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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.*

## CAPSEE Research and the Myth of the Underemployed College Graduate

Thomas Bailey



With the tough years following the Great Recession still taking their toll, there's a lot of discussion about whether college is the best route to a good job, and anxiety about whether the labor market benefits of a college degree will support the debt needed to attain it. The conversation is fueled in part by widespread misconceptions about the value of degrees. We've all heard the stories of welders making \$100,000 a year while English majors end up working in a coffee shop, not to mention college dropouts who invent the next tech sensation and become billionaires.

A recent survey by Public Agenda found that a shrinking number of Americans—now only 42 percent—say a college education is necessary for success in the working world. The anxiety about college is compounded by state cuts to higher education and rising tuition, which have shifted the risk of attending college more and more onto students and their families.

But five years of studies by the CCRC-led Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment (CAPSEE) have confirmed across several states and in several different kinds of programs that higher education leads to better jobs with higher pay. And in most cases, borrowing to get a degree is worth it; the boost in income covers the loans.

CAPSEE, a five-year center funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, is drawing to a close in 2017, but its 40-plus research papers hold lessons for policymakers, researchers, and higher education leaders as they think about the best ways to educate students and put them on a path to a career.

CAPSEE's conclusion that on average the completion of a college program substantially boosts earnings and employability holds across different types of credentials, from certificates through bachelor's degrees.

**The anxiety about college is compounded by state cuts to higher education and rising tuition, which have shifted the risk of attending college more and more onto students and their families.**

*Continued from page 1*

## The Myth of the Underemployed College Graduate

Longer term certificates have stronger returns than short-term certificates, which have a much more uncertain value. But the averages also disguise another fact—that the program a student chooses matters. The studies show wide variability in the annual earnings of students who graduate from different programs of study. Health certificate programs, for instance, tend to push up the average for certificates generally, but some certificates—especially at for-profit colleges—cost more than they're worth.

CAPSEE research from North Carolina, one of several states where the center conducted studies, found that community college students who graduated with a degree or certificate earned more than students who dropped out. But an associate degree in a technical field provided much more of an earnings boost than an associate in arts. Returns were especially strong for women.



When broken down by major, a few fields stood out. Nursing and other health professions showed earnings gains for associate degree holders of between \$10,000 and \$25,000 per year compared to students who didn't get a degree. Construction and mechanics, repair, and welding were nearly as high. Education and childcare, at the low end, did not yield earnings gains for those earning associate degrees.

In the context of rising tuition and concerns about debt, research into the labor market returns to various degrees and fields of study can be used to help students make informed choices about programs before they invest significant money and time. The research can also help address issues of equity, such as why low-income students and students of color are more concentrated in programs with lower earnings, and why debt for Black students balloons in graduate school far faster than for White students.

Drawing on the work of CAPSEE and others, the higher education sector must figure out the best way to help students do more than pick a college. Students need support to identify programs that match their interests and to understand the career paths available to gradu-

# capsee

CENTER FOR ANALYSIS OF  
POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION  
AND EMPLOYMENT

ates of those programs, along with typical salaries. Helping students pick a program is particularly important for community college students because they tend to enroll in their local community college without shopping around. In response to the call for more information, states are beginning to create websites that compare earnings for various degrees, programs, and colleges.

But more generally, students should not be dissuaded from going to college or taking on a reasonable amount of debt out of fear that the degree they earn won't get them anywhere. That's not to say that student debt isn't a burden for many, especially for students who don't finish their programs. States should do more to make higher education affordable for families, and consumer-friendly debt repayment options should be widely available. But CAPSEE research clearly shows that students with only a high school diploma who go straight into the workforce or those who accumulate only a small number of college credits are the ones who are at risk. Students who make it to graduation are much better off. Completing a college program is a worthwhile investment.

