

The Quest for Student Success at Community Colleges

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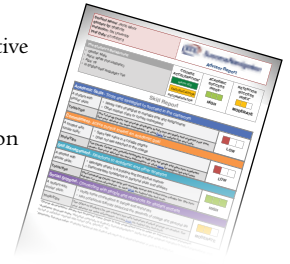
ETS on the Quest for Student Success at Community Colleges

Now more than ever, community colleges play a vital role in our educational system, as well as our society as a whole. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, 45 percent of all current undergraduate students attend a community college.¹ Although community colleges attract a large number of students, they serve different purposes for different students. For some, they serve as a gateway to four-year universities and bachelor's degrees. For others, they provide training in technical or professional fields or provide an opportunity to improve or change careers.

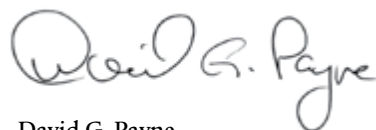
Yet too many community college students never graduate. The most recent Beginning Postsecondary Students Survey, conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, found that only 35 percent of students who began at a two-year institution had received any degree or certificate within six years, compared to 64 percent of students who started at four-year institutions.² Several studies have pointed to academic preparation and the need for remediation as one barrier to success. According to Complete College America, roughly 50 percent of students who enroll in community colleges need at least one developmental course. Among those students, rates of success are abysmally low, with fewer than one in four ever receiving a degree or credential.³

Community colleges can overcome this barrier by avoiding long sequences of remedial courses that slow down and demotivate students who face the most significant academic challenges. Gaining a holistic understanding of each incoming student — one that goes beyond high school grades and placement test scores to include noncognitive factors — can help identify those who could benefit from placement into college-level courses to keep them motivated and on track.

We developed the ETS *SuccessNavigator*® assessment to measure the critical noncognitive factors that most greatly influence incoming student success — academic skills, commitment, self-management and social support — to help colleges identify at-risk students and improve first-year retention rates. A course acceleration recommendation is provided to help advisors make more informed placement decisions and accelerate students into higher-level courses whenever possible, giving them a better chance for success by shortening their path to graduation. After just one year, the *SuccessNavigator* assessment is being used by more than 150 colleges and universities.



ETS is committed to going beyond traditional approaches to provide community colleges with the tools they need to help students achieve their goals and earn a degree or certificate. As part of this mission, we've collaborated with *Inside Higher Ed* to bring you information and best practices that can help your institution overcome the barriers to success.



David G. Payne
Vice President and Chief Operating Officer
Global Education Division
ETS

For more information on the *SuccessNavigator* assessment from ETS, visit ets.org/successnavigator.

¹American Association of Community Colleges, *2014 Fact Sheet*. (April 2014).

²Wine, J., Janson, N., and Wheelless, S. (2011). *2004/09 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:04/09) Full-scale Methodology Report* (NCES 2012-246). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC. Retrieved January 21, 2015 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.

³Complete College America. (2012). *Remediation: Higher education's bridge to nowhere*. Washington, DC: Author.

INTRODUCTION

Community college students are central to the goals of the Obama administration, many governors from both major parties, foundations and others to increase the percentage of the adult public with college credentials. Not only do a plurality of college freshmen start at community colleges, but those students are more diverse and more disadvantaged than others.

This makes community colleges crucial not only to overall college attainment goals, but to related goals to diversify the student body nationally.

But success in these goals is far from assured. At many community colleges, completion rates are low. Remedial needs are high.

As a result, colleges are currently working on a variety of strategies – involving orientation, registration deadlines, assessment, the curriculum and more – to promote student success.

The articles in this compilation explore a range of strategies being used at community colleges.

Opinion essays offer expert analysis and personal experience.

Inside Higher Ed will continue to cover these issues, and welcomes your ideas on topics for future articles.

--The Editors

editor@insidehighered.com

Influence incoming STUDENT SUCCESS with the ETS SuccessNavigator® Advisor Report

Gives advisors a complete understanding of each student and specific guidance, tools and action plans to ensure their success

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Aggregates key student information from both SuccessNavigator® and the student information system so advisors have a handy snapshot.

DETAILED ACTION PLANS

Suggested interaction with programs and services on campus based on domain scores — so advisors can easily guide the student to the resources that will help ensure success.

Student Name: Jacob Minor
Student ID: 5698736
Institution: SN Community College
Test Date: 07/16/2013

The Student's Background	COURSE ACCELERATION*	ACADEMIC SUCCESS INDEX*	RETENTION SUCCESS INDEX*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender: Male Race: White (non-Hispanic) Age: 19 Is English your best language? Yes 	<p>MATH: YES</p> <p>ENGLISH: CAUTION</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION</p>	<p>HIGH</p>	<p>MODERATE</p>

Skill Report

Academic Skills- Tools and strategies to succeed in the classroom		
A student with similar skills:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarely uses strategies to manage time and assignments Often misses class or comes unprepared 	
Tools/Tips	The Tutoring Center can provide strategies to help you set goals and organize your time. See your Advisor for more information, or click here for helpful tips and tools.	LOW
Commitment- Active pursuit toward an academic goal		
A student with similar skills:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sees little value in a college degree Does not feel attached to the college 	
Tools/Tips	The Career Center can provide strategies to help you set goals and plan your academic career. See your Advisor for more information, or click here for helpful tips and tools.	LOW
Self-Management- Reactions to academic and other stressors		
A student with similar skills:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manages stress in a positive and productive manner Demonstrates confidence in personal skills and abilities 	
Tools/Tips	The Counseling Center can help you manage stress that arises from college life. See your Advisor for more information, or click here for helpful tips and tools.	HIGH
Social Support- Connecting with people and resources for student success		
A student with similar skills:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holds some connections to people and resources Has occasional difficulty balancing the demands of college and personal life 	
Tools/Tips	The Office of Student Life can connect you with important student groups on campus. See your Advisor for more information, or click here for helpful tips and tools.	MODERATE

*Acceleration: Please see Technical Users Guide to fully understand how to make an informed course placement.
*Academic Success Index: Weighted composite of student's SuccessNavigator® profile and other academic indicators of student preparedness, such as self or institution reported high school GPA, SAT/ACT, etc.
*Retention Success Index: Projected likelihood that student will return for a second semester or year at the institution.

Note: Advisor Report also includes a Detailed Skill Report and additional information on the student's background.

Report Date: 07/17/2013 01:01 PM

SUCCESS INDICES

The Academic Success Index helps advisors identify at-risk students and make acceleration decisions. The Retention Success Index indicates the likelihood that a student will return for a second semester or second year at the same institution. Both are based on background, cognitive and psychosocial information and supported by statistical relationships with success.

DOMAIN SCORES

Four general areas — academic skills, commitment, self-management and social support — give advisors a holistic understanding of the student's strengths and vulnerabilities.

To learn more about the Advisor Report, as well as the Student and Institutional Reports, please email highered@ets.org, call 1-800-745-0269 or visit www.ets.org/successnavigator.

NEWS

A selection of articles from *Inside Higher Ed*

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER?

BY PAUL FAIN

Ending late registration for courses may help more community college students get to graduation, but it also challenges deeply held views about student access, and can hurt enrollment levels.

One way community colleges can help more students graduate is by eliminating the option of registering late for courses, research has found. But this move, which is a key part of college completion reforms, can also stir up controversy and hurt enrollment numbers.

In February 2014 the College of Southern Nevada began requiring that students sign up for a course no later than the night before it begins. The two-year college included a few exceptions to the revised policy and also added new, short-term courses to avoid shutting out late-arriving students.

Previously, students could join an in-progress course for up to three weeks. By ending that relatively liberal registration policy, experts said the college should see improved retention and graduation rates.

“Retention is far lower for students who register late,” said Rhonda Glover, national director of data coaching and data strategy for Achieving the Dream, a completion-oriented nonprofit group that works with the College of Southern Nevada and many other community colleges.

By preventing students from entering a class they’re unlikely to complete, Glover said “you’re actually supporting those students in more positive ways than you’re hurting them.”

A committee of Southern Nevada’s Faculty Senate oversaw the drafting of the new course registration policy, which the full senate later approved. Dennis Soukup, who chairs the college’s applied technology department, said faculty members in his department cheered when they heard about the end of late

registration.

The reason, he said, was that during the first few days of a term, instructors were often overwhelmed by students trying to get into courses. “I felt like an auctioneer,” Soukup said of trying to teach during the first few days of a course. “It was very intrusive.”

The flood of late registrations caused other problems, too, such as making it tough for administrators to hire the right number of adjunct professors for course sections. “Students would wait until the last minute,” said Soukup. “We couldn’t plan our faculty.”

Not all instructors are sold on the new policy, however. Several have argued that the elimination of late registration takes a disproportionate toll on the neediest, least-prepared students.

“The policy is going to block low-

income students from enrolling,” said Sondra Cosgrove, a history professor at the college. “They’re the students who have the most problems. They’re the poorest students. They don’t have family support.”

Soukup, however, said the policy is already helping students – including those from underserved populations.

In the past many students would wait until the last minute to register, he said. And those who start late “never finish.”

