

Twelve Recommendations for Community Colleges

The following recommendations were taken from *Defending the Community College Equity Agenda*, edited by Dr. Thomas Bailey and Dr. Vanessa Smith Morest of the Community College Research Center.

1. A focus on student achievement as well as enrollment and access

Community colleges can be proud of their role in providing access to college for a wide variety of students. But many of those students make little progress in college. *Management, professional development, human resource policy, and program planning and coordination should all be explicitly designed to promote student progress.*

2. Beyond enrollment-based funding and accountability

In most states, college revenues are based on enrollments. As we ask colleges to shift their focus from enrollments to student success, *states must develop funding, accountability, and regulation systems that encourage colleges to work hard to ensure that each student achieves his or her goal.*

3. Closing racial and income gaps in college achievement

Although community colleges provide access to college for African American, Hispanic, and low income community college students, their outcomes remain below those for white and higher income students. *While colleges must improve outcomes for all students, they must focus particularly on closing racial, ethnic, and income gaps.*

4. Systemic reform

In seeking to improve student outcomes, rather than primarily pursuing discrete, small-scale programs that are often based on outside funding and targeted at a limited number of students, *colleges must think of reform in terms of broad institutional policy that creates fundamental change in the way a college operates.*

5. Informed decision-making through data analysis

Colleges must improve their use of data—both quantitative and qualitative—to promote student success. Colleges must design better data systems to track student progress so they can understand how students move through college (both within and outside state borders) and better recognize common barriers to student achievement.

6. Incentives in the accountability movement

In shifting attention from college enrollments to actual student outcomes, *performance accountability systems introduced by states and accreditors should*

avoid creating unintended incentives for colleges to enroll more easy-to-educate students.

7. Strategies in developmental education

The weakness of the academic skills of their entering students is the most difficult and important problem facing many community colleges. Colleges use a bewildering variety of developmental education strategies to address this issue, yet have little idea about which approach is most effective. *Colleges must focus financial and human resources on developmental education, but in doing so must do a better job of measuring the strengths and weaknesses of these programs.*

8. Direct counseling and advising

Counseling and other student services are fundamental to the community college equity agenda. *As is the case with developmental education, colleges must improve their knowledge about the use and effectiveness of these services. Our study suggests that a variety of services are needed, but that face-to-face counseling should be prioritized over excessive written information.*

9. Lessons from for-profit colleges in the design of student services

Successful for-profit colleges in general use a much more highly structured approach to student services than community colleges. While the much broader mission of community colleges makes this approach much more difficult, nevertheless, *community colleges should work toward providing a more structured and coordinated approach that is still consistent with their comprehensive and diverse roles.*

10. The expanding role of dual enrollment

Once limited to high-achieving students, dual enrollment is increasingly seen as a model for helping a wider variety of high school students prepare for college. There appears to be great potential in this strategy, nevertheless, *dual enrollment needs to be designed so that it does not exacerbate inequality in educational opportunities, and colleges need to do a much better job of measuring the effects of the model.*

11. Credentials for the workplace

Although community colleges play a central role in workforce development, the training they offer is sometimes short term and episodic. *Community colleges need to listen to both employers and students and offer comprehensive programs that provide credentials of value in the job market.*

12. Teaching and learning through online education

Most colleges have incorporated online education into their curriculum; nevertheless, the technical aspects of this approach often distract colleges from addressing issues of content and teaching. *Thus colleges need a stronger focus on solving the difficult pedagogic aspects of online education programs.*