**Students need support to identify programs that match their interests and to understand the career paths available to graduates of those programs, along with typical salaries.**

# Our Research

## The Role of the Community College

What role do community colleges play in the post-secondary landscape? We study the history and mission of community colleges, their commitment to access and equity, and the opportunities and challenges they face. Projects in this area 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 conducts research on programs and policies designed to prepare high school students for college, including high school transition programs, dual enrollment and other college-credit programs for high school students, early college high schools, and vocational pathways.

CCRC researchers are currently conducting a national scan of transition curriculum designs and policies. 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 the factors that contribute to low rates of college completion among students assigned to remedial coursework, including issues around assessment and placement. Researchers also evaluate reforms aimed at helping underprepared students achieve greater college success.

CCRC, together with MDRC, also leads the Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness (CAPR), a U.S. DOE-funded center that documents current practices in developmental education and evaluates innovative approaches to remedial instruction and assessment, including experimental research on the impact of a “data analytics” approach to placement in State University of New York (SUNY) colleges. This complements research CCRC is conducting in two other states.



### FEATURED PROJECT: Multiple Measures Assessment

Studies have shown that standard placement tests are inaccurate and often place students into developmental courses who could otherwise succeed in college-level coursework. In response, some colleges are beginning to redesign their placement systems to use multiple measures, including high school GPA, to better assess whether students need remediation. In this project, CCRC and MDRC are working with colleges in Minnesota and Wisconsin to build and evaluate high quality multiple measures placement systems that use high school records and non-cognitive assessments.

*Project Lead: Elisabeth A. Barnett*

## 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 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 (see p. 4) and a study tracking the implementation and impacts of advising redesigns at multiple colleges.

Continued from page 3

## Our Research



### FEATURED PROJECT:

#### Evaluation of Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success (iPASS)

Technological tools that help with course planning, send alerts about struggling students, and assist with other advising functions can help advisors do their jobs better. But technology is only one element of a holistic iPASS advising system that provides in-depth, intensive support to students to help them succeed. CCRC is studying the impact of technology-mediated advising on college persistence and completion at two dozen colleges. In partnership with MDRC, CCRC is also conducting randomized controlled trials at three colleges to provide rigorous evidence about the effects of iPASS on student success.

*Project Lead: Melinda Mechur Karp*

### 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 evaluating an online, competency-based learning system used by six Kentucky community colleges for training IT workers in computer and medical fields.

**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.**

### 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 projects to understand complicated transfer markets and to help colleges implement successful strategies to improve transfer outcomes, and 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 CUNY's ASAP Program at Bronx Community College

The City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs—which combines intensive advising with financial assistance including public transit passes and other supports—has been shown to more than double three-year graduation rates. CCRC is studying the first effort to offer the program to all eligible students at Bronx Community College. In partnership with the college and CUNY, researchers will document implementation and provide feedback that will help educators refine their efforts in real time. The project will also explore the effect of ASAP on student outcomes and the extent to which the associated reforms take root and transform how the college operates.

*Project Lead: Maria S. Cormier*

## College to Career and Workforce Education

Preparing students for the workforce is a central mission of community colleges. CCRC leads the Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment (CAPSEE), a U.S. DOE–funded center that analyzes the labor market returns to postsecondary credentials (see p. 1), the role of for-profit colleges, and the impact of financial aid and work-study programs. CCRC is also exploring the labor market value of stackable credentials in three states.

## Improving Community College Institutional Performance

CCRC helps to develop research-based models for improving student outcomes and institutional performance. It also studies and helps to inform the implementation of reform strategies in partnership with individual institutions, state systems of colleges, and national reform initiatives.



### FEATURED PROJECT: Knowledge Development for the AACC Pathways Project

The American Association of Community Colleges and partner organizations are providing a series of two-and-a-half-day Pathways Institutes for teams from 30 community colleges that are committed to making the systemic changes in practice necessary to implement guided pathways at scale. CCRC is collaborating with the other partners to design and conduct the six institutes, and it is helping to document the reforms the colleges are implementing and to measure and assess their effects. In these roles, CCRC is helping to build knowledge and tools that will help practitioners nationally to implement effective guided pathways reforms.