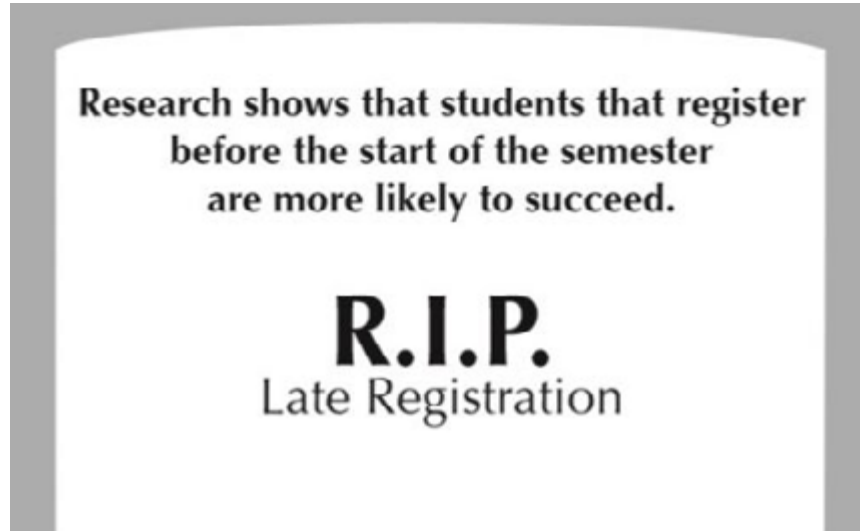
In 2014, however, Soukup said students are “well ahead of the game.”

'Enabling Students?'

Eliminating late registration isn't easy. It can go against the philosophical grain for “open access” institutions that pride themselves on taking all comers.

The main reason institutions like the College of Southern Nevada have been able to buck that tradition is the national college completion “agenda.” Officials from powerful foundations and the Obama administration are pushing hard for community colleges to focus on both student access and completion.

But when colleges try to draw from the completion agenda playbook, they sometimes encounter faculty resistance. And the strategies that groups like Achieving the Dream encourage can also impact enrollment and



Flyer from the College of Southern Nevada

the bottom line, because many states provide community colleges with appropriations based on enrollments.

Oregon's Klamath Community College, for example, saw its enrollment decline by 20 percent in 2012 after college officials put in place a number of completion-oriented policies. One key change at the college was the elimination of late registration.

Yet Achieving the Dream argues that late registration ends up hurting students in the long run. And Glover said colleges typically see a 2-3 percentage point retention gain from eliminating the option.

For example, her former employer, Valencia College, saw strong retention gains after nixing late registration (among other completion-oriented shifts). And students got the message quickly.

“Once you make the rules, they

abide by it,” she said.

Officials at Southern Nevada said they studied the issue before moving ahead. That included looking at studies from peer institutions, as well as gathering national and local completion data.

They also conducted focus groups with students, faculty and staff members, said James McCoy, associate vice president of academic success at the college.

The goal was to ask if the college was “enabling our students” with late registration, McCoy said. And the research said yes.

Once the policy was changed, the college added to its more than 150 shorter-term courses, many of which are eight weeks long. College officials also began a marketing campaign to get the word out to students.

The campaign featured a widely distributed flier that read “R.I.P. Late Registration” and included a

picture of a tombstone.

"Research shows that students that register before the start of the semester are more likely to succeed," the flier said. "Starting Spring Semester 2014, students must register by 11:59 p.m. the night before the semester begins. Some classes may be offered in a late-starting, short-term format."

The word apparently got out. At the beginning of the most recent term, only 332 students sought to get into courses after the deadline, McCoy said. That's a small number for an institution with a

total enrollment of roughly 35,000 students.

For her part, Cosgrove said students often aren't fully to blame for being late to register for a course. Many can't figure out their plans until they know how much financial aid they will receive, and that can be a challenge to do on schedule.

Instead of eliminating late registration, Cosgrove said, she would have preferred provide more resources for students such as advising, tutoring and child care.

They are, said McCoy. The

college has ramped up counseling and advising for students, helping them plan their course schedules well before a term begins.

It's too early to say if the policy has resulted in lower overall enrollment. But McCoy predicted it would be flat or only slightly down.

The college plans to continue investigating other ways to improve retention. McCoy said they are looking at other forms of student interventions as part of a broad strategic enrollment planning effort.

"We're not done yet," he said. ■

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/03/05/college-southern-nevada-seeks-boost-retention-ending-late-registration>

FLEXIBILITY AND GRADUATION

BY PAUL FAIN

Going to college exclusively full time isn't the best way for adult students who are returning to college to earn an associate degree, new data show.

Atending college full time isn't always the best way to get to graduation, at least for adult community college students who have previously pursued a degree and dropped out.

That's the central finding of a January 2015 study from a coalition of five higher education groups. The data are based on 12 million

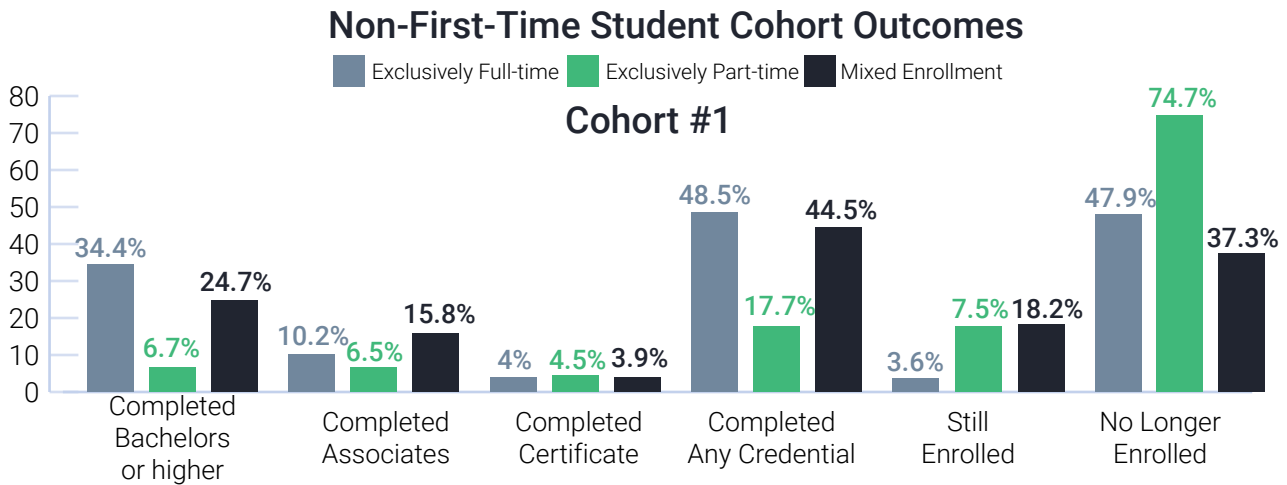
student records from the National Student Clearinghouse.

The American Council on Education, InsideTrack, NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and the University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA) worked with the Clearinghouse to track the

graduation and retention rates of non-first-time students.

Their findings showed the benefits of combining full-time and part-time enrollment. Students were more likely to complete an associate degree if they used this "mixed enrollment" approach.

Policy makers in several states, as well as some at the federal level,



have shown interest in encouraging more students to attend college full time -- generally defined as 15 credit hours or more per semester. Interest in the approach, which can be controversial, has been driven in part by Complete College America, a nonprofit group that is seeking improved graduation rates nationwide.

However, the new research does not appear to be in conflict with Complete College America or its allies. That's because the group has focused its course-load push on first-time students who are attending four-year institutions, not on adult students who are enrolling at a community college for a second time.

"We never said all students should take 15 credits," said Stan Jones, Complete College America's president and founder. "These are very different student populations."

The research project from the

associations follows two groups of students. The first includes 4.6 million who re-enrolled in college between 2005 and 2008, after being away from higher education for at least one year. The larger, second group of 7.7 million students re-enrolled between 2008 and 2013.

About 16 percent of students in the first group who attended college in a combination of full-time and part-time study successfully earned an associate degree as of August 2014. In contrast, about 10 percent of exclusively full-time students earned one, and 7 percent of exclusively part-time students did.

The second group of 7.7 million students showed similar results, but with far fewer completers because less time had passed since they re-enrolled.

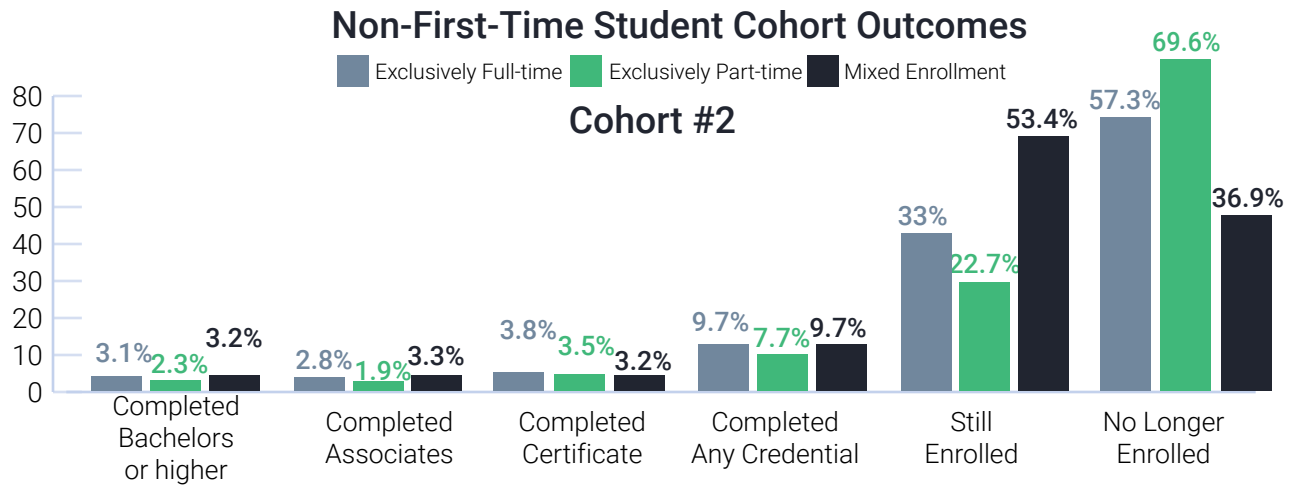
Returning students were also more likely to attend a private college the second time around,

the research found, and less likely to enroll at a public institution.

