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Our Research

CCRC produces research that helps community colleges expand access to higher education and promote 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.

Equity and Guided Pathways: Which Practices Help, Which Hurt, and What We Don't Know

Thomas Bailey



One of the major challenges to closing equity gaps in higher education is that students from historically underrepresented groups often attend institutions where they are less likely to graduate. Black, Hispanic, first-generation, and low-income students are disproportionately represented at community colleges and open-access four-year colleges, where graduation rates are commonly below 50 percent.

The relatively low graduation rates at many community colleges are perpetuated by structural barriers, including disconnected courses, unclear program requirements, advising services that are difficult to access, and lengthy developmental education sequences that themselves enroll disproportionate numbers of students of color and low-income students. Compounding these challenges is the fact that community college students typically have fewer outside resources available to help them navigate college.

The guided pathways reforms now taking place at more than 250 colleges across the country are designed to break down these barriers. Best known for their emphasis on program maps to help guide students to graduation and beyond, these comprehensive reforms are broad in scope; they are intended to influence all areas of the student experience. Colleges are thus redesigning their programs and processes, clarifying pathways to educational and career success, reforming developmental education, and strengthening student supports. The reforms address major obstacles to student success and have the potential to help close equity gaps in college completion.

But because guided pathways reforms are relatively new, their full potential has yet to be determined. Even if they increase success for most students, colleges committed to equity cannot assume that they will close gaps in outcomes. These are complex reforms, and there is still a lot we do not know about the

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Equity and Guided Pathways *Continued from page 1*

impacts of the myriad changes in organizational practice and culture entailed in the model. Thus, as guided pathways reforms mature, colleges will need to monitor for unintended outcomes.

For instance, colleges will want to make sure that they are not systematically advising lower income students or students of color into programs that lead to lower paying jobs. Colleges that use predictive analytics to gauge students' likelihood of program completion could wind up pushing students whose grades, attendance, or other indicators suggest they are on a path to failure toward "more realistic" short-term programs that are less likely to lead to jobs with family-supporting wages, thereby reinforcing existing disadvantages. Pressures from performance funding to raise completion rates could have a similar impact.

To reduce opportunity gaps, colleges should use the insights gained from predictive analytics to help students anticipate the challenges that await them and to provide them with the supports they need to succeed on the paths they choose. Moreover, colleges should strive to improve the graduation rates in all their programs rather than shifting students deemed at-risk into programs with already higher completion rates.

Similarly, colleges should be aware that there is room for advising messages to be misinterpreted by students. As part of an advising redesign, CCRC recommends that colleges send alerts to students and their advisors when students are at risk of falling off their program plans. The intent is to help students course-correct by connecting them with sources of support; this type of proactive intervention can be especially important for first-generation students, who might not know where to go for help. But depending on how these messages are delivered, it is possible that students could find the alerts discouraging, and take them to mean they are not up to the challenge of college. Colleges need to ensure that the message they intend to send is the one that students are receiving.

The particular choices colleges make as they implement guided pathways also have the potential to help some students while leaving others behind, so colleges need to scrutinize them carefully and think through their implications for equity. For example, many colleges initially create program maps for full-time,

college-ready students—a minority of students in most community colleges. Who does that help, and how long does it take for reforms to reach the students most in need of support, particularly part-time and poorly prepared students? Likewise, a major part of guided pathways is a redesigned advising system that allows advisors to provide intensive support and guidance to students. But if a college's resources are limited, where should it target its advising support? Which students will benefit?

In addition to implementing reforms with an eye toward equity, it is essential that colleges collect and analyze student data to ensure that reforms are in fact leading to improvements for all students. In addition to looking at overall averages, colleges should perform subgroup analyses to determine whether the reforms they implement have differential impacts—and then investigate through interviews and other qualitative methods why gaps persist when they do—to identify areas where further reform is needed.

