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## Our Research

CCRC conducts research on the major issues facing community colleges and contributes to the development of practice and policy that expands access to higher education and promotes success for all students. We carry out studies in eight related topic areas:

- The role of the community college
- High school to college
- Developmental education and adult basic skills
- Student services, financial aid, and other supports
- Online education and instructional technology
- Student persistence, completion, and transfer
- College to career and workforce education
- Improving community college institutional performance

*These topic areas are described on page 3.*

## The Growth and Influence of the Guided Pathways Model

Thomas Bailey



When CCRC was founded 20 years ago, community colleges were rarely mentioned in the discourse on higher education or economic competitiveness, despite the key role they played in educating nearly half the nation's undergraduates. Moreover, little information was available on how students were doing at community colleges. Study of the community college sector accounted for less than 10 percent of the published research on higher education. And it was not until 2000 that the federal government first released consistent graduation data on community college students.

Since then, the interest in community colleges has grown dramatically. The publication of graduation rates revealed that most community college students, many of whom were working and attending classes part-time, were leaving college without completing programs. At the same time, the nation's changing economy meant that a high school education was no longer enough for job seekers to secure employment that provided family-supporting wages. Largely in response to these circumstances, major reform efforts have been initiated over the past dozen years to improve programs and services and thus increase the graduation rates of students.

Much of CCRC's research over the past decade has focused on the effects of these efforts and on the obdurate challenges that stand in the way of student success. Broadly, what we have found is that most colleges, even those undertaking particular reforms, still operate according to the traditional "cafeteria-style" model, in which students choose from a vast array of courses and programs with little guidance or support. While reforms of, say, developmental education or college intake may be well-intentioned and useful, they involve only one segment of the student experience and often produce only modest benefits that tend to fade over time.

**Most community colleges operate according to the cafeteria-style model, in which students choose from a vast array of courses and programs with little guidance or support.**

Our book published last year, *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success*, argues that to substantially increase student success, colleges must make fundamental changes. They must integrate student services and instruction into clearly structured programs of study that are organized around students' education and career goals. In what we and others are calling the "guided pathways" approach, colleges can go a long way in helping students by creating educationally coherent programs of study that simplify stu-

*Continued from page 1*

## The Growth and Influence of the Guided Pathways Model

dents' choices without limiting their options. In our work leading up to and including the book, we saw an emerging consensus around the guided pathways model, and there has been a recent growth in efforts at individual colleges, in systems and states, and in cross-state collaborations to put the principles articulated in the book into practice.

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Pathways Project, which includes CCRC as a partner along with Achieving the Dream, the Aspen Institute, Jobs for the Future, Public Agenda, and others, is one major initiative built around the guided pathways model. Over the next three years, the project will help 30 colleges in 17 states develop more structured programs with clearer pathways to transfer and careers. Another new development is the establishment of Student Success Centers, which coordinate efforts by a state's community colleges to improve student completion. Many of these centers have explicitly adopted a guided pathways approach. Funded by The Kresge Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, these centers are now operating in 12 states: Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.

Other states, including Georgia, Indiana, and Tennessee, along with the city of Chicago, some colleges in Florida, and individual institutions such as Guttman Community College in Manhattan, have adopted their own comprehensive reforms. The colleges have moved far beyond boutique, piecemeal changes that have been found to be of limited effectiveness and are instead implementing reforms that involve the entire student experience.

Indian River State College in Florida, an AACC Pathways college, is one school that has implemented some of the most critical elements of a guided pathways redesign. It has mapped semester-by-semester course sequences for 125 degree and certificate programs and has created meta-majors for new students who are not yet ready



to choose a specific program of study. Incoming students must declare a major or meta-major. The college also assigns each student an advisor who helps the student plan a path to completion. Developmental education is being redesigned so that instruction is contextualized within the subject matter of each meta-major. And now Indian River is planning to push pathways down to the high school level through early advising and program planning for dual-enrollment high school students. Similar reforms are being designed, implemented, and refined in other colleges as well.

Guided pathways reform efforts such as these open up new research opportunities for CCRC as we investigate how the ideas we elaborated in the book are taking shape on the ground. In the years to come, we will examine and evaluate guided pathways efforts at community colleges around the country. We still have many questions to explore—about the best way to tailor pathways to individual colleges, about how best to help underprepared students, and about how to help students who stray from the path.

