and one whom nearby Pellissippi State Community College (PSCC) is proud to call a full-time student. As recently as 10 years ago, that combination — a person successfully balancing a 40-hour workweek with a full load of PSCC classes — was as rare as an Alabama Crimson Tide banner here in orange-soaked Tennessee Volunteer territory.

The odds began to shift in 2006, when PSCC — serving 12,000 students on five Knoxville-area campuses — introduced an accelerated program in business administration management aimed solely at working adults. Supported by their peers in a cohort learning model, students in the Accelerated Higher Education Associate Degree (AHEAD) program proved so successful that the college has since added an AHEAD

general education program and programs in general technology, computer accounting, culinary arts, teaching, communications and industrial maintenance.

AHEAD accommodates working adults and their families by compressing courses and offering them in a prescribed, structured sequence — a protocol that allows many participants to pack two years of study into just four semesters. For example, a typical general education cohort will take five weeks of English, followed by five weeks of Western Civilization, followed by five weeks of American Government — all in the time it takes students in a traditional 15-week semester to complete one course.

“It’s not for the weak-minded, that’s for sure,” says Joey Rodriguez, who earned a general education degree in May. “My mind had to be 20 places at once; it was insane. I had to concentrate on four classes, plus a full-time job.”

Rodriguez, 25, is continuing his studies, pursuing a bachelor’s degree in business at the branch of King University located near PSCC’s Hardin Valley campus on Knoxville’s western edge. (Pellissippi State takes its moniker from the Native American name for the river now known as the Clinch River.)

The pace of such an accelerated program is akin to running wind sprints; AHEAD students barely catch their breath at the conclusion of one course before the first lecture of the next class is upon them.



**AHEAD graduate Joey Rodriguez looks back on the program appreciatively, if a bit wearily. “It’s not for the weak-minded, that’s for sure,” he says. “I had to concentrate on four classes, plus a full-time job.” Rodriguez, 25, is continuing his studies, pursuing a bachelor’s degree in business on the Knoxville campus of King University.**





**AHEAD students Laura Moody (left) and Debbie Silcox confer with Robert Lloyd, an English instructor at Pellissippi State. Moody, who works full time as a stockbroker, loves the way the program is structured. “The cohort helps with the camaraderie,” she says. “(They’re) people who understand what it’s like to go to school while working full time.”**

Stanfill began his sprint as the summer of 2012 ended. Admittedly “green as grass” after graduating from Oak Ridge High School, Stanfill moved through a series of odd jobs until a family friend recruited him to join the Buffalo Mountain Wind Energy crew. It didn’t take long for Stanfill to realize he wouldn’t get far in the energy business without, at the bare minimum, an associate degree. The hitch was finding the time to pursue a degree and the money to pay for it. Exploring his options, Stanfill decided the GI Bill was the way to go. He was in the process of enlisting in the Air Force when he heard about Pellissippi’s AHEAD program in industrial maintenance.

“Being able to work every day and go to school at night was a huge push for me,” he says. “It just made sense to go that route.” The 2013 fall schedule brought Stanfill to the Hardin Valley campus twice a week. His course load included a grueling four-hour physics class on Thursday nights. He spends non-school evenings studying and comparing course notes with classmates via text and e-mail. “I have no personal life. My personal life is out the door,” Stanfill admits. “If you are dedicated to the program, sacrificing the time is the only way to get it done.”

Barbara Jenkins, coordinator of the AHEAD teacher education program, says compartmentalization is essential to balancing the demands of work, family and academics. “There has to be a lot of creative juggling,” Jenkins says.

Industrial maintenance major Anthony Mitchell is becoming an accomplished juggler. He begins his day at 6 a.m., punching the clock at JTEKT Automotive in Morristown, where he works as a maintenance technician. He pulls four 10-hour shifts each week, making sure the production lines keep running, turning out steering mechanisms for Toyota and other manufacturers.

When his shift ends on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, Mitchell drives an hour to the Hardin Valley campus, where he joins the industrial maintenance cohort in courses such as Industrial Electricity, Machine Elements and the dreaded Non-Calculus-Based Physics. Some nights his instructors dismiss class on time — 9:30 p.m. Some nights they don’t. Not that it matters: Mitchell, who lives more than 60 minutes from campus, rarely gets home before 11.

Mitchell never envisioned himself a college student. His ambition was to enroll in a program to learn Harley-Davidson motorcycle repair. When that didn’t pan out, he accepted the job with JTEKT, which offered to pay for the education that would help him rise through the ranks. He calls college fulfilling yet arduous.

“Accelerated learning is tough on everybody,” he says. “It’s tough on the students, it’s tough on the instructors. But the rewards come quicker.”

That expedited delivery of a degree suits Laura Moody just fine — perhaps because college was something she put on hold for 20 years. She and college were not a

good fit the first time around. Moody admits that, after graduating from an Ohio high school, she overextended herself by enrolling in too many classes at the local community college. “I got burned out and decided I liked making money more than school,” she reflects.

Moody eventually chose a career in which she helps other people earn money; she’s a stockbroker. She now manages a Scottrade branch office on the outskirts of Knoxville, where she resides with her husband and two dogs. Contemplating a return to college after a two-decade hiatus, it became apparent to Moody that her job — which keeps her in the office up to 65 hours some weeks — left little time to earn even an associate degree.

“I did the research and realized there was no way I could do a traditional schedule,” she says. “It would take me five years” Moody’s research ultimately brought her

to AHEAD’s structured-pathway approach, and the opportunity to learn with like-minded professionals sealed the deal.

“The cohort helps with the camaraderie — people who understand what it’s like to go to school while working full time,” she says.

Moody dismisses a suggestion that an accelerated program shortchanges students’ learning by wedging 16 weeks of material into four- to five-week segments. “I think they’re cutting out the B.S., to be honest,” she says. “We have to lose something. But we’re not losing as much as you might think we are.”

Jenkins phrases it bit more delicately: “In a traditional classroom, you teach to the amount of time you have. But in an accelerated classroom, there is less time so you want to keep to the essential concepts.” Still, there’s little

**As its director, Celeste Evans (left) is immersed in every aspect of AHEAD. She oversees the schedules, develops and helps implement new programs and even finds time to teach a class. Andrea Pappas (right) also credits Evans’ advice during a pre-enrollment interview for helping her succeed in the program. Pappas earned an associate degree this year and is pursuing a bachelor’s degree from Tusculum College in Greeneville, Tenn.**





doubt that maintaining quality while slashing the number of classroom hours is the largest hurdle facing schools who adopt the structured-pathway approach.

"It's a complete paradigm shift. You have to think differently," says Jenkins, part of the team that reconfigured the curriculum for PSCC's Associate of Science in Teaching (AST) program. "When you go from the traditional, full-semester model to five weeks, it can be pretty overwhelming," she acknowledges. "The big thing is, you don't want to sacrifice quality when you compact things."

The AST program is the most popular AHEAD cohort among adult learners. A cooperative "2-plus-2" agreement (two years at a community college, two at a baccalaureate institution) with Cookeville-based Tennessee Tech University enables AST graduates to complete the final two years of the degree program without leaving PSCC.

(The 100-mile gap between Knoxville and Cookeville is bridged through online learning and a cadre of faculty members who travel to Pellissippi State.)

AHEAD groups are not taught in a vacuum. Every aspect of their progress is monitored by the program staff through the review of data and direct reports from faculty. Celeste Evans, the program director, oversees the schedules, works to develop new programs, analyzes the outcomes and even finds time to teach a class.

From a data perspective, nothing slips past Evans. "If we lose a student, we know exactly why," she says. By the same token, she knows the precise reason every student enrolled in the AHEAD program in the first place. Prior to admission, she interviews each one individually. The one-on-one experience is the first step in a process that ideally leads to a Pellissippi State degree.



The path Evans laid out for Terri Hagwood in 2012 took into account the first-time college student's obligations as a grandmother, wife, employee and active member of her church.

"When you sit down with a plan, you know where you're going from start to finish," says Hagwood, who earned an associate degree in general education a year after enrollment. "It's not like the 16-week classes," she says. "We know what we have to get done, and we know we have six weeks to get it finished."