The good news is that early results from some initiatives that are part of the guided pathways model, such as using multiple measures to decide on developmental education placements, are showing some narrowing of gaps. But for colleges to truly achieve equity in outcomes—in particular to increase the rate at which low-income students and students of color earn higher level degrees in high-value fields—it is important to recognize that equity is not just a one-time commitment. Guided pathways involve not just major institutional decisions about policy and practice but fundamental changes in organizational culture. These reforms are enacted on a human level, day in and day out, and it is up to colleges to make sure they work in a way that is consistent with their equity-driven mission, and with the central belief embedded in guided pathways—that all students can succeed in the right environment and with the right supports.

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Our Research

The Role of the Community College

CCRC studies the mission of community colleges, their work to promote access and equity, and opportunities and challenges they face. Projects include a study of American Honors, a partnership between a for-profit company and two-year colleges in eight states, which recruits talented high school students and provides academic and nonacademic supports to help them progress through community college and transfer to a four-year college.

High School to College

CCRC examines programs and policies designed to prepare high school students for college, including transition programs, dual enrollment and other college-credit programs for high school students, early college high schools, and vocational pathways.

We are currently conducting research on the postsecondary outcomes and transition experiences of high school students in California NAF academies—small learning communities offering STEM-infused, industry-specific curricula and work-based learning. In partnership with MDRC, CCRC is also evaluating CUNY Start, a pre-matriculation program designed to help students with substantial needs in basic skills succeed in college.

Developmental Education and Adult Basic Skills

CCRC studies barriers to graduation for students assigned to remedial coursework, including issues related to assessment and placement. We also evaluate reform efforts aimed at helping underprepared students achieve greater college success.

Together with MDRC, CCRC also leads 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 instruction and assessment, including experimental research to assess the impact of using a multiple measures placement system that includes high school GPA in State University of New York (SUNY) colleges. This complements assessment research CCRC is conducting in two other states.



FEATURED PROJECT

Adapting Lesson Study for Community College Math Instruction

Lesson Study is a structured, collaborative professional development intervention that has shown evidence of improving math instruction among K-12 teachers. This project, conducted in partnership with Education Northwest (EdNW), examines the use of Lesson Study among instructors teaching a new developmental math course at community colleges in Oregon. Under the guidance of EdNW, teams of college faculty and administrators are adapting Lesson Study for the community college context. CCRC is conducting implementation research during the development period and will provide feedback to strengthen refinement. CCRC will also conduct a pilot study to assess the promise of Lesson Study for improving teaching and learning in developmental math.

Project Leads: Nikki Edgecombe and Susan Bickerstaff

Student Services, Financial Aid, and Other Supports

CCRC researchers study nonacademic factors that influence success as well as student support services, such as counseling, success courses, and technology-mediated 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 the scaling of CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) at Bronx Community College and a study tracking the implementation and impacts of advising redesigns at multiple colleges.

Continued on page 4

Our Research

Continued from page 3



FEATURED PROJECT

Start Smart: Helping College Students Get on the Right Path to Degrees and Careers

Students' choice of academic major influences their future earnings and likelihood of academic success, yet most new students receive little assistance in selecting a path through college and into the labor market. This project examines new cost-effective approaches to help students select and enter a program of study. Working with two leading Florida community colleges, Indian River State College and St. Petersburg College, CCRC is assessing the effectiveness of the career guidance strategies these colleges are implementing as part of larger reforms aimed at clarifying pathways to careers and degree completion.

Project Lead: Davis Jenkins

Online Education and Instructional Technology

Technology plays a growing role in postsecondary education. Our research examines the design of online education and its impact on student persistence and completion. CCRC researchers are currently evaluating an online, competency-based learning system used by six Kentucky community colleges for training IT workers in computer and medical fields.

Student Persistence, Completion, and Transfer

Persistence and completion rates at two-year colleges are low, particularly among historically underrepresented groups. CCRC studies how students progress through college and how the structure of programs and pathways may influence rates of completion and transfer.

