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- Top Navigation
 - [News](#)
 - [Business](#)
 - [Politics](#)
 - [Lifestyle](#)
 - [Opinion](#)
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Tennessee one of 10 states selected for education grant

By [James Harrison](#)

Published Tuesday, July 26, 2011 5:44 pm EST

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Gov. Bill Haslam announced Monday that Tennessee is one of 10 states selected from a pool of 33 that will receive a \$1 million grant intended to focus on the completion of college degrees and the closing of attainment gaps.

The grant, awarded by [Complete College America](#) as part of its "Completion Innovation Challenge," was funded by the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#) and will be implemented over 18 months by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

Richard Rhoda, executive director of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, said that while \$1 million may not seem like a grand sum to many, that the programs made possible by the grant would provide tangible benefits to students pursuing higher education at all levels.

"Now that we've secured the grant, for which we're very appreciative, we can begin to put things in place,"

Rhoda said. "Some of these programs are huge undertakings, and it's something that would not be possible without this grant, which will help us move along quickly."

A major portion of the funding will go towards assessing the academic attainment of adult students who choose to pursue education after years in the workforce, but may have little to no prior collegiate experience.

"For many adult students, it may be possible to get academic credit for prior work experience," Rhoda said. "It's kind of like building a resume backwards, showing what kinds of skills an individual has acquired through their working experience. Then we'll start working on a timeline for them."

The grant will also provide funding for a program called an "Adaptive Advising Tool," developed by professors at Austin Peay State University. The program, which has been called the "Netflix approach" to counseling, will advise students on course selections based upon an algorithm that predicts their likeliness to succeed based on data from previous courses.

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38% of young adults (aged 25-34) in the U.S. currently have an associate's degree or higher—making the U.S. 10th among OECD countries for attainment in that group.
NCHEMS/U.S. Census Bureau 2008 American Community Survey, and OECD, Education at a Glance, 2009.

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Complete College America's website.

The final component of the grant will provide for a "Completion Academy" event, drawing presidents and chancellors from colleges and universities across the state to compare notes and methods on ushering students towards degree attainment in a timely and responsible manner.

Upon awarding the grant to Tennessee, Stan Jones, president for Complete College America, said that bold innovation would be necessary in the face of the "new majority" of students who choose to balance both work and school.

"Tennessee's innovative Complete College initiative promises to significantly increase college completion, saving students precious time and money," Jones said. "It also gives taxpayers more of what they expect from their hard-earned investments on education—college graduates."

In a press conference, Haslam expressed appreciation for the state's selection as a recipient of the grant and offered hopes that it would enable more Tennesseans with the ability to pursue higher education.

"This is exciting news that complements our continued focus on improving education in Tennessee," Haslam said. "On behalf of Tennesseans, we appreciate Complete College America and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for making this investment to support our efforts."

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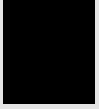
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