Evans takes care in every interview to identify and address the potential traps that stand between a student and that degree. And she doesn't shy away from pointing out the demands of the program. For her, and for her students, clarity is key; ambiguity, perilous. "They need to know up front that, when you're only sitting in a class five times in a single semester, you can't miss a single class," Evans says emphatically.

The students who agree to Evans' terms arrive at PSCC with a distinct advantage over adult learners of yesteryear — technology. A quarter-century ago, not

even the most forward-looking policymaker could have guessed that learning would be enabled by devices that fit in a backpack or, even more improbably, a student's pocket. Andrea Pappas remembers the unconnected era of the early 1990s — and she can attest to the difficulties of combining work, family and college in those days.

"I took night classes, and I can tell you it was impossible," says Pappas. "There was no Internet." Today, Pappas readily avails herself of the Web and all it has to offer — including Facebook, instant messaging and texting — en route to the associate degree in general education she earned earlier this year. Pappas says her pre-enrollment interview with Evans helped put her on her current road — the one leading her toward a bachelor's degree from Tusculum College in Greeneville, about an hour east of Knoxville. She also credits the help she got from her Web-connected peers, the members of her AHEAD cohort.

For some, the rise of cohort-based learning has been almost as much of a surprise as the digital revolution in higher education. Norman "Pat" Riddle, a longtime



Suzann Swiney (left) is an adjunct professor in one of AHEAD's most popular offerings, the Associate of Science in Teaching (AST) program. Swiney, here with fellow adjunct professor Kathy Bernstorf, is a firm believer in cohort-based learning. She benefited from it herself a decade ago while in a master's program at the University of Tennessee.





**Norman "Pat" Riddle (right), a longtime engineering professor and administrator at Pellissippi State Community College, has helped many students over the years, including Anthony Mitchell (left). Riddle's been with the AHEAD program since its infancy, even before knowing what cohort-based learning was, he jokes.**

engineering professor and administrator at PSCC, laughs while retelling the story of an idea floated by then-President Allen Edwards at a 2009 meeting in which officials were discussing the creation of the AHEAD program in industrial maintenance. "The president asked if we'd be able to teach it in a cohort delivery system," Riddle remembers. "And I said: 'I'll let you know just as soon as I can get back to my office to find out what that means.'"

Suzann Swiney needed no such introduction. Her first exposure to cohort learning came 10 years ago when, at age 50, she enrolled in a master's education program at the University of Tennessee. Three decades removed from a college campus, Swiney came to the Tennessee program unsure whether her interim years as a parent, a PTA organizer and a Sunday school teacher had eroded her learning skills. Those fears eased when she realized she'd have a support group helping her every step of the way. "If I hadn't been in a cohort, I wouldn't be here," Swiney says.

Now an adjunct professor in the AST program, Swiney's first order of business is emphasizing the role of peer support. Item 2 on the agenda is making sure the students have not only their classmates' e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers, but Swiney's as well. Camaraderie, she says, is key. "It is essential to the cohort. Getting to know everyone establishes the community."

As a result, she adds, "I'm more involved than just a teacher at a podium. I learn from them. I use examples from their lives so I can relate to their lives. It makes us

better teachers if we can step up to their needs."

It's important to note, however, that the accelerated, cohort model is not universally embraced by the PSCC faculty. Evans and Jenkins say that full-time, tenured instructors are less likely to go that route than are adjuncts such as Swiney, who are more amenable to breaking from the norm. "The biggest hurdle is finding faculty members who believe in it," Jenkins says. "If they think they'll sacrifice quality, they won't do it."

Nancy Shulock, a Sacramento State University professor of public policy and executive director of the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy (IHELP), says Pellissippi State is not the only college to discover that the road to accelerated learning often features a steep learning curve. "It's a lot more challenging than early adopters believe because it requires substantial changes in the way work is structured," says Shulock, part of a team that is researching the outcomes of cohort, accelerated and structured-pathway learning in California higher education.

Still, at schools that accept the challenge, the rewards for students can be significant. For instance, it's a safe bet that Josiah Stanfill would now be stationed on a U.S. Air Force base had PSCC not done the work to forge AHEAD. More than halfway to earning his degree, this young windmill cowboy is still climbing, and he knows the sky's the limit.

"Getting a degree makes me feel more confident," he says. "I know what I'm doing, and I know I can do it." ●



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