*Project Lead: Davis Jenkins*

# New from CCRC

## Technology-Mediated Advising Redesign



*What We Know About Technology-Mediated Advising Reform*, a three-part practitioner packet recently released by CCRC, is intended to help college leaders and others better understand what is sometimes called e-advising or

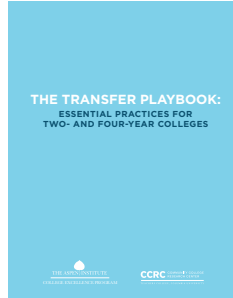
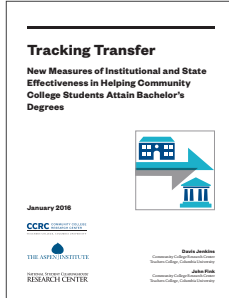
iPASS (Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success) and to learn about the evidence for this type of reform and lessons learned by colleges where it is underway.

The packet looks at the differences between the way advising is commonly done—with drop-in appointments and little or no long-term relationship between advisors and students—and the sustained, proactive, and personalized case management model. It also considers what colleges can do to prepare to implement advising technologies in the context of a larger reform effort and what needs to happen for reform to be successful.

## Funders for Active Projects

- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation
- ECMC Foundation
- Ford Foundation
- Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation
- Greater Texas Foundation
- J-PAL North America
- James Irvine Foundation
- Joyce Foundation
- JPMorgan Chase Foundation
- 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

# The Year in Review



## JANUARY 2016 Transfer Research Spotlights States

CCRC research, conducted in collaboration with the Aspen Institute and the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, breaks down transfer outcomes by state and reveals wide gaps in the rates at which students transfer and earn bachelor's degrees. The *Tracking Transfer* report is followed in May by the release of a playbook of essential practices to improve transfer.



## APRIL 2016 Judith Scott-Clayton Receives AERA Early Career Award

Judith Scott-Clayton, a senior research associate at CCRC and associate professor of economics and education at Teachers College, Columbia University, is recognized by the American Educational Research Association with the Division L Early Career Award for research that has made a significant contribution to education policy debates. In July, Scott-Clayton receives the Robert P. Huff Golden Quill Award from the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) in recognition of her contributions to the literature on financial aid.

## 2016

## MARCH 2016 CAPR Holds Second Annual Meeting

# CAPR

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POSTSECONDARY READINESS

The Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness (CAPR), a research partnership led by CCRC and MDRC and funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, holds its second annual meeting. CAPR researchers and other experts in developmental education discuss emerging reforms in developmental education, the current state of research knowledge, and the progress of CAPR evaluations on the use of multiple measures in placement decisions and on the use of an alternative model of developmental math.



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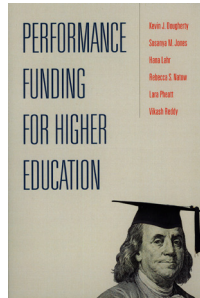
## MAY 2016 CCRC Researchers Earn Graduate Degrees

Four CCRC staff members are awarded graduate degrees by Teachers College, Columbia University, in spring 2016. Veronica Minaya (1) earns a PhD in economics and education. Tatev Papikyan (2) earns an MA in economics and education. Porshèa Patterson (3) earns an MA in international educational development. Vikash Reddy (4) earns a PhD in education policy. In addition, Hoori Santikian Kalamkarian (5), also a CCRC staff member, earns a PhD in education policy from Stanford University.

**JUNE 2016**

**First-Semester Course Load of 15 Credits Found to Benefit Students**

A CCRC study using data on Tennessee public colleges finds that students who enroll in 15 credits in their first semester are much more likely to graduate than students who initially enroll in only 12 credits. The impacts are financially valuable to students as well. The results suggest that colleges should consider policies that encourage higher credit loads.



**OCTOBER 2016**

**New Book on Performance Funding**

*Performance Funding for Higher Education*—by CCRC researchers Kevin Dougherty, Sosanya Jones, Hana Lahr, Rebecca Natow, Lara Pheatt, and Vikash Reddy—is published. The book finds that state performance funding policies have so far failed to clearly improve student achievement and that they create unintended incentives to weaken academic quality and limit the enrollment of less advantaged students. The book discusses policy options.