**It is remarkable how two-year public colleges, little noticed in the past, have taken on a central role as laboratories for postsecondary innovation.**

It is remarkable how two-year public colleges, little noticed in the past, have taken on a central role as laboratories for postsecondary innovation. It makes for an exciting time to be working in the community college field. We look forward to contributing to the innovative work taking place through our research on guided pathways and other reforms and through our partnerships with college educators and others who are striving to improve education for millions of students.

# Our Research

## The Role of the Community College

What role do community colleges play in the postsecondary landscape? We study the mission of community colleges, their commitment to access and equity, and the opportunities and challenges they face. Projects include a study of the role of minority-serving institutions in higher education, conducted under the aegis of the CCRC-led Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment (CAPSEE).

## High School to College

CCRC studies programs and policies designed to prepare high school students for college, including short-term readiness programs, college-credit transition programs, and vocational pathways.

CCRC researchers are currently evaluating the outcomes of students who enroll in senior-year transition courses in two states. In partnership with MDRC, CCRC is also evaluating CUNY Start.



### FEATURED PROJECT: CUNY Start Evaluation

CUNY Start is a pre-matriculation program designed to help students with substantial needs in basic skills to succeed in college. The program, which costs students \$75 per semester, provides intensive instruction in reading, writing, and math through a customized curriculum and offers advising, tutoring, and a weekly college success seminar. CCRC and MDRC are conducting an evaluation of CUNY Start at four City University of New York community colleges.

*Project Lead: Nikki Edgecombe*

## Developmental Education and Adult Basic Skills

CCRC studies the factors that contribute to low rates of college completion among community college students assigned to remedial coursework, including issues around assessment and placement. Researchers also evaluate reform efforts aimed at helping underprepared students achieve greater college success.

CCRC houses the Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness (CAPR), a U.S. Department of Education-funded center that documents current practices in developmental education and evaluates innovative approaches to remedial assessment and instruction. CCRC is also conducting a study of developmental education reforms in two states.



### FEATURED PROJECT: Analysis of Statewide Developmental Education Reform (ASDER)

The community college systems in North Carolina and Virginia have embarked on ambitious statewide redesigns of developmental mathematics and English, aiming to reduce the time students spend in remediation and increase the effectiveness of services. This project investigates multiple aspects of these reforms. CCRC has released analyses on assessment and placement, college math placement and performance, reform implementation, and English learning assessment. Additional implementation and outcomes analyses are underway and will be made available this year.

*Project Lead: Nikki Edgecombe*

*Continued from page 3*

## Our Research

### Student Services, Financial Aid, and Other Supports

Success in college requires more than academic skills. CCRC researchers study nonacademic factors that influence success as well as student support services, such as counseling, success courses, and online advising systems. We also study the effects of student employment and financial aid on student outcomes.

Ongoing CCRC work in this area includes an examination of Bronx Community College's First Year Seminar, a study tracking the implementation and impacts of online planning and advising systems at multiple colleges, and research on how students choose programs of study at City Colleges of Chicago.



**FEATURED PROJECT:**  
**Evaluation of Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success (iPASS)**

Because community and broad-access colleges lack the resources to provide in-depth, one-on-one student advising, some colleges have begun to use technology tools to assist with program and course selection and to target support services. This project seeks to understand the extent to which technology-mediated advising reforms are adopted and can play a role in improving student outcomes. Building from our previous study of iPASS implementation and adoption, CCRC is now conducting a multifaceted research study at a second cohort of colleges and universities engaged in technology-mediated advising reform to examine the impact of iPASS on college persistence and completion.

*Project Lead: Melinda Mechur Karp*

**For more information about our areas of research, and to see a full list of research subtopics, projects, and publications, visit our website at [ccrc.tc.columbia.edu](http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu). Like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter at @CommunityCCRC.**

### Online Education and Instructional Technology

Technology plays a growing role in postsecondary education. Our research examines the structure and design of online instruction and its impact on students' persistence and completion rates. CCRC researchers are currently studying the effectiveness of blended learning models, which mix online and in-person instruction, in developmental classrooms as part of the ASDER project (see p. 3).

### Student Persistence, Completion, and Transfer

Student persistence and completion rates at community colleges are low, particularly among low-income students, students of color, and first-generation students. CCRC studies how student populations progress through college and how the structure of college programs and pathways may influence rates of completion and transfer.

Ongoing CCRC work in this area includes several projects on the implementation and impacts of reforms to create clearer, more coherent program pathways through college that lead to successful college completion, transfer, and careers.