Flexibility appears to be important for once-again adult students, said Dave Jarrat, vice president of marketing for InsideTrack, a company that provides student coaching services.

"Returning students are typically balancing work, family and other commitments that ebb and flow in intensity over the course of their academic career," Jarrat said in a written statement. "Mixing part-time and full-time enrollment enables these students to persist through the inevitable fluctuations in their life obligations."

The findings differed when it came to four-year degrees. Exclusively full-time students in the first group did best here, with 34 percent earning at least a bachelor's degree. About 25 percent of mixed enrollment students completed, as did just 7 percent of exclusively part-time



students.

“If you go part time all the way, you’re really not likely to graduate,” said Jones.

Complete College America has called on states and universities to use a standard of at least 15 credits per semester as the definition of full time. The public policy group has also pushed for degree requirements to be limited to 120 credits for a bachelor’s and 60 credits for an associate degree, with a few exceptions.

These reforms are intended to improve student retention and graduation rates.

Jones points to several public universities that have encouraged

course loads of at least 15 credits for full-time students, including the University of Akron, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis and the University of Hawaii system.

The three institutions have increased the number of incoming freshmen who take at least 15 credits per semester to at least half, up from less than 30 percent. In all three cases, however, not all incoming students must take the full load.

“We’re not talking about 100 percent,” said Jones.

The state of Indiana has also begun a new campaign -- dubbed “15 to Finish” -- to encourage more

students to attend college full time. That idea, however, can be controversial among community college leaders.

Tom Snyder is president of Ivy Tech Community College, which is Indiana’s two-year system. He has written that the campaign won’t work for nontraditional students at community colleges, and could even hurt them.

“Rather than insisting that these students take 15 credit hours, or more than they can handle both financially and academically,” Snyder wrote in an opinion piece, “we need to look for ways to make their path to a degree easier.” ■

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/01/21/study-finds-mix-part-time-and-full-time-enrollment-can-boost-graduation-rates>

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MOVING AHEAD WITH COMPETENCY

BY PAUL FAIN

Eight Washington State community colleges will offer an online, competency-based business degree, as emerging form of higher education wins fans -- and some critics -- in the state.

The online, competency-based certificate Bellevue College offered in 2014 was a hit with students. In fact, the certificate in business software was so popular that the two-year college in Washington State decided to drop its conventional online version.

"The train has left the station at Bellevue," said Suzanne Marks, a faculty member who teaches business technology systems and is the program's chair. "We went from pilot to permanent, immediately."

The certificate was part of phase one of an experiment by a handful of Washington's 34 community and technical colleges. The next phase, which began in January 2015, is the creation of a fully online, competency-based associate degree in business.

The degree will be a transfer credential, meaning students should be able to move easily to four-year institutions. The courses will feature only free and open content. And Lumen Learning, an Oregon-based company, is designing the material to be

adaptive, meaning it will respond to each student's prior knowledge.

Competency will replace grades in the degree track, with the equivalent of a B being the minimum mark students must meet.

"They keep trying until they're done," said Connie Broughton, who works at the Washington State Board for Technical and Community Colleges and directs the project.

Columbia Basin College, which is the system's lead institution for the business degree, received approval from its regional accreditor for the program. It has begun marketing the degree, which, although linked to the credit-hour standard, includes elements of self-pacing. The program will also feature assessments that students can take and pass without completing course material.

Seven other two-year colleges in Washington, including Bellevue, plan to sign on and begin offering the competency-based associate degree later in 2015, according to Broughton.

A key reason for the degree's creation was research showing that there are 1 million people in the state with some college credits and no degree. Broughton said many of those people need a flexible form of higher education to go back and earn their degree.

"We saw that we need to serve learners who are not with us now," she said. "The goal is, eventually, every college can do this."

Washington's two-year colleges have joined more than 200 other institutions around the country that are giving competency-based education a whirl. However, some faculty groups at the Washington colleges have criticized the move. They said the competency-based credentials were created without adequate faculty input, and that the programs will create more work for faculty members.

Karen Strickland, president of the American Federation of Teachers of Washington, a faculty union, said administrators have not always acknowledged the new responsibilities competency-based credentials create for

instructors. She also said faculty members were concerned about how the programs "disaggregate" the faculty role. They break apart the degree track with a canned curriculum and modularized course content, she said, which can be offered by a different college than the one where instructors work.

"It's a generic degree from another college," said Strickland. "What we oppose is corporatization of the learning process."

Tapping Expertise

The project in Washington began with a hand from Western Governors University, a pioneer in competency-based learning. The nonprofit university in 2013 began working with 11 community colleges in 5 states -- including the 4 in Washington -- to help those institutions design their own competency-based credentials in information technology. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the U.S. Department of Labor chipped in funding for the project.

WGU ran workshops in those five states to expose faculty members and administrators to the emerging form of higher education. Attendees in Washington ranged from vice presidents to online instructors and registrars.

The sessions "started to get the idea of competency-based education into the cultural soup," said Rich Cummins, president of Columbia Basin College.



COURTESY: BELLEVUE COLLEGE

Soon four colleges in the state began offering short-term, competency-based certificates in business and I.T. As part of those programs, students take a pretest at the beginning of each course to identify their strengths and weaknesses. They can use those results to move faster through material they understand, earning credits when instructors deem them competent.

The competency-based courses feature both course instructors and a navigator for students, who serves as a sort of advisor, providing support and helping them to select course sequences.

Three days into offering the certificate, Bellevue had enrolled 104 students in the program, said Marks. Another 107 or so enrolled

during the second quarter.

"Students voted with their feet," she said. In particular, Marks said students like the self-pacing, the flexible due dates for work and the program's "high-tech, high-touch" approach.

Faculty members had to do a lot of work up front to create the programs. Mapping course competencies in particular is laborious, said Marks. But there was a payoff for instructors as well as students, she said. "It makes you pay more attention to instructional design, your outcomes and your assessments."

Other faculty members at Bellevue were less enthusiastic. And some have expressed concern about the college's attempt to join the Columbia Basin pilot group.

Several signed a letter expressing concern about who is overseeing quality control for the degree.

“It will be taught by non-Bellevue College faculty, developed by non-Bellevue College faculty and with assessments formulated by a third party, Lumen Learning,” the faculty members wrote. “Should Bellevue College lend its name to this degree?”

Self-Paced Model

The eight participating colleges in the consortium contributed a total of \$1.4 million for the creation of the online transfer degree. The costs went toward the hiring of four full-time faculty members, who will

oversee the business core of the program.

Columbia Basin also hired six part-time faculty members to run the general education side of the degree track.

Cummins said the program will need about 400 students to break even. Other colleges can then join by creating their own online portals for the degree track, which should be fairly simple.

“We don’t believe it’s going to fail,” he said.

A key innovation of the program, said Cummins and others, is that students will be able to begin when they like during the first three months of each term. They

must enroll full-time for the second chunk of three months.

Tuition is a \$2,667 flat fee per six-month term. There is a \$40 assessment fee. The program includes 18 courses, all competency based and online. Students must earn at least 20 credits per term, but can earn more at no cost. Cummins called this an “all you can eat” model.

Columbia Basin's role is about social mobility, he said. And the competency-based degree will allow "distant students to move at their own speed as well as their own time and place while ensuring a greater level of rigor across distance learning offerings.” ■

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/02/17/two-year-colleges-washington-state-expand-competency-based-project-business-degree>

DROPOUT-ADJUSTED OUTCOMES

BY KAITLIN MULHERE

A new paper measuring the economic outcomes for students who drop out of community college programs finds that earnings vary based on the number of credits earned and courses taken.

Most research on the payoff of attending community college actually doesn’t measure the effect of attending, but rather what happens for those who graduate.

Yet when the majority of students

who enroll in community colleges don’t complete their programs, the financial benefit should be adjusted given the likelihood of failure.

That’s the philosophy driving a February 2015 report that tries to measure the economic

benefit of two-year college for the mass of dropouts. The report was published by the Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment at Columbia University’s Teachers College.

“People look at what the completers do and they think, ‘Oh, well, that’s what I’m going to get,’ and that’s a somewhat inaccurate picture,” said Clive Belfield, one of the report’s authors and an associate professor of economics at the City University of New York’s Queens College.

Relatively few individuals who enroll in community college go on to earn a credential, although the available national data is limited. Based on federal graduation rates, 22 percent of first-time, full-time students who enroll in community colleges earn an associate degree within three years, according to the center.

In general, community college provides fairly high labor-market returns for those who complete. Based on previous studies, women with an associate degree earn an average of 21 percent more than those with a high school diploma, and men earn an average of 13 percent more, according to the report.

But there’s a far more complex and varying breakdown of the labor market returns based on the number of credits earned and type of courses taken, Belfield said.

