

Trellis joins national network of hybrid colleges to support non-traditional students

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Aieriel Lewis, foreground, and Jasmine LaRoche are among the students enrolled in Trellis, a Cowen Institute program that helps working adults and non-traditional college students in New Orleans earn a degree online. (Photo courtesy of the Cowen Institute)

[Trellis](#), an enterprise from The Cowen Institute at Tulane University, has joined 15 postsecondary education providers to launch the [Hybrid College Network](#) (HCN), a

national coalition dedicated to helping non-traditional students find a path to college no matter their age, income or geography.

Trellis helps working adults and non-traditional college students in New Orleans earn a degree online in an affordable, flexible and project-based program that offers them individualized coaching.

The initiative is designed to improve college graduation rates and employment outcomes for high school graduates. There are an estimated 126,000 New Orleans residents 18 years of age or older who have a high school diploma or equivalency but no postsecondary degree, according to 2017 census data.

Students have unique reasons and life circumstances that prevent them from persisting at the post-secondary level. However, most first-generation or socioeconomically disadvantaged students lag behind their peers due to financial constraints affording college, difficulties navigating college processes and a lack of support and stabilization resources to overcome life and academic barriers.

Hybrid colleges combine digital, self-paced coursework (offered through partner institutions) with intensive coaching and wraparound resources like academic tutoring and coworking spaces. Since the emergence of the earliest programs in 2014, the hybrid college model has grown rapidly, with nearly 3,000 students currently enrolled nationwide, averaging a 78% persistence rate while serving a majority-minority learner population.

Trellis's program serves alongside the [School of Professional Advancement](#), the Tulane degree-granting college for New Orleans' community members and working adults. Students who attend SoPA earn a Tulane bachelor's or master's degree and can attend classes on campus, online, or in combination.

Trellis, which is a partnership with Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU), plans to enroll 75 students in the next year. Because the program's tuition is less than \$6,000 per year — the equivalent of a full financial aid award from the federal Pell Grant program — students are able to graduate with little to no college debt. There are no student fees or textbook costs. Trellis provides laptop computers and internet hot spots to its students.

“Through our research, policy and collaborative work, the Cowen Institute plays an important role in addressing college persistence challenges that many New

Orleanians face after high school,” said Amy Barad, deputy director of the Cowen Institute. “Trellis is a critical step in taking action to support these students and disrupt systems that currently aren’t serving them well.”

Through Trellis, students complete affordable, competency-based, self-paced online associate and bachelor’s degree programs with Southern New Hampshire University. The Trellis staff supports students through in-person counseling and coaching and provides physical space to study and other resources to assist students as they navigate their pathways through college graduation.

“I thought that being out of school for over 20 years would hinder my academic performance when in all actuality, I feel more focused today than my 20-year-old self,” said Trellis student Cynthia Ortega. “Through my assignments, I have gained exposure to writing proposals, creating presentations, and researching specific topics to present the information. These are all things I hope to do one day in my management position.”

In creating Trellis, the Cowen Institute drew on its knowledge about what works in supporting non-traditional students through its Earn and Learn program and College Persistence Collaborative. Trellis staff tailor enrollment and financial aid support, academic coaching and career counseling to each student’s unique circumstances so they stay on a path towards college graduation. Students participating in Trellis have access to computers, coaching and a learning community at the Cowen Institute’s offices, which are centrally located across from the Superdome.

For more information about Trellis and how to enroll, visit www.trellisnola.org

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