Recent CCRC work in this area has focused on helping colleges assess their transfer effectiveness and implement strategies to improve transfer outcomes. Ongoing work includes projects on guided pathways reforms that aim to create clearer pathways through college that lead to college completion, transfer, and careers (see featured project on guided pathways work in California on p. 5).

College to Career and Workforce Education

CCRC studies the role of community colleges in the economy and their effectiveness in preparing students for the labor market. Under the auspices of the CCRC-led Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment (CAPSEE), a U.S. Department of Education-funded six-year research center, CCRC researchers recently completed a multi-state analysis of the labor market returns to postsecondary credentials.



FEATURED PROJECT

Stackable Credentials: Award Patterns and Their Labor Market Value

Using nationally representative survey and other data, this project examines the association between different kinds of stackable credentials and earnings. Findings suggest that fewer than one in 20 college-educated persons have stackable credentials and that these award combinations generally provide only weakly positive earnings gains that are often not distinguishable from the returns to only one postsecondary award. Given the need for skills accumulation by workers, findings from this research may inform the design of future postsecondary credential pathways and how they intersect with noncredit vocational awards, licenses, and industry certifications.

Project Leads: Thomas Bailey and Clive Belfield

Related work explores the award patterns and labor market value of stackable credentials, sequential post-secondary awards aimed at facilitating career progress.

Improving Community College Institutional Performance

CCRC helps to develop research-based models for improving student outcomes and institutional performance. Our work informs the implementation of these reform strategies, such as guided pathways, in partnership with individual institutions, state systems of colleges, and national reform initiatives.



FEATURED PROJECT

California Guided Pathways Project

The California Guided Pathways Project is providing assistance to 20 California community colleges to design and implement guided academic and career pathways for all their students. A partnership of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the Foundation for California Community Colleges, and other organizations, the project is managed by the National Center for Inquiry & Improvement. CCRC is helping to design and conduct institutes for participants and will monitor colleges' progress in planning and implementing their reforms.

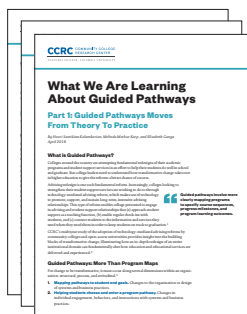
Project Lead: Davis Jenkins

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.

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @CommunityCCRC.

New from CCRC

Guided Pathways for Practitioners



A three-part practitioner packet titled *What We Are Learning About Guided Pathways*, released in April 2018, introduces college faculty, staff, and leadership to the major elements of guided pathways, provides case studies from colleges whose reforms are underway, and lays out a timeline for implementation.

It reflects CCRC's up-to-date thinking on the reforms and how they are playing out at colleges.

Hundreds of colleges nationwide are implementing guided pathways reforms to help more students graduate by giving them clear paths to graduation and comprehensive supports. The packet describes the four main practice areas of guided pathways: mapping pathways to student end goals, helping students choose and enter a program pathway, keeping students on a path, and ensuring that students are learning.

Funders for Active Projects

- Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation
- ECMC Foundation
- Foundation for California Community Colleges
- Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates
- J-PAL North America
- James Irvine Foundation
- JPMorgan Chase Foundation
- Laura and John Arnold Foundation
- Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust
- Smith Richardson Foundation
- U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences
- U.S. Department of Labor
- Walton Family Foundation

The Year in Review



JANUARY 2017

CCRC and MDRC Launch Rigorous Evaluation of Technology-Mediated Advising

Using randomized controlled trials, the research project will test whether a comprehensive advising overhaul supported by technologies such as early alert systems and education planning tools has a measurable impact on students' persistence and graduation.