If colleges or prospective students are evaluating programs and majors based on their labor market returns, they need to look at the rate of completion so students know what their chances of actually seeing those payoffs are.

That sounds obvious, Belfield said. And yet, most research measures only the earnings of completers. Part of that is explained by the relative difficulty of gathering data on noncompleters.

In this case, to measure the outcomes of students who enroll -- not just those who complete -- the researchers created an algorithm that predicts which award (associate degree, certificate or a one-year job-training credential) a student was most likely to receive based on his or her transcript data.

The report also compares the



outcomes of completers and noncompleters based on the students’ stated intent or goal. The algorithm, intent and goal models delivered different outcomes, demonstrating that students often don’t pursue the path they intended. (Sometimes there’s a deliberate change of paths, but often this reflects students’ confusion about what courses they need to take, the study said.)

The researchers used data from all first-time, credit-seeking

students within the North Carolina Community College System between the 2002-03 academic year through 2004-05. Students who transferred and went on to earn bachelor’s degrees were taken out of the sample. The student transcript data was merged with earnings data from the state’s unemployment office.

For students who end their postsecondary education without an award, those who were predicted to complete certificate programs had worse labor market outcomes than those who were on the associate degree or diploma track.

The differences in earnings also vary depending on the field of study. In most of the 13 fields researchers looked at, there wasn’t a significant difference between students who earned an associate degree and the noncompleters, though that wasn’t true across the board.

In general, fields that are relatively high paying remain lucrative after dropouts are included in the data, but not by as much, according to the report.

The clearest example is in nursing. The earnings gain for female students who complete their nursing credentials is 104 percent. But when noncompleters are factored into the equation, the earnings advantage drops to 37 percent. It’s still positive, but much less so.

“To the student, if you’re really going to pin your hopes on nursing, you’ve got to make sure you complete,” Belfield said. “Because those big payoffs are only going to happen if you complete.”

Earnings differentials might be influenced by how skills can be applied across disciplines, Belfield said. For example, a noncompleter in a business program is more likely to have learned skills that can be applied elsewhere than has a nursing student.

“The more specific the skill, the bigger the risk if you don’t complete,” he said.

One surprising finding of the study was that there wasn’t any evidence that progression mattered. Students who were farther along in a specific course of study were no better off than students who simply earned a collection of general college credits.

In fact, after controlling for the number of credits earned, the labor

market returns actually declined for noncompleters who progressed farther into their studies. In other words, students who dropped out after taking a somewhat random assortment of classes were just as well off as those who followed a strict path of study.

The finding certainly needs to be looked at in further detail, Belfield said. But it could make a big difference in the way programs are structured and the way students sign up for courses. ■

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/02/16/paper-explores-earnings-students-who-fail-complete-community-college>

HIGH IMPACT, LOW PARTICIPATION

BY PAUL FAIN

Research has shown community colleges how to improve graduation rates and create clearer pathways for students, but too few colleges have gone big with those strategies.

Community colleges now have solid data on which strategies work best to help students get to graduation. While more colleges are using those techniques, far too few students are benefiting from them.

That has been a central theme of three studies from the Center for Community College Student Engagement, all of which seek

to investigate the use of “high-impact practices” to boost student success. The center released its third and final piece of the project in September 2014.

The new research adds to the case for 13 specific practices that work particularly well (see box). Some can have a big impact on student retention and graduation rates.

Take the elimination of late registration for courses. The report found that students who reported registering for all courses before the meeting of the first class were four times more likely than their peers to stay enrolled between semesters and 11 times more likely to not drop out over a year.

Yet 5 percent of students in the survey did not register for all their

courses before they began.

“There’s a lot of work to be done to be where we want to be on completion rates,” said Evelyn Waiwaiole, the center’s director.

One key, as the center has shown in previous studies, is applying retention-oriented policies to many or even all students. Kay McClenney, who retired as the center’s director, often said “students don’t do optional.”

However, Waiwaiole said the community college sector still has many cracks for students to slip through, even with required programs. “I don’t think we really get what ‘all’ means,” she said.

Going big with success policies need not be difficult or painful, said Waiwaiole. Some, like ending late registration, are “low-hanging fruit.” In that case colleges can create new, shorter-term courses to keep from shutting out late-registering students and losing their tuition dollars as well as enrollment-related government support.

Most of the other strategies can feature similar protections,

said Waiwaiole. But some of the practices are more unavoidably expensive. One is the creation of new “learning communities,” which feature the linking up of courses that groups of students take together.

Colleges don’t need to try all 13 to be successful, Waiwaiole said. They should pick the ideas that work best for their campus cultures. The report can help them make those choices.

“That’s how you can use this data,” she said, by asking, “What’s the culture like in tandem with what does the data say?”

Paradox of Choice

The new research features the most in-depth information the center has produced on student-success initiatives.

The first report in the series, released in February 2012, sought to describe the most promising efforts to improve completion. It was followed by an October 2013 report that tracked how students who participate in those programs

fare in comparison to those who do not.

Both studies drew from several national surveys of community college students, including the center’s flagship survey -- the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE).

This latest research, however, went deeper than surveys by linking up individual student transcripts from 12 community colleges with the students’ survey answers. As a result, it tracked student attitudes and outcomes alike.

“It’s the most complex work we’ve ever done,” said Waiwaiole.

The report looks at how the 13 most promising student-success practices affected three key metrics: students’ completion of one remedial education course, how likely students with remedial needs were to complete an introductory course in English or math, and student “persistence” in college.

All 13 led to improvements. And even some seemingly small changes paid off in big ways. For

HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES

- Academic goal setting and planning
- Student success course
- Supplemental instruction
- Orientation
- Learning community
- Assessment and placement
- Accelerated or fast-track developmental education
- Experiential learning beyond the classroom
- Registration before classes begin
- First-year experience
- Tutoring
- Alert and intervention

“THAT’S HOW YOU CAN USE THIS DATA,” SHE SAID, BY ASKING, “WHAT’S THE CULTURE LIKE IN TANDEM WITH WHAT DOES THE DATA SAY?”

example, the study found that students in remedial math courses were almost three times more likely to complete those courses if their instructor clearly explained the class attendance policy. The good news with that strategy is that fully 98 percent of students said all their instructors already do this.

On the flip side, only 6 percent of surveyed students with remedial needs participated in learning communities. Those who did were roughly 2.6 times more likely to complete a remedial English course.

The report pushes hard on community colleges to give their students clearer “pathways” to graduation. For a full decade the center has been producing research showing that students do better if colleges “make engagement inescapable.”

That means requiring academic support and tutoring. And the center has said that a more structured approach should include cuts to the dozens of choices of majors and

hundreds -- or even thousands -- of course options that can confuse and overwhelm students.

“Current brain science research shows that people experience anxiety and frustration when they face too many choices,” the report said, and as a result “are more likely either to make poor decisions or to retreat from the situation altogether.”

Several community colleges have made progress in reducing the clutter students face. The report singles out Miami Dade College for a program, begun in 2011, to create more structured academic pathways.

Faculty, staff and administrators redesigned curriculums as part of the project, by streamlining course sequences and making sure degree requirements are designed to help students transfer to four-year colleges without losing credits.

Any effort to narrow students’ choices requires strong academic advising, said Waiwaiole. For

Miami Dade that meant a direct contact for all of its more than 10,000 first-time students who arrive each fall. The students talk with pre-college advisers, complete an online orientation and have a mandatory in-person pre-enrollment orientation, where advisers help them create personalized academic plans. Advisers stick with students throughout their first semester. And full-time faculty members take over as coaches and mentors when students pass the 25-percent-complete milestone on their way to a credential.

Miami Dade isn’t alone in this sort of heavy-duty redesign of the student experience. But Waiwaiole said the going is slow across the two-year sector.

“There are a lot of good initiatives out there,” she said, pointing to Achieving the Dream and Completion By Design, among others. “But change, and I mean cultural change, doesn’t happen overnight.” ■

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/09/18/new-report-builds-case-set-strategies-help-community-college-students-graduate>

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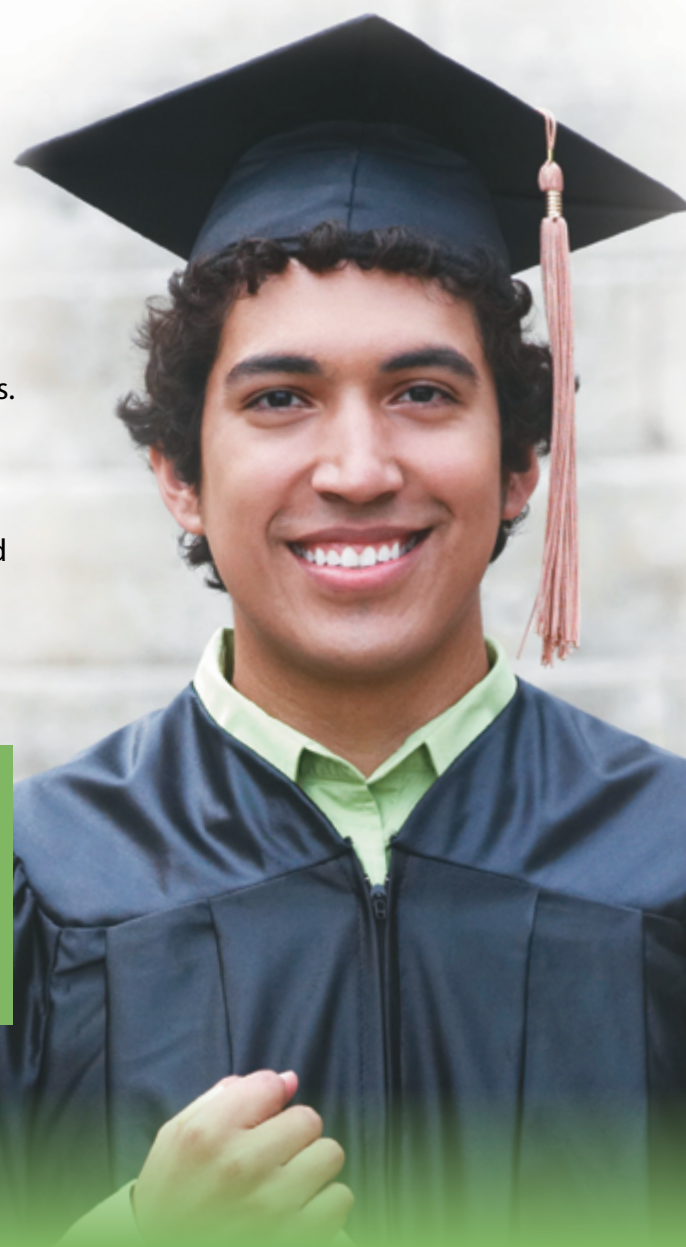
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MAKING THEM PAY