**2017**



**SEPTEMBER 2016**

**CCRC Begins Work With Ohio Colleges Implementing Guided Pathways**

CCRC is awarded a \$1.5 million grant from the Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation to help Ohio's community and technical colleges implement guided pathways reforms. CCRC is the knowledge development partner on the project, which is intended to expand guided pathways to all of the state's 23 public two-year colleges and improve the education of their 275,000 degree-seeking students.



**NOVEMBER 2016**

**Dr. Jill Biden Keynotes CCRC's 20th Anniversary Celebration**

CCRC celebrates its 20th anniversary with an event at Teachers College. The highlight is a speech by Dr. Jill Biden, the Second Lady of the United States and a community college professor, about the importance of community college research and investment. The event also includes a distinguished panel on the future of community colleges.



## 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.

## Advisory Board

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President, St. Petersburg College

**CYNTHIA A. BIOTEAU**, President,  
Florida State College at Jacksonville

**WALTER BUMPHUS**, President and CEO,  
American Association of Community Colleges

**RUFUS GLASPER**, President and CEO,  
League for Innovation in the Community College

**JAMES JACOBS**, President, Macomb Community College

**SHARON MORRISSEY**, Vice Chancellor for Academic Services and Research, Virginia Community College System

**JEFFREY RAFN**, President,  
Northeast Wisconsin Technical College

**SCOTT RALLS**, President,  
Northern Virginia Community College

**HENRY D. SHANNON**, Superintendent/President,  
Chaffey Community College

**KAREN STOUT**, President and CEO,  
Achieving the Dream, Inc.

## CCRC Staff

### DIRECTOR

Thomas Bailey

### ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Lisa Rothman

### ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Melinda Mechur Karp

### MANAGING EDITOR

Doug Slater

### PROJECT MANAGER

Liz Carroll

### SENIOR RESEARCHERS

Michael Armijo  
Elisabeth A. Barnett  
Peter Bergman  
Susan Bickerstaff  
Maria Scott Cormier  
Kevin Dougherty  
Nikki Edgcombe  
Davis Jenkins  
Rebecca Natow  
Dolores Perin  
Judith Scott-Clayton

### RESEARCH AFFILIATES

Clive Belfield  
Negar Farakish  
Michelle Hodara  
James Jacobs  
Shanna Smith Jaggars  
Valerie Lundy-Wagner  
Lauren Schudde  
Michelle Van Noy  
Di Xu

### POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Jessica Brathwaite  
Hoori Santikian Kalamkarian  
Veronica Minaya  
Vikash Reddy

### RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Maggie P. Fay  
John Fink  
Markeisha Grant  
Serena Klempin  
Hana Lahr  
Vivian Yuen Ting Liu  
Marisol Ramos  
Julia Raufman

### DATA ANALYST

Madeline Joy Trimble

### SENIOR RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

Eric W. Chan  
Magdalena Bennett  
Octaviano Chavarin  
Jeffrey Fletcher  
Elizabeth Kopko  
Andrea Lopez  
Soumya Mishra  
Seung Eun "Rina" Park  
Porshèa Patterson  
Xiaotao Ran  
Tatiana Velasco  
Takeshi Yanagiura  
Yang "Rachel" Zhou

### RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

Susha Roy  
Jasmine Sanders

### FINANCE

Tam Do  
Sandra Spady

### ADMINISTRATION

Mathilda Lombos  
Gladys Perez-Mojica  
Sarah Prescott Phillips

### COMMUNICATIONS

Elizabeth Ganga  
Amy Mazzariello  
Kimberly Morse

**CCRC** COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
RESEARCH CENTER

TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

525 West 120th Street, Box 174  
New York, New York 10027  
Tel: 212.678.3091 | Fax: 212.678.3699  
ccrc@columbia.edu  
http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu