



# Match Beyond: No Excuses Meets Disruption In Higher Education

*Michael Horn, Contributor | April 30, 2015*

Disruption has been alive and well in higher education for years now. With millions of nonconsumers of traditional colleges and universities in the United States and worldwide—many of them low-income adults with jobs or families—and a traditional higher education model that, increasingly, is both expensive and under financial strain, there has been no shortage of opportunities for disruptive higher education upstarts powered by online learning to emerge.

These upstarts have offered the classic benefits that disruptive innovations extend when they emerge—greater convenience, accessibility, simplicity, and, most recently with the emergence of online, competency-based providers, affordability.

What's been exciting about this disruptive potential has been the opportunity to make a quality higher education fundamentally affordable. But what's also been noticeably absent from almost most of the disruptors is the “no excuses” mindset that has pervaded much of the startup ethos in U.S. K–12 education—that is, a commitment to do whatever it takes to help all students succeed through completion and, in this case, into a job. Although the online, competency-based providers are offering attractive, low-cost options, many don't have the supports in place to do whatever it takes for students who, for any number of reasons, have traditionally struggled with school.

That's what makes the launch of Match Beyond so intriguing.

Match Beyond combines College for America, the disruptive, online, competency-based arm of Southern New Hampshire University, with a relatively new college and jobs

services division of Match Education, a charter management organization with a no excuses mindset, to deliver a blended college and jobs solution for low-income students in the Boston area.

The partnership has the potential to bolster dramatically degree completion rates and, more importantly, jobs outcomes for low-income students, at a low cost to all stakeholders. If it's successful, it potentially creates a template for a model that can be replicated nationally to address the college and jobs crisis facing low-income students in the U.S.

The magic is in the mix. The degree is relatively low cost—tuition and fees will be \$5,000 per year, which can be covered by the Pell Grant. College for America's degree is both competency-based, which allows students to work at their own pace—critical for students from low-income households who need to balance their studies with part-time jobs and other obligations—and tailored to the job market. And Match Beyond will bring its expertise in individualized face-to-face support, personal coaching, and jobs placement services in the greater Boston area to drive successful completion and placement, as well as the development of persistence in students.

Of course, it's still early days for the program, and there will be bumps in the road. The partnership enrolled its first formal cohort of students in January 2015. The program will start small and, over time, grow to a steady-state enrollment of 500 students—not a huge scale.

That said, Match Beyond and College for America ran an early pilot in 2013 and 2014 of 47 students, and the early data are promising. Forty-five of those students remain enrolled and continue to work with Match Beyond coaches. Of these, three have completed their associate's degrees and are now working toward bachelor's degrees, and 25 more are on track to complete at least their associate's degree in the next several months. The program doesn't yet have the critical data—the jobs placement rate and success afterward for its students.

But this partnership match that takes higher education beyond just disruption and combines it with a commitment to the success of each and every student could be a breakthrough.