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM

New America Foundation argues that regulations governing federal financial aid are keeping community college students from earning degrees faster.

Community college students should be able to afford to take two courses every spring, summer and fall semester, a February 2015 policy paper from New America argues, but a number of barriers -- especially surrounding financial aid -- “impede the flexibility” those students need to earn a degree.

In “Community College Online,” Rachel Fishman, a senior policy analyst with the foundation, suggests community college students would be able to speed up their time to degree completion if they could mix face-to-face, hybrid and fully online courses, courses that rely on seat time and courses that measure competencies. To achieve that kind of flexibility, Fishman presents a wish list of federal- and state-level policy changes.

“Information technology has the potential to support students through their degree paths and increase the number of courses a student takes per semester, hastening time to degree,” Fishman writes. “[Students] should not have

to struggle through a system that was designed around a face-to-face education at a physical location.”

The paper comes at a time when community colleges leaders are wondering how to capitalize on the Obama administration’s interest in their institutions. While the administration estimates its plan to make community college free would cost \$60 billion over the next decade, some community college experts have said the institutions need reforms that involve more than money to serve the millions of students who could benefit from the initiative.

At the same time, many community college leaders are concerned that the administration’s plans to rate institutions based on metrics such as completion and transfer rates could brand them as “low performing.” As Fishman’s paper points out, 64 percent of community college students who enrolled in 2006 didn’t earn a degree after 6 years. Among part-time students, that number was 82 percent.

To lower those percentages, Fishman writes, students need to take more courses -- two each during the spring, summer and fall semesters. But for many students, she adds, federal regulations governing financial aid make that an unaffordable proposal.

Nearly half of Fishman’s proposals therefore involve changing federal regulations to make financial aid less tied to semesters and time spent in the classroom. Those rules are a “relic” from when most students went directly to college after graduating high school and then took summers off, she writes. “That is not the reality for most students anymore, and especially not for community college students, who are more likely to be older, have part-time or full-time jobs, commute to school or take courses online.”

According to Fishman’s proposal, the federal government should offer year-round Pell Grants to help students pay for courses during the summer, as opposed to splitting the financial aid evenly between the fall and spring. (The

foundation in January devoted a separate policy paper to that idea.) Financial aid officers should also be able to limit how much part-time students can take out in loans, thereby preventing students from hitting financial aid caps before they earn a degree.

"It's not that financial aid is necessarily a barrier to online learning and innovation, but our financial aid system is a barrier for increasing the flexibility in credit accumulation that could really meet the needs of 21st-century students," Fishman said in an e-mail. "Giving year-round financial aid to students does not mean all those students will necessarily be online, but it does allow them the flexibility to go online during the summer or winter intercession, for example."

In addition to proposing more flexible ways of distributing federal financial aid, Fishman suggests students should be free to spend the funds on whatever mix of courses they need, including face-to-face classes, competency-based education or courses that help them prepare for higher education.

"Allowing financial aid to flow to students who want to take both an online competency-based course and a face-to-face course is not possible in our current system even if it would benefit students and hasten time their time to degree," Fishman said in an e-mail. "If the



system allows for financial aid to flow in this way, institutions would be less hindered in how and in what modality they offer their courses."

Adult students also should have more financial aid options beyond what the federal government offers, Fishman writes. State programs that only provide aid to students graduating high school could expand their eligibility

requirements to include other groups of students, she suggests, and more community colleges could offer "emergency funding" for students to pay for unexpected car repairs or medical expenses. Even federal and state tax returns could be tweaked to automatically alert students to government benefit programs they qualify for, she writes.

"INNOVATIONS LIKE THE ONES FEATURED IN THE REPORT TAKE TIME AND MONEY. WITH LOCALITIES AND STATES SLASHING THE BUDGETS OF THEIR HIGHER ED INSTITUTIONS, IT'S OFTEN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES WHO ARE THE HARDEST HIT."

Matt Reed, academic vice president at Holyoke Community College (and a blogger for Inside Higher Ed), said in his blog that the policy paper "offers plenty to build on," and that Fishman's suggestion to ease the restrictions on financial aid for competency-based education "makes sense on several levels."

But Reed also questioned whether expanding existing grant programs and creating a new one specifically for community colleges -- two other proposals outlined in the policy paper -- is the best way to promote innovation among two-year institutions. Fishman makes those recommendations after pointing out that "there are no federal funding streams dedicated to innovation at community colleges, even though they educate the largest share of students in higher education."

"Grants are great, and I'd heartily endorse a recommendation to make more of them, and a more varied set of them, realistically available to community colleges," Reed wrote. "But the issue that kills so much innovation in the crib isn't a lack of grants; it's a shortage of operating funds."

In an e-mail, Fishman acknowledged the resources required to make such reforms possible.

"Innovations like the ones featured in the report take time and money," Fishman said. "With localities and states slashing the budgets of their higher ed institutions, it's often the community colleges who are the hardest hit. In many cases states are asking them to act innovative, while pulling the funding right out from beneath them."

Giving community colleges

more opportunities to compete for grants can give initiatives that help students an initial boost, Fishman added, "but it's up to states and localities to ensure that these improvements are sustained through continued funding."

Apart from recommendations strictly related to funding, the paper suggests ensuring that credits students earn at community colleges transfer to four-year institutions, giving faculty more professional development opportunities and promoting the creation and use of open educational resources. To learn more about the students taking blended courses and enrolling in competency-based education programs, the report also recommends the federal government collect more data through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, or IPEDS. ■

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/02/18/new-america-paper-recommends-changes-federal-financial-aid-benefit-community-college>

COMMUNITY COLLEGE LIBERAL ARTS

BY SCOTT JASCHIK

While advocates for the humanities and some social sciences worry about enrollment patterns at many colleges, they may have missed good news from two-year institutions.

Many liberal arts faculty members these days worry about struggling enrollments for their disciplines. But data released in January 2015 suggest that they might be encouraged by the trends at community colleges.

From 1987 to 2013, the average annual growth rate for liberal arts or liberal studies degrees at community colleges was 4.3 percent, according to data being released as part of the Humanities Indicator Project of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. The total number of degrees awarded a year in these fields grew over that time period from 113,587 to 338,688. The highest rate of increase came in 2010-12, when average annual growth hit 8.5 percent. Those were years when many community colleges reported increased enrollments from students planning to transfer later to four-year institutions.

The Humanities Indicator Project, as its name suggests, tracks data primarily in humanities disciplines.

But at community colleges, the overwhelming majority of degrees that touch in some way on humanities are the pre-transfer degrees in liberal studies or liberal arts. Some colleges do have specific majors in humanities fields and they are included in the above total.

As the new report notes, community colleges have for years offered such liberal studies degrees, in many cases designed for students planning to transfer to four-year institutions. But amid debates over the state of the liberal arts, and fears of declining enrollments in the humanities, the programs at community colleges are largely ignored by those outside the two-year-college sector.

The period covered by the study is of course one in which many community colleges experienced significant enrollment growth across all programs. But the new data show that the growth was not just in the total number of degrees, but in the share of degrees awarded

to humanities-linked fields such as liberal studies and liberal arts.

As a share of all associate degrees, those with a significant humanities component rose from 25.8 percent in 1987 to 38.9 percent in 2013. During the same time period, the share of degrees classified here as awarded in professional fields fell from 57.5 percent to 49.2 percent.

To accompany the data, the American Academy also released a short essay by Martha J. Kanter, a distinguished visiting professor of higher education at New York University and former U.S. under secretary of education.

In the essay, Kanter writes that the new data should highlight the roles of community colleges beyond job preparation, both for those who earn liberal arts associate degrees and for others.

Writes Kanter: "Exposure to the humanities in the first two years of college as a significant component of general education provides the intellectual framework for

students to compare and contrast the viewpoints of those different from themselves and to delve into the learning spheres of analytical reasoning, problem solving, and decision making to tackle the very real problems facing their communities and the greater society." ■

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/02/18/new-america-paper-recommends-changes-federal-financial-aid-benefit-community-college>

VIEWS

A selection of opinion essays from *Inside Higher Ed*

LEARNING FROM A BOLD EXPERIMENT

BY SHOUPING HU

Florida's remedial reform law poses both complex challenges and valuable opportunities, writes Shouping Hu.

