Complete College America Launches Completion Innovation Challenge
Governors Invited to Compete for Million Dollar Grants to Boost College Completion

Washington, DC (EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL FEBRUARY, 22, 2011) – Complete College America today launched the Completion Innovation Challenge, a new $10 million competitive grant program for states designed to inspire and enhance efforts to significantly boost college completion and close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations. A national organization whose sole mission is to work with states to increase the number of Americans with college degrees or certificates of workplace value, Complete College America has established the grant program with funding support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Beginning today, Complete College America is inviting Governors from all 50 states to take up the Completion Innovation Challenge by submitting proposals to win one of ten $1 million, 18-month implementation grants. Grants will be awarded to states that produce the best plans to develop and deploy innovative, state-wide strategies to substantially increase college completion.

Unchanged for decades, the number of Americans who complete postsecondary degrees falls woefully short of the nation’s needs and potential. Less than forty percent of young adults hold an associate or bachelor’s degree, and substantial racial and income gaps persist. According to labor market projections, by 2020, six of ten jobs will require a quality postsecondary degree or credential. Therefore, to ensure their success, six of ten young Americans ages 25 to 34 must achieve this basic threshold. States must lead the way, adopting strategies and policies that will increase college completion.

“Simply doing more of the same will not achieve the gains necessary to significantly raise student achievement and ensure America’s competitiveness,” said Stan Jones, president of Complete College America. Instead, the organization aims to leverage the grants to stimulate states to innovate and implement reforms in key policy areas it deems essential for real and lasting impact:

- **Shifting to Performance Funding** by transitioning state support for higher education from being solely based on student enrollment to appropriating funds for the accomplishment of key performance goals, including courses completed, student retention, successful student transfers between institutions, and, most importantly, high-quality degrees and certificates awarded.

- **Reducing Time-to-Degree and Accelerating Success** by utilizing clear, comprehensive statewide transfer policies so students can easily receive credit for courses they have completed; requiring students to have on-time graduation plans and declare majors early; reducing
unnecessary coursework by reviewing academic programs whose credit requirements exceed 120 hours for bachelor's degrees and 60 hours for associate degrees; providing incentives for full-time enrollment and the efficient use of summers; expanding the use of distance and online education; and offering more college-credit courses in high school.

- **Transforming Remediation** in order to move students into first-year, full-credit college-level courses as soon as possible by offering students with academic short-comings additional tutoring and support as a co-requisite to first-year, full-credit classes, not as a pre-requisite; customizing and modularizing remedial programs to help students catch up in needed areas only, moving on when ready, instead of being locked into traditional semester-long sessions; and having students complete strong college-prep curricula in high school in order to reduce or eliminate the need for remediation entirely.

- **Restructuring Delivery for Today’s Students** to help the new majority of American college students who must now balance the jobs they need with the higher education they desire by providing opportunities to choose clearly constructed pathways to degrees and certificates, organizing schedules in time blocks, and promoting opportunities to move at an accelerated pace through the curriculum.

- **Deploying Transformative Technology** in order to customize, accelerate and support student learning by redesigning courses across systems, allowing for more completions per dollar in high-enrollment general education courses; initiating open textbook, library and courseware efforts to cut costs for books and other learning materials; and encouraging shared enrollments across campuses through online learning, so students can always get the courses they need.

In addition to submitting plans to focus significant state effort on one or two of the essential policy areas, Complete College America is requiring that interested applicants report statewide higher education data based on the Common Completion Metrics jointly established with the National Governors Association in 2010.

States must express their intent to apply for funding by March 18, 2011. The deadline for proposals is May 17, 2011, and awards will be announced on July 13, 2011. Complete College America has engaged an Advisory Committee of experts in postsecondary education and systemic reform to impartially review all applicant proposals and make selection recommendations.

"The need for higher education in our country has never been greater," said Hilary Pennington, Director of Education, Post-Secondary Success and Special Initiatives for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "While states are facing serious budget deficits, this challenging time provides an opportunity to seek changes that will create real and lasting impact for successful student achievement. We gladly support this effort, because we think it is critical to find long-term solutions in these lean times."

Additional information on the *Completion Innovation Challenge* can be found at [www.completecollege.org/innovationchallenge](http://www.completecollege.org/innovationchallenge).

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