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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.

Educational Equity and the Promise of Comprehensive Reform

Thomas Bailey



The past several months have witnessed mounting public concern about “academic undermatching,” in which high-achieving, low-income students fail to apply to and enroll in highly selective colleges and end up, instead, attending less competitive institutions. This was a central theme of the January 2014 White House Higher Education Summit, and First Lady Michelle Obama has taken it on as a signature issue.

All students deserve a chance to attend a college that will give them the best opportunity to achieve their education and career goals, and I applaud efforts to better inform students about their range of viable college choices. Yet while we are right to want to direct more high-achieving, low-income students to our most selective colleges and universities, we should also recognize that reallocating students to different types of colleges does nothing to improve the overall quality of the higher education system.

Currently, millions of low-income, minority, first-generation, and immigrant students are enrolled in community colleges; most of these students are not high-achieving in college admissions terms. If we want to significantly improve the educational experience and attainment of these students, then we need to improve the colleges where so many of them are and will continue to be enrolled, even in a perfectly matched world.

Numerous studies demonstrate that community college degrees are valuable for employment and earnings. And community colleges have been extremely successful at opening the doors for underserved students to begin postsecondary education. But the colleges have been much less successful at having students achieve their education goals. Fewer than 40 percent of students who start in community colleges complete a degree or certificate within six years. The success rates are worse for low-income and minority students.

So how do we increase student success at community colleges? Community college faculty and administrators have worked tirelessly over the last 15 years to develop new approaches in teaching and support services, and numerous federal, state, and foundation-funded initiatives have been implemented. Despite these efforts, however, completion rates have not risen.

There is a simple explanation for this result. Reform initiatives have tended to involve small numbers of students and have mostly

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Educational Equity and the Promise of Comprehensive Reform

focused on only one segment of the student experience—such as entry, developmental education, or the first semester. These efforts have also mostly relied on a small group of activist faculty to carry them out, and they have often shut down when outside funding has ended. Overall, most initiatives have avoided making fundamental changes in the way that colleges operate and have remained marginal to the day-to-day activities of the colleges.

Research conducted by CCRC and others has found that while small-scale initiatives may lead to some success for targeted students, they fail to improve overall institutional performance. Rigorous studies of specific programs such as learning communities or enhanced counseling typically find modest short-term benefits that fade after one or two semesters—impacts that are not large enough to make significant lasting improvements in the success of community college students.

These studies make it abundantly clear that, while we certainly need to improve such things as developmental education, we also need to strengthen the entire college experience for all students. Developmental students continue to need help when they go on to take college-level courses, and even students deemed college-ready when they first enroll often struggle in their courses and drop out before completing a credential.

In light of these realities, community colleges are now beginning to enter a new phase of reform—one that recognizes the profound importance of the institution itself and the imperative for a much more comprehensive and transformative reform agenda. CCRC has advanced the idea that such comprehensive change should take the form of what we term the “guided pathways model.”

The guided pathways model reconceptualizes the entire structure of college and attends to all aspects of the student experience, from preparation and intake to completion. It starts with the end in mind by engaging faculty in mapping out educationally coherent paths for each program to degree completion, further education, and career advancement. The model also includes robust services to help students choose career goals and majors; substantial integration of developmental education and college-level courses; organization of the curriculum around a limited number of broad substantive areas



that allows for coherent programs of study; and strong, ongoing collaboration among faculty and between faculty, advisors, and staff.

At CCRC, we have encouraged the colleges we work with to introduce elements of this model, especially if they can be combined. Projects such as *Completion by Design* and *Finish Faster*, a new project co-led by CCRC, focus on broad institutional reforms and pay particular attention to creating clear pathways through programs of study leading to credentials, transfer, and careers. The new Guttman Community College at the City University of New York (CUNY)—an example of a comprehensive community college design—incorporates many elements of the guided pathways model, and CUNY’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), which like Guttman takes a holistic approach to student success, has significantly improved associate degree completion rates.

Ambitious and comprehensive reforms are rare for good reason—they are risky and difficult to implement. If successful reform were easy, it would have already happened. Our frustration with the progress of reform in community colleges is not because skilled and dedicated people have not tried; rather, the reforms themselves have been self-limiting.

The current concern about undermatching is driven partly by a perception that the distribution of quality among colleges and universities is and will remain fixed. This need not be so. Bold large-scale reforms have the potential to raise the quality of institutions across the higher education sector so that no matter where our neediest students enroll in college, they get the help they need to fulfill their educational ambitions.

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Our Research

The Role of the Community College

What role do community colleges play in the postsecondary landscape? We study the history and mission of community colleges, their commitment to access and equity, and the opportunities and challenges they face, including growing competition from for-profit colleges. Projects in this area include a study of the role of for-profit colleges in higher education, conducted by affiliated researchers under the aegis of the CCRC-led Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment.