Florida is one of several states where legislatures are exploring dramatic reforms of developmental (remedial) education.

A high percentage of students who enroll at the 28 state colleges (formerly the community colleges) in the Florida College System have remedial needs, and only a small fraction of those students actually earn college credentials.

To try to combat this problem, the state's Legislature in 2013 passed a new law mandating

that the 28 state colleges provide developmental education that is more tailored to the needs of students. As reported earlier by *Inside Higher Ed*, the policy gives students much more flexibility in terms of whether they participate in developmental education and what options they choose if they do decide to participate.

Some concerns have emerged since the Florida reform was implemented in the fall of 2014. For example, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* described

"headaches" such as a drastic decline in students enrolling in developmental education courses, challenges faculty members face and other issues regarding student decisions and choices.

It's clear that the state's developmental policy reform could have a long-lasting influence on student success in Florida and beyond. The Florida reform would be particularly relevant if the proposal of two years of free community college by President Obama ever becomes a reality.

To learn more about it, the Center for Postsecondary Success (CPS) at Florida State University has been conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation and effects of the policy.

The Florida Experiment

The law drastically changes the placement and instructional practices in developmental education. It prohibits requiring placement testing or developmental education for students who entered ninth grade in a Florida public school in the 2003-2004 school year and after, provided the student earned a standard high school diploma. The law also exempts active-duty members of the military from required placement testing and developmental coursework. It does, however, allow exempted

students to choose to be tested and/or to take developmental education once advised of their options.

Students now have several new options in terms of developmental education delivery methods that are designed to move them quickly into college credit, using corequisite instruction, modules and tutoring. The new strategies include: (1) modularized instruction that is customized and targeted to address specific skills gaps; (2) compressed course structures that accelerate student progression from developmental instruction to college-level coursework; (3) contextualized developmental instruction that is related to metamajors (a collection of programs of study or academic discipline groupings that share common foundational skills); and

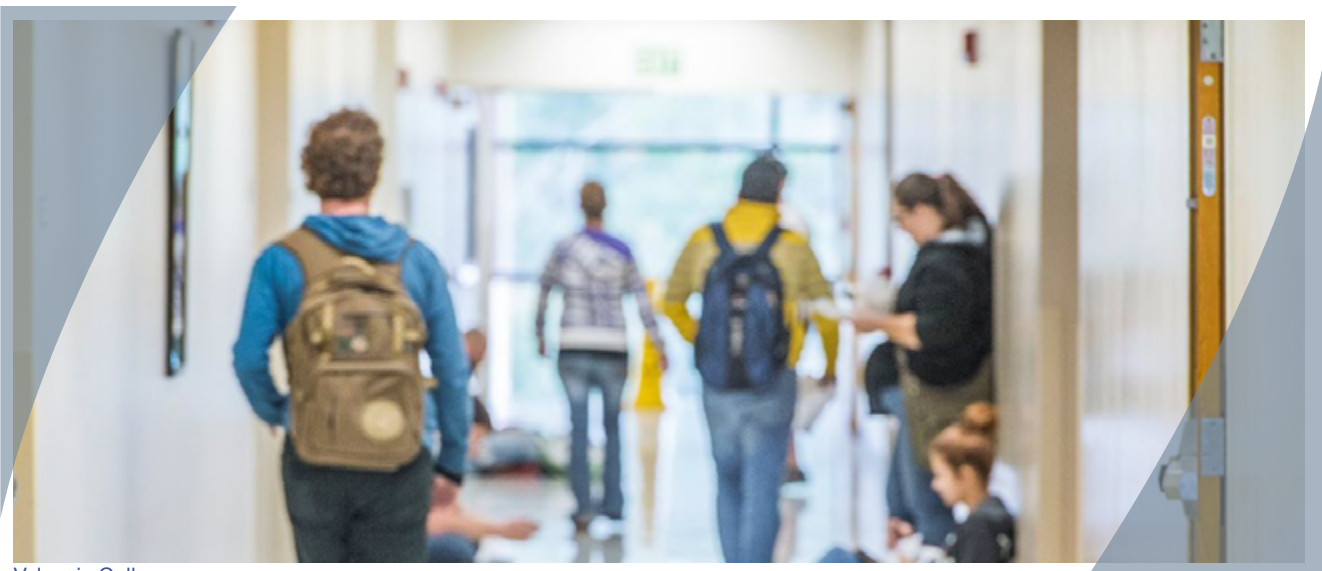
(4) corequisite developmental instruction or tutoring that supplements credit instruction while a student is concurrently enrolled in a credit-bearing course.

The legislation does not mandate the specifics around each option and therefore allows the individual campuses in the system some flexibility in regard to the form and delivery of each option.

Challenges and Opportunities

The reform strategies underway are sweeping.

Because a key intent of the reform is to provide greater flexibility in determining who needs to take developmental education courses, it is not surprising to observe a sizable drop-off in students enrolling in them. The drop-off itself may not necessarily



Valencia College

become a concern for some students, but we will need to closely monitor those who choose not to opt in to developmental education programs to determine their outcomes compared to those who did.

Research has indicated that developmental education may not be that helpful for borderline students, thus suggesting flexible placement may increase student success by not holding back students just shy of the cut score. However, a large number of students who would have scored far below traditional cutoff scores and instead opt in to college-level courses may present new and difficult challenges to institutions and instructors, and may also jeopardize students' chances of succeeding in college. Such a scenario could be compounded depending on how students of different backgrounds make decisions.

While some perceive the increased student choice to be positive, others question whether developmental education students have the preparation and wisdom to make informed choices about course options. Students, though, generally appreciate the increased choice provided by the legislation but questioned whether other students would always make the appropriate decisions. Colleges and universities have ramped up advising and student support

services, which could be key to student success and the reform as a whole. Advising students to make the "good" choice, and students following the advice properly, will be critical to student success in this new policy environment. Meanwhile, providing the necessary support to students along the way is important to sustain student success.

With greater flexibility in placement, the developmental education reform could alter the composition of classrooms across college campuses, possibly also shaping the structure and culture of teaching and learning on campus due to the wider range of student academic preparation in both developmental and college-level classes. The voices of faculty have indicated this is the case. A promising sign is that faculty members are designing customized instruction tailored to students based on their assessment of student preparation. This is consistent with the substantial literature on effective teaching and learning by meeting the needs of learners. Of course, this customization increases the work of faculty members, but if there is a way to support faculty adaptation to the new classroom reality, student success may be well in reach.

In anticipation of both student and faculty concerns, most campuses planned to increase

the student support services they provide. A content analysis of the 28 implementation plans indicated that the colleges planned to ramp up advising as well as extensive training and professional development for front-line personnel. In addition, support services such as tutoring and success courses are widely considered in colleges' implementation plans.

An earlier survey of college administrators also indicated a whole-campus approach in implementing the new policy. There is a fairly wide agreement that the reform reflects a spirit of innovation and offers an opportunity to solve an old problem in new ways, and colleges mobilized to respond to the new law and increased intra-institutional collaboration in developing strategies. Each campus has an implementation team that includes the key constituents on campus so that perspectives from all can be shared and considered.

Learning From the Experiences

The Florida experiment is a state response to a persistent problem. It marks a drastic departure from the traditional developmental education model that has not been working well. The "headaches" reported in *The Chronicle* from the early stage of implementation are not unexpected. However,

"COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES HAVE RAMPED UP ADVISING AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES, WHICH COULD BE KEY TO STUDENT SUCCESS AND THE REFORM AS A WHOLE. ADVISING STUDENTS TO MAKE THE 'GOOD' CHOICE, AND STUDENTS FOLLOWING THE ADVICE PROPERLY, WILL BE CRITICAL TO STUDENT SUCCESS IN THIS NEW POLICY ENVIRONMENT. MEANWHILE, PROVIDING THE NECESSARY SUPPORT TO STUDENTS ALONG THE WAY IS IMPORTANT TO SUSTAIN STUDENT SUCCESS."

the issues raised should not be ignored. In fact, we should keep close eyes on those issues and student outcomes.

The law allows institutions to be responsive to their individual student populations. But because there are variations in institutional reality based on student characteristics, infrastructure and previous experiences with developmental education, some colleges may be ahead of the game while others may be struggling to catch up, resulting in different reactions to the reform. While some colleges embrace it, others may have some reservations. The state and other interested parties should provide assistance to help struggling colleges to get up to speed.

The success of the reform depends on a multitude of players and factors. It depends on students to make the right decisions for themselves; it depends on practitioners and administrators

to successfully rally the troops on the ground to implement the critical components called for by the new law; it depends on faculty members to deliver courses that meet student needs; it depends on advisers to effectively advise students and support services staff members to provide timely and needed support to the students along the way; it also depends on policy makers to create favorable policy environments for those on the ground to do the work at the best of their expertise and capacity.

Moving Forward

The bold reform strategies in developmental education in Florida could blaze a new trail, or offer states valuable lessons. It is easy to point fingers to K-12 education for the lack of preparation of college students. While it is important to continue to improve the quality of K-12 education for all students, it is also important to consider the ways the higher education system

can improve student success. Given the nature of the reform and the multiplicity of issues, strong and sustainable leadership at both the state and campus level is required in order for the reform to stand a chance of delivering results. At least six steps appear to be warranted to determine whether such a broad reform is capable of achieving its intended outcome.