**FEATURED PROJECT:**  
**Scaling GPS: Guided Pathways to Success**

CCRC and Complete College America are working with two- and four-year public system leaders, faculty, and administrators in Indiana and Tennessee to implement guided pathways reforms. CCRC has helped organize institutes where teams from these states have convened

to take stock of their progress and develop plans for scaling up guided pathways. CCRC is also evaluating the implementation of guided pathways in both states and conducting studies in Tennessee on the cost effectiveness of specific strategies. Based on this work, CCRC is developing guidance materials and tools for systems and colleges in other states that are seeking to adopt guided pathways.

*Project Lead: Davis Jenkins*

## College to Career and Workforce Education

Preparing students for the workforce is a central mission of community colleges. CCRC studies the role of community colleges in the U.S. economy and their effectiveness in preparing students for the labor market.

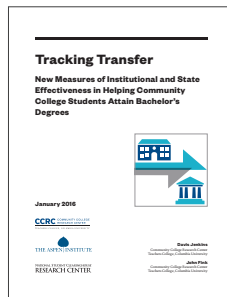
CCRC houses the Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment (CAPSEE), a U.S. Department of Education–funded center that analyzes the labor market returns to postsecondary credentials, among other issues. In related work, CCRC is exploring the award patterns and labor market value of stackable credentials in three states, and is investigating the enrollment and transfer behaviors of community college students who go on to earn bachelor’s degrees in computer science fields.

## Improving Community College Institutional Performance

CCRC works with major initiatives that aim to improve student outcomes by helping colleges use data to implement significant institutional changes. CCRC also studies system-wide reform models, such as performance funding, to identify practices that increase student success across colleges. CCRC is currently contributing to projects in states and college systems to create more structured pathways to degrees and transfer between public two- and four-year postsecondary institutions.

## New from CCRC

### Making Transfer Work for Students



In collaboration with the Aspen Institute and the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) Research Center, CCRC researchers Davis Jenkins and John Fink authored a major report on transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions.

Released in January, *Tracking Transfer* uses NSC data to break down transfer and bachelor’s attainment rates for all 50 states, showing where improvement is needed in the transfer process. The report also highlights differences in outcomes between higher and lower income students.

Based on a complementary qualitative study, a “playbook” for institutional leaders will be published later this year that focuses on how to create effective transfer partnerships. It will be accompanied by a major communications and engagement initiative, carried out in partnership with the Aspen Institute and Public Agenda, to build urgency to improve transfer outcomes through changes in practice and policy.

### Funders for Active Projects

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation  
 Carnegie Corporation of New York  
 Ford Foundation  
 Google Inc.  
 Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation  
 Greater Texas Foundation  
 Joyce Foundation  
 JPMorgan Chase  
 Kresge Foundation  
 Laura and John Arnold Foundation  
 Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust  
 Lumina Foundation  
 Smith Richardson Foundation  
 Spencer Foundation  
 U.S. Department of Education,  
 Institute of Education Sciences  
 U.S. Department of Labor  
 Walton Family Foundation  
 William T. Grant Foundation



# Looking Back on 20 Years of CCRC Research

This year CCRC marks its 20th anniversary, inspiring us to look back at our impact on community college scholarship and the on-the-ground reforms that colleges have undertaken to increase student success. Since its founding, CCRC has helped illuminate how community colleges function, how they are experienced by students, and how new strategies and innovations may serve to improve student learning and outcomes. In the years to come, we will continue to provide research evidence to help inform decision-making at community colleges so that these institutions—so vital to our nation’s well-being—can thrive in helping students fulfill their educational goals.

**1996**

**A New Center at Teachers College**

CCRC is founded at the suggestion of Alfred P. Sloan Foundation program officer Jesse Ausubel.



**2003**

**Assisting Large-Scale Reform Efforts**

The Ford Foundation embarks upon the Community College Bridges to Opportunity Initiative, a five-year project to promote educational and employment opportunities for disadvantaged adults through state policy change in six states. CCRC conducts research on its activities, impacts, and sustainability.

**2003**

**The Reach of Dual Enrollment**

CCRC launches initial studies on dual enrollment and the high school to college transition. Later research shows that dual enrollment, once the province of the advanced college-bound set, offers tangible benefits to career-technical students.