High School to College

CCRC conducts research on programs and policies designed to prepare high school students for college, including short-term readiness programs as well as college-credit transition programs and vocational pathways.

CCRC researchers are currently examining early assessments and senior-year transition curricula in four states. A two-state evaluation of outcomes of students who participate in transition curricula is also planned.

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 and evaluates reform efforts aimed at helping underprepared students achieve greater college success.

Projects in this area include a study of statewide developmental education reforms in Virginia and North Carolina, a multi-college examination of the reform implementation process and its influence on teaching and learning, and an analysis of the costs of placement exam systems.

For more information about our areas of research and to see a full list of research subtopics, projects, and publications, please visit our website at ccrc.tc.columbia.edu.



FEATURED PROJECT: Scaling Innovation

CCRC is studying several colleges as they adopt, adapt, and scale up innovative developmental reforms that simultaneously attend to the structural, curricular, and pedagogical dimensions of instructional delivery in order to understand how reform implementation contributes to a reform's effectiveness. The Scaling Innovation team has developed a framework colleges can use to address common challenges in adopting and scaling reforms.

Project Lead: Nikki Edgecombe

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 and evaluation of Bronx Community College's First Year Seminar, which introduces college content using integrative learning strategies, and a project at Macomb Community College that identifies institutional complexities that pose challenges to students.

Continued from page 3

Our Research

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 persistence and completion rates of community college students.

CCRC researchers are currently studying the effectiveness of modularized and “blended learning” models in developmental classrooms. We are also examining the implementation of online planning and advising systems.



FEATURED PROJECT:
Implementation and User Adoption of Integrated Planning and Advising Services (IPAS)

This project examines how electronic course selection and advising tools are implemented and adopted by colleges and students. Researchers will document implementation at several colleges, analyze how use of the tools changes over time, and assess the validity of CCRC’s emergent Readiness for Technology Adoption framework, which gauges institutions’ readiness to adopt new technology.

Project Lead: Melinda Mechur Karp

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 the development of analytics that college personnel can use to better understand student enrollment patterns, the timing of entry and comple-

tion in programs of study, and the costs of completion in various programs. CCRC is also examining the course-taking patterns of students who successfully transfer in order to inform the development of more structured pathways for transfer-oriented programs.



FEATURED PROJECT:
Finish Faster: Guided Pathways to College Completion

Along with two partner organizations, CCRC is working with two- and four-year public system leaders in four states to redesign programs and support services at scale following the “guided pathways” model. Institutions will map coherent course sequences that lead to degree completion, transfer, and employment, and will create “meta-majors” to help undecided students choose and enter programs of study more quickly. CCRC will also work with institutions to improve systems and practices for monitoring student progress and for providing ongoing feedback and support.

CCRC 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 also houses the Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment (CAPSEE), a U.S. Department of Education-funded center that analyzes labor market re-

turns to postsecondary credentials, among other issues. Additionally, CCRC is conducting research on collaborations between community-based organizations and community colleges that facilitate workforce preparation among underserved adults.

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-led projects in this research area include studies of state performance funding systems and a project working with four states to create more structured pathways to degrees and transfer across public two- and four-year postsecondary institutions.



FEATURED PROJECT: Implementation and Impacts of Performance Funding 2.0

A new form of performance funding, known as PF 2.0, embeds performance funding into base state funding formulas instead of taking the form of a bonus on top of base funding. This project is examining how performance funding 2.0 is being implemented in Indiana, Ohio, and Tennessee; its impacts on institutional practices and student outcomes; and obstacles and unintended outcomes encountered by the states.

Project Lead: Kevin J. Dougherty

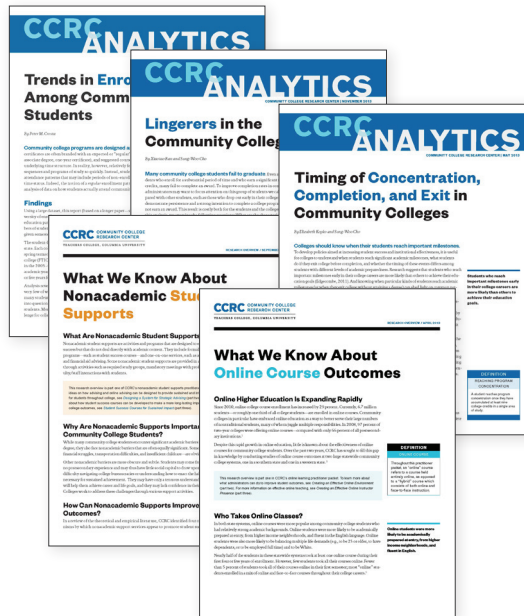
New from CCRC

CCRC Practitioner Packets

The latest publications in this popular series review research on nonacademic student supports and online course outcomes and set forth recommendations for faculty and administrators.