First, as for any policy change, it will take time to see results. Is there willingness to wait for a period of time to see the impacts of the current policy changes on student success, given the likely pressures from various sources? If not, we may never know whether such a reform is able to deliver.

Second, to assess the impact of the reform on students and continuously improve the policy, there is a need for credible evidence. The research community needs to contribute to the conversation by conducting valid research to understand the perspectives from

all concerned and affected, and assess the impact of the new policy on outcomes related to student success.

Third, practitioners and administrators need to be open-minded and provide feedback on what works and what may be needed on the ground. On the one hand, they need to challenge conventional practices that have been in place for a long time. Fortunately, the early signs indicate they indeed embrace the idea of innovation.

On the other hand, they should demand the support they need to ensure the new initiatives will be successfully put in place.

Fourth, policy makers should use the evidence and results to guide

the policy-making and -remaking process.

Just as practitioners within community colleges need to be open-minded in implementing reform, policy makers need to be open-minded and honestly consider feedback to adjust the policy accordingly.

Fifth, funding agencies should be keenly attentive to what is really going on in educational reform and put their resources behind research on real-world problems. Instead of waiting for perfect research, they should strike a good balance in pursuing the rigor and relevance of the research to promptly respond to the needs on the ground. Otherwise, they may end up being empty-handed in the

pursuit of connecting research, policy and practice.

Finally, credible and timely research has the potential to generate valuable evidence to inform policy and practice, and it can be accomplished by collaboration among researchers, practitioners, state agencies and funding organizations. After all, it is our shared responsibility to optimize the educational environment so that our students can succeed, reach their full potential and realize their dreams. ■

Shouping Hu is the Louis W. and Elizabeth N. Bender Endowed Professor and the founding director of the Center for Postsecondary Success (CPS) at Florida State University.

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/01/29/essay-making-most-floridas-remedial-reform>

NO SILVER BULLET

BY HUNTER R. BOYLAN

Fixing remedial education will be much more complex than reformers and policy makers acknowledge, writes Hunter Boylan.

Many members of the professional community in developmental education agree with many studies suggesting that simply placing students in remedial courses is an inadequate response to the problems of

underpreparedness among entering college students. They would further tend to agree that the current process of identifying and placing underprepared students is flawed and that the entire process of assessing, advising and

teaching them needs reform.

But if there is a “solution” to the remediation education “problem,” it is vastly more complex than many reform advocates and most policy makers acknowledge.

It will require that community

colleges change the way they do remediation. It will also require that they address non-academic issues that may prevent students from succeeding, improve the quality of instruction at all levels, revise financial aid policies, provide better advising to students at risk, integrate instruction and support services, teach college success skills, invest in professional development and do all of these things in a systematic manner integrated into the mainstream of the institution.

It may be useful for reformers to collaborate with the developmental education professional community, a community that has not only supported but invented many of the innovations reformers have proposed. Instead many policy makers are ignoring these professionals and requiring colleges to adopt unproven innovations disconnected from institutional systems or existing innovations.

Policy makers often fail to understand that the majority of remedial courses are taught by adjunct faculty who, although they may possess content expertise, often have no idea how to teach underprepared students. Many of them do not understand the principles of adult learning and development and they are offered no support or training to help them learn techniques to teach these students. Although

learning laboratories, tutoring and other support services are often available, few systematic efforts are made to ensure that those enrolled in remedial courses participate in them. The services designed to help students succeed in course work are seldom integrated into the courses they are supposed to support. In addition to this, underprepared students are often placed in some sort of computer-based or online remedial course, frequently without assessing their levels of computer access or literacy.

During the past decade, several research studies of varying quality have indicated this model of remediation doesn't work -- that too few students complete it -- and those who do often fail to graduate. This has stimulated a nationwide discussion of remediation and a large number of foundation-funded initiatives to reform it.

Historically, reform efforts in remediation have been only moderately effective. Much of this is due to the fact that alternative models were thought to be too expensive and more labor-intensive than the traditional remedial model. Given the limited funding with which most community colleges operate, those thoughts were probably accurate. Furthermore, many community college leaders had no idea how poorly remediation was working and there were few incentives to

find out. It was only after various groups began to measure the outcomes of remediation during the early years of the 21st century that we realized the poverty of those outcomes. Encouraged and supported by foundation funding, colleges across the country then began to experiment with new ways of providing remediation to the large numbers of students who needed it to be successful.

Meanwhile, new players entered the remediation reform game, usually without consulting any of those who were already advocating the reform of remediation. These new players included policy makers, foundation officers, politicians and organizations that sustained themselves with government and foundation grants -- few of them with any knowledge of or experience with underprepared students. Some of these individuals and organizations began the scientific study of remediation in an attempt to find data that might provide pathways to more successful remediation. Others simply announced that they had found the pathways.

The reformers have provided policy makers with an array of proposed solutions possessing various degrees of promise, research support and likelihood of success. The fact that there is often little research evidence supporting the proposed solutions appears not to bother either the

policy advocates or the state legislators they lobby. There are two other major shortcomings with contemporary reform efforts in remediation. The first is that most reform advocates are promoting piecemeal, non-systematic change. The second is that none of the proposed reforms address the underlying causes of poor performance among underprepared students.

Many contemporary reformers are promoting specific techniques such as embedded support services, modular instruction, contextualized instruction, computer based instruction or accelerated remedial courses. Some are even advocating that remedial courses be eliminated entirely and replaced with these techniques. What these reform efforts fail to acknowledge, but what experts in the field know well, is that no innovation is going to be successful in a community college unless the institutional system into which it is being introduced also changes.

There are those who contend that remediation is broken and needs to be abandoned. Equally likely, the campus system in which remediation takes place is broken and simply adding an innovation to the system or removing remedial courses from it will not fix anything.

Most community colleges do not have the resources to do the sort of intrusive academic advising needed by underprepared students. Academic support services in the community colleges are not systematically connected to the courses they are supposed to support. There is little focused faculty development for those working with underprepared students.

The system provides few rewards for working effectively with underprepared students. There is insufficient communication between those who teach remedial courses and those who teach college-level courses. There are, of course, some exceptions to these circumstances, but they exist only at a minority of community colleges. Innovations introduced into environments such as described here are unlikely to be successful because the environment itself mitigates against success.

Furthermore, many of the proposed innovations fail to address the conditions that cause students to be underprepared. There is a naïve assumption among many policy makers that if we just find different ways of presenting the material to students, they will do well in college. If we are to increase success rates for underprepared students, we will

also need to address the reasons why minorities and the poor and first-generation students perform poorly in the first place.

If policy makers are so convinced that they have a solution to remediation, then they should at least have the integrity to build evaluation plans into their policies and reforms. Ongoing systematic evaluation is a critical component of successful innovation which has been advocated in the field of developmental education for over two decades. If it turns out that the policies and reforms are successful, there will be proof that others can use to improve their programs. If it turns out that they are not, then the evaluation data can be used to inform the revisions of policies and innovations.

Thus far, few policy makers have bothered to build evaluation plans into their reform plans. In so doing, they are making the same mistake that let the shortcomings of traditional remediation remain for so long. They are not bothering to look at the results of what they have put into place, perhaps because they, too, have no incentives for doing so. ■

Hunter R. Boylan is the director of the National Center for Developmental Education and a professor of higher education at Appalachian State University.

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2014/04/18/essay-says-remedial-reform-efforts-face-serious-limitations>

THE DIFFERENCE COMMUNITY

COLLEGES MAKE

BY CASEY RANDAZZO

When you hear nay-sayers doubt the value of free tuition at two-year institutions, or suggest that the beneficiaries may not succeed, Casey Randazzo wants you to consider her story.

My college career began with remedial courses at a community college and ended four years later with a bachelor's degree from Cornell University.

This makes people flinch. But we all have an unexpected flame inside of ourselves waiting to be lit. I always believed this to be true. Others did not, and justifiably so, as my grades in high school were inconsistent. The marks on my report card followed the waves of my depression.

President Obama's proposal to expand access to community colleges has many asking why the country should focus on students with the odds against them. I offer my story as one to think about amid this debate.

When I was a high school senior, expensive private colleges seemed unrealistic and only small, flimsy envelopes arrived from four-year state colleges. I scanned the website of Raritan Valley Community College, remembering

that a high-achieving friend had just enrolled. That was enough to convince me to apply.

I received a startling text from my aunt after announcing my decision to attend Raritan Valley. "You're going to fail out and ruin your life," read the message. My aunt knew the stereotypes of community college too well. Those who attend two-year schools are thought to be defeatist, uninspired, and lacking in follow-through, according to the stereotype. My parents started community college with the intention of earning a degree, but walked away empty-handed.

Feeling perplexed, I quickly wrote back, "Students transfer from community colleges into top schools like Pepperdine and Syracuse all of the time! There's also an honors society. Some people even get full scholarships. I just need to get above a 3.5."

"That's never going to happen," read the message that flashed across the screen of my phone. I

was disappointed. She feared that if I went to community college I would derail, forfeiting all hopes for a successful life.

For me, forfeiting wasn't an option. The eccentric and quick-witted professors, personable and encouraging nature of the college president, and wealth of opportunities to explore made Raritan Valley Community College a well-kept secret that I was fortunate enough to discover.

My mathematics professor enlightened our class with her first lesson. "To be fully proficient in any subject," she said, "studying an additional six to nine hours each week is essential." I went home and immediately reorganized my schedule to accommodate this formula for mastery.

The tutoring center was my sanctuary. Although passes to the center were limited, I still managed to convince my professor to give me a few extra. I treated them like golden tickets, rejoicing as I



academically struggling children from low-income neighborhoods for the education nonprofit Practice Makes Perfect. We accept all types of scholars because we know they can achieve academic success through our five-week summer education programs. Learning in an environment that promotes acceptance, whether a summer program or a local community college, can strengthen a weak flame into becoming an invincible fire.

Please think about my story when you think about why community colleges matter – in the decisions of high school guidance counselors, state legislators who allocate funds, and members of Congress who now have a unique opportunity to make a difference. ■

Casey Randazzo is communication coordinator for Practice Makes Perfect, an intergenerational program that matches struggling elementary and middle school students with high-achieving middle and high school students with the supervision of college interns and expert teachers for an intensive academic summer program. She studied communication at Raritan Valley Community College and received her bachelor's degree from Cornell University in 2013.

danced down the hallway to book my appointment. In the end, my professor's ultimate study formula proved to be correct. The high-achieving student within me finally took form.

I was no longer ashamed of not having it all together in high school. I belonged in this land of lost toys. The students I interacted with varied in age.

They shared identical challenges but told unfamiliar stories. Community colleges accept more than just everyone's application. Community colleges welcome all students and support them in their

pursuit to improve their lives with education. There's a reason no other academic institution is more accepting.

I applied to Cornell University with my fingers crossed. When I was accepted and decided to major in communication, I knew the odds were still against me. I didn't anticipate that community college would lead me to graduating from one of the most competitive universities in the world. However, the tenacity I gained over those two years enabled me to face the odds and flourish.

Now, I share the stories of

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/01/23/essay-role-community-colleges-changing-student-lives>

OFFICE HOURS

BY PRESTON HUTCHERSON

Southern Methodist University and a Dallas community college differ on price, writes Preston Hutcherson, an SMU student, but they share a special ingredient for academic success.

As a student at a private university I had a sneaking suspicion that the magic between the pages of our great books had nothing to do with the cost of tuition, but had much to do with the generous heart of the instructor -- no matter the setting. I think I was right.

I spent the fall of 2013 enrolled at a community college in Texas trying to discover what you really get when you pay the most in the world of higher education -- and what you get when you pay the least.

By day, I was a junior English major at Southern Methodist University, one of the nation's most expensive private universities. By night, I was a commuter student in an American literature class at Richland College, a nearby community college. An English class at my university cost over \$5,100, while at Richland it was only \$153. While at SMU, after a few false starts, the liberal arts had come alive through accessible professors and vibrant class discussions, something near the

fantasy of "Dead Poets Society" but with textbooks too expensive to be able to justify tearing out any pages. As the semesters passed, I began to wonder about the extent to which this experience was tied to the amount I paid for it -- what do the liberal arts look like on a budget? What does a literature class feel like at our most accessible institutions? I went to find out.

The most important thing I had done at SMU was to go to my English 2312 professor's office on a Friday afternoon and tell the truth. The truth was not that I was unprepared for college, but that I simply didn't like college. It's a different world up there, my mother had warned. I must have misplaced the map. And I didn't know if I wanted to stay at SMU. I wondered how I would I ever begin to come to terms with this whole college thing -- what it was for and how it could ever be worth the cost. These are hard questions to ask during the best years of your life, which is what they called college

in the movies I had watched. But I couldn't recall a scene where the freshman pulled doubts like rabbits from a hat and turned them into answers for his soul.

The teacher was there, door open and waiting, just as the syllabus had promised under the heading of "Office Hours." My purpose was to discuss my second paper -- a postmortem. Tim Cassedy, a young assistant professor recently arrived from New York, observed that it seemed my high school had prepared me well for college writing -- an innocuous compliment to most students. But for me it was an invitation. The proper response is to say "thank you" and indicate how happy you are to be at college now instead of that dreadfully confining high school that taught you how to form simple paragraphs. I hesitated for a second, half-inclined just to agree, give the correct answer, and continue with the conversation. But another part of me, the honest part, wanted badly to tell the truth.

I began to unpack my situation, my confusion, my questions, my

"PROFESSOR NORTHCUT WANTS TO BE AT RICHLAND AND SHE IS THERE ON PURPOSE. SHE IS CONVINCED THAT COMMUNITY COLLEGES SERVE A VITAL PURPOSE IN AIDING THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST STUDENTS WHO LACK THE RESOURCES TO ATTEND FOUR-YEAR SCHOOLS RIGHT OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL, OR PERHAPS GOT SIDETRACKED ALONG THE WAY. BY HER DESCRIPTION, RICHLAND EXISTS EXPLICITLY TO HELP THOSE STUDENTS FIND THEIR WAY TO UNIVERSITIES AND BRIGHTER FUTURES."

longing for something more from my college experience than just velvet green lawns and affluent classmates. And Professor Cassidy listened. He didn't dismiss or diagnose. He didn't tell me that everything would be O.K. I was surprised to find that he seemed just as interested as I was in finding the answers to my questions and wishful thoughts. He understood. I got better. And I became an English major.

That moment saved college for me. If I had decided not to tell the truth that afternoon, I could have continued to accrue credits and eventually a degree, but I wouldn't have been to college. Something significant would have been missed and valuable time wasted. I went back to his office another time and again I was reassured and challenged. I went back again and again and the door was always open. All of my big and important realizations were tested there; made sharper through discussion,

questioning and that ancient practice most simply known as "teaching."

Three semesters later I was at Richland, looking again for a way to understand college. My search led me to a green armchair. You nearly trip over it when you walk into Crockett Hall 292, but its importance there has more to do with symbolism than functionality. Near the halfway point of the semester, I decided to go to the office of my English 2326 professor, Mary Northcut, and try to tell her the truth about why I was taking her class and the answers I was seeking. I say "try to" because I didn't know whether it was even possible to experience this part of the professor-student relationship in the way I had at SMU. There were office hours listed on the syllabus, but how could my professor, who was teaching six classes that semester, possibly have the time or energy to engage meaningfully

with her students one-on-one? I was mistaken in questioning her availability and commitment to her students, and along the way I found that I was wrong about many other things as well. Important, life-changing conversations are happening at community colleges too, and I was lucky to have found myself in the middle of one that afternoon.

Professor Northcut has been teaching at Richland College for nearly 40 years. After completing a doctorate at Texas Christian University, she immediately devoted herself to teaching outside the spotlight but inside a social mission. She first taught at Bishop College, a historically black college that later closed its doors in 1988, and then at El Centro College before transferring across the Dallas County Community College District to Richland. At some point during her decades-long stay she must have acquired this green padded chair, the arm



Richland College'

of which served as my seat during our hourlong talk. She was a fascinating conversation partner, possessing the tendency toward eccentricity that marks college professors everywhere. Between exchanges on the nature and purpose of higher education we discussed her love for horses, East Asian cinema and collecting Ancient Grecian coins. (In fact, it seemed I had walked into her office at a crucial moment in an eBay bidding war over a coin bearing the image of Phillip II of Macedon.)

But what deeply moved me, largely because I had foolishly believed that it couldn't possibly be true, was this important truth: Professor Northcut wants to be at Richland and she is there on purpose. She is convinced that community colleges serve a vital purpose in aiding the best and brightest students who lack the resources to attend four-year schools right out of high school,

or perhaps got sidetracked along the way. By her description, Richland exists explicitly to help those students find their way to universities and brighter futures. She is not at Richland because she never found a better job, or to collect a few extra paychecks before retirement. And she certainly does not see her students as the caricatures they often become in our higher-education debates -- representatives of broken systems; too unprepared to make it at a "real college."

She knows them to be just as capable of academic success as any other students. And she has an astounding track record of helping her students take the next step. Professor Northcut is full of stories of her students, many of whom she describes as being like her own children, going on to schools like TCU, SMU and even Columbia University. To her, Richland College is a serious place with serious

goals, and despite decades of changes and challenges, she is no less committed to its mission now than she was as a newly minted Ph.D. joining the ranks of socially conscious community college faculties in the 1970s. She told me she plans to keep teaching full-time for the foreseeable future and to retire later, reducing her teaching load to only "one or two classes" per semester. Two classes per semester is the ordinary teaching load for professors at SMU and most other elite colleges.

As I sat listening to all this on the arm of the green chair, worn threadbare by the pants of many students before me, I was overwhelmed with an awareness that the ancient art of teaching had found a home in this small office also. And the stakes in this office were much higher, the problems more pressing and the margin for error more perilously thin than perhaps in most of the offices at

SMU. Futures were forged here not from an abundance of advantages but out of a struggle for a fighting chance. I don't consider it an exaggeration to say that lives were saved in that office, in addition to the moments of intellectual growth we expect from any college experience. And most important for me, I left with that same feeling I had found my freshman year in Professor Cassedy's office -- that the world is full of complexity

and college is here to help you recognize and make sense of it. The best professors show you how. The best professors are everywhere.

I can no longer assume that office hours and compelling professors are the exclusive property of private universities. But of course, I cannot guarantee that they exist at every single college either. I can only claim this:

I am a product of office hours and great teachers and truth-telling, and I would not pay for a class, be the cost \$150 or \$5,000, that doesn't include the chance to find an open door and welcoming ear whenever the questions become too large to face alone. This is the difference between a degree and an education. ■

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