**1996**

**2000**

**The National Field Study**

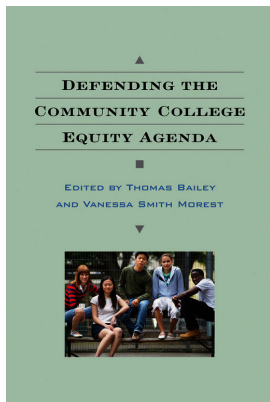
CCRC launches the National Field Study of Community Colleges. Over three years, researchers conduct case studies of 15 community colleges in six states. Research topics include multiple missions, performance accountability, counseling and student support services, distance education, workforce development, and relationships between community colleges and high schools.



**2004**

**Advancing Evidence-Based Reform**

Achieving the Dream is founded by Lumina Foundation with CCRC as a knowledge development partner. Participating community colleges use data on their students to inform changes in programs and services. The initiative stimulates community college reform and research, particularly in developmental education.



**2006**  
**Beyond College Access**

CCRC's award-winning book *Defending the Community College Equity Agenda* is published. The book propels a shift in focus from college access to the success of students.

**2010**  
**Instruction in the Classroom**

CCRC begins work to support the replication of pedagogical innovations in developmental education, providing a foundation for CCRC's future work on teaching and learning at community colleges.



**2011**  
**CAPSEE: Our Second IES-Sponsored Partnership**



The IES-funded Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment (CAPSEE) is established to examine the employment and earnings benefits of a broad range of postsecondary degree and certificate programs.

**2006**  
**NCPR: Our First IES-Sponsored Partnership**



CCRC, MDRC, and the University of Virginia establish the National Center for Postsecondary Research (NCPR), funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) to study the effectiveness of programs to help students transition to college and master basic skills. Over six years, NCPR produces research on summer bridge programs, dual enrollment, learning communities, and developmental education, among other topics.

**2008**  
**Student Progression in Developmental Education**

A landmark CCRC study shows that fewer than half of students complete the sequence of developmental courses to which they are referred.



**2011**  
**Assessment of Evidence Series**

Reports on developmental assessment and placement, mathematics pedagogy, contextualization of basic skills instruction, online learning, nonacademic support, institutional and program structure, and organizational improvement in CCRC's Assessment of Evidence Series synthesize evidence on strategies to improve the success of community college students.





**2012**  
**Understanding Students’  
Developmental Needs**

CCRC studies find that standardized assessment tests place many students into developmental education courses when they could succeed in college-level courses.

**2014**  
**CAPR: Our Third  
IES-Sponsored  
Partnership**



CCRC and MDRC establish the IES-funded Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness (CAPR) to document current practices in developmental education and evaluate innovations in developmental assessment and instruction.



**2016**  
**Improving Transfer**

CCRC celebrates its 20th anniversary, embarks on research on the implementation of guided pathways reforms at various colleges, and completes influential research on improving transfer between two- and four-year colleges.

**2016**

**2012**  
**Strengthening Program  
Pathways**

Widely cited CCRC research advances the conversation on the need for comprehensive program reform and articulates the notion of guided pathways for students.

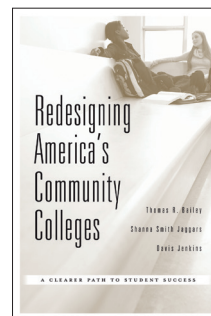


**2014**  
**Performance Funding**

CCRC completes a second multistate study on performance funding programs. The book *The Politics of Performance Funding for Higher Education: Origins, Discontinuities, and Transformations* is published in 2015.

**2015**  
**The Guided Pathways Model**

*Redesigning America’s Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success* is published, drawing together lessons from a decade of research on community colleges and arguing for broad institutional reform to improve student outcomes.



## About CCRC

Housed at Teachers College, Columbia University, the Community College Research Center (CCRC) is the leading independent authority on the nation's nearly 1,200 two-year colleges. Our staff is comprised of economists, sociologists, and other scholars whose specialties range from high school–college transitions to workforce education. We produce reports, briefs, practitioner packets, and other materials; present widely at conferences and colleges across the country; and provide testimony before Congress and state legislatures in order to help community colleges achieve their mission of providing effective and affordable postsecondary education for all students.

CCRC was founded in 1996 with a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. At the time, very little was known about two-year public colleges despite the fact that they enrolled nearly half of the nation's undergraduates. In the years since, thanks to support from Sloan and other funders, CCRC's work has served to generate and inform a renewed interest in these essential higher education institutions and continues to make vital contributions to higher education research, policy, and practice.

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