CCRC Analytics

This series presents practical analyses colleges can use to better understand student progression and completion. The most recent publication examines the characteristics that distinguish community college “lingerers.” Other publications examine student enrollment patterns, progression through core curriculum, and timing of student exit, completion, and transfer.



Funders for Active Projects

- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- City University of New York
- Ford Foundation
- Kresge Foundation
- Lumina Foundation
- National Science Foundation
- U.S. Department of Education,
Institute of Education Sciences
- William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

The Year in Review

FEBRUARY 2013

CCRC's Online Research Is the Focus of a *New York Times* Editorial

CCRC's research on the differential impacts of online coursework on student performance inspired an influential *New York Times* editorial. The editorial cites CCRC's findings in arguing that online learning can widen achievement gaps, and it urges colleges and universities to recognize the importance of having face-to-face classroom interactions with professors, particularly for more vulnerable students.



MARCH 2013

Director Thomas Bailey and CCRC Receive the 2013 ETS O'Banion Prize

Thomas Bailey and CCRC were awarded the ETS O'Banion Prize for Outstanding Contributions to Teaching and Learning at the League for Innovation in the Community College's 2013 Innovations Conference. The prize is named in honor of Dr. Terry O'Banion, President Emeritus and Senior Fellow of the League.

MARCH 2013

Thomas Bailey Selected as a 2013 AERA Fellow

The American Education Research Association announced the selection of CCRC Director Thomas Bailey as a 2013 AERA Fellow. Bailey is one of 23 scholars recognized for exceptional contributions to education research. The new Fellows were nominated by their peers, selected by the Fellows Program Committee, and approved by the AERA Council. They join 534 current AERA Fellows.

2013

MARCH 2013

CAPSEE Researchers Share Emergent Findings at Year-Two Meeting



In the second annual convening of the Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment (CAPSEE),

researchers, community college administrators, and state higher education officials from around the country gathered to discuss methodological issues and preliminary findings from the first year and a half of research on labor market outcomes for a wide variety of postsecondary pathways. Research from North Carolina and Michigan on certificates and degrees mirrored earlier CCRC research from Washington State, suggesting an emerging consensus: There are high earnings gains for associate degrees, and particularly large returns for credentials in the health fields are driving greater returns for women.



MAY 2013

Doctorates Awarded to CCRC Researchers

Five CCRC staff members completed doctorates at Teachers College, Columbia University, in 2013. In May 2013, Sosanya Jones (1) and Rebecca Natow (2) both earned EdDs in Higher and Post-secondary Education. Natow has been with CCRC since 2008; Jones is now an assistant professor at Southern Illinois University. Olga Rodríguez (3) and Di Xu (4) both earned PhDs in the Economics and Education program; Rodríguez has been with CCRC since 2008, and Xu has been with CCRC since 2009. Peter Crosta (5) earned a PhD in Economics and Education in October 2013 and is currently director of research at 2U, Inc.



1



2



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NOVEMBER 2013

CCRC Co-Hosts DC Forum with Jobs for the Future: Making the Most of 12th Grade in the Common Core Era

Research and policy experts convened in Washington, DC, to learn about strategies states and districts are using to prepare students for college who have been deemed unprepared for college based on 11th-grade assessment tests. CCRC Senior Research Associate Elisabeth Barnett presented recent research on early assessment and transition courses in four states, and educators and policymakers discussed programs and policies that show promise in helping students avoid remediation upon entry to college.

2014



JUNE 2013
CCRC Receives Funding to Assess Educational Linkages for Vulnerable Populations and to Develop Guided Pathways that Facilitate College Completion

The Ford Foundation awarded CCRC a two-year grant to examine, document, and assess collaborations between community-based organizations and community colleges that aim to facilitate postsecondary education for immigrants, veterans, and formerly incarcerated individuals. Additionally, CCRC was awarded a three-year grant from Lumina Foundation to partner with other organizations in helping two- and four-year college systems in Georgia, Indiana, and Tennessee develop and implement guided pathway reforms.



NOVEMBER 2013
Judith Scott-Clayton Testifies on Financial Aid Before Senate HELP Committee

Senior Research Associate and Teachers College Assistant Professor Judith Scott-Clayton testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions (HELP). The topic of the full committee hearing was “Ensuring Access to Higher Education: Simplifying Federal Student Aid for Today’s College Student.” Scott-Clayton set forth three ideas to simplify Pell Grants, which she first presented at an October forum hosted by the Brookings Institution.

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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