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2



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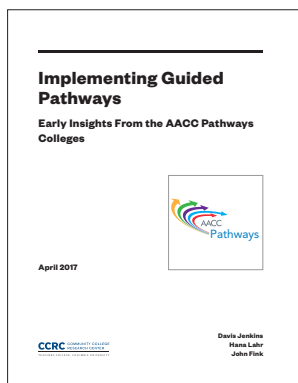
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MAY 2017

CCRC Researchers Earn Degrees from Teachers College

Four current and former CCRC staff members earn graduate degrees in May 2017 from Teachers College, Columbia University. Elizabeth Kopko (1) and Vivian Yuen Ting Liu (2) both complete doctoral degrees in the economics and education program. Lara Pheatt (3) earns a PhD in politics and education. Jasmine Sanders (4) earns a master's in sociology and education.

2017



APRIL 2017

Research by CCRC Examines How Colleges Are Implementing Guided Pathways

CCRC releases a major report on how the 30 colleges participating in the American Association of Community Colleges' (AACC) Pathways Project are planning and implementing guided pathways reforms. *Implementing Guided Pathways: Early Insights From the AACC Pathways Colleges* identifies connecting developmental education reforms to colleges' pathways efforts as the next frontier for pathways colleges.

APRIL 2017

CAPSEE Hosts Final Conference

The CCRC-led Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment (CAPSEE) wraps up more than five years of work with a final conference and a paper synthesizing findings from eight states on the labor market returns to community college. Findings affirm that the returns to associate degrees are strong but vary by field of study; returns to certificates and credits are more modest.



What Happens to Students Who Take Community College “Dual Enrollment” Courses in High School?



September 2017

CCRC
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RESEARCH CENTER

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Community College Research Center
Teacher College, Columbia University
David Jenkins
Community College Research Center
Teacher College, Columbia University
Takeshi Yamaguchi
Community College Research Center
Teacher College, Columbia University

SEPTEMBER 2017

CCRC Releases State-by-State Findings on Outcomes for Dual Enrollment Students

What Happens to Students Who Take Community College “Dual Enrollment” Courses in High School? is the first report to look state by state at how many high school students are taking community college classes and how they perform in college. The study shows that college graduation rates for dual enrollment students vary widely by state and by income.



OCTOBER 2017

NCES Adopts Recommendations of Committee Chaired by Thomas Bailey

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) adopts new outcomes measures—including for part-time and transfer-in students—based on recommendations by the Committee on Measures of Student Success, which was convened several years ago to provide guidance on how the federal government could provide a more complete picture of how students earn degrees at community colleges.

2018

CAPR

CENTER FOR THE ANALYSIS OF
POSTSECONDARY READINESS

JUNE 2017

CAPR Works to Bridge Research and Policy

The Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness (CAPR), led by CCRC and MDRC, holds its third annual meeting, convening researchers, policymakers, and practitioners from Florida, New York, and Texas. The meeting compares developmental education approaches and policy contexts across states and generates conversations on ways to create better connections between research and policy.



NOVEMBER 2017

Judith Scott-Clayton Testifies on Financial Aid Simplification

Judith Scott-Clayton testifies before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions in a hearing on reauthorizing the Higher Education Act and simplifying the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). She argues that the FAFSA’s “complexity and lack of transparency undermine the effectiveness of financial aid, making it harder to reach students who need aid most.”

About CCRC

Housed at Teachers College, Columbia University, the Community College Research Center (CCRC) is the leading source of independent research on community colleges and their students. Our researchers include economists, sociologists, and other scholars who study community college practices and outcomes to identify ways to promote student access and success. We offer evidence-based analysis, frame high-priority issues, and create useful tools for educators and policymakers. By developing knowledge to improve the nation's community colleges, our work supports efforts to increase opportunity and social mobility, strengthen the workforce, and sustain the vitality of communities.

CCRC was founded in 1996 with a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. At the time, 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 research has helped to generate and inform a renewed interest in these essential higher education institutions. Our work provides a foundation for innovations in policy and practice aimed at giving every community college student the best chance of success.

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