2018–2020

BIENNIAL REPORT

CCRC COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH CENTER

TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH CENTER

The Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University, studies community colleges because they provide critical access to postsecondary education and are uniquely positioned to promote equity and social mobility in the United States. Our mission is to conduct research that helps these institutions strengthen opportunities and improve outcomes for their students, particularly those from underserved populations.

Photo courtesy of Kingsborough Community College
Cover photo courtesy of Westchester Community College

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from Our Director

Dear colleague,

It is a pleasure to share with you this biennial report from the Community College Research Center (CCRC). Whether you are a long-term follower of CCRC or learning about us for the first time, we hope this overview offers insights into the issues we study and the way we operate. Most important, we hope it demonstrates why community colleges—and especially their students—are worthy of the nation's attention and support.

CCRC has been a leader in community college research for more than 20 years. We owe an enormous debt to our founder, Tom Bailey, who began the center at a time when little was known about community colleges or the students they served. Over time, CCRC has built a large portfolio that addresses almost every facet of their work, from discrete programs and services (such as developmental education and workforce training) to broad-based institutional reform. As we reflect on this history and look ahead to the future, we are guided by five core values:

- **Rigorous research:** We use scientific methods to produce accurate and reliable information on community college programs and the students they serve. Our researchers take a broad interdisciplinary approach that combines quantitative and qualitative analysis.
- **Actionable knowledge:** Our studies are designed to yield evidence that practitioners and policymakers can use to improve students' experiences and outcomes.
- **Collaboration:** We partner with community colleges, states, federal agencies, philanthropies, and other organizations to design studies and disseminate lessons from research. Our collaborative approach enables us to address pressing issues in the field and offer recommendations that are attuned to the realities on the ground.
- **Equity:** Community colleges are crucial sites for improving educational equity. We aim to identify policies and practices that enable institutions to counteract social disparities by race and class and promote the success of students from all underserved populations.
- **Optimism:** Our work is fundamentally driven by the idea that research can improve outcomes for community colleges and their students. Our optimism is bolstered by the deep dedication we observe among community college faculty and staff.

We hope these values are apparent as you peruse this report and interact with us in the field. As a learning organization, we always welcome your thoughts on how we can improve. If you have feedback on our research—or new questions in need of attention—please contact us at **ccrc@columbia.edu**. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Tom Brock

Thomas Brock
September 2019

Thomas Brock

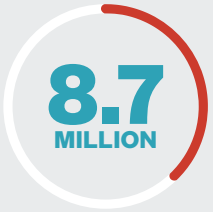
Director, CCRC

> **Community colleges—and especially their students—are worthy of the nation's attention and support.**

Why Study Community Colleges?

Though family-sustaining careers increasingly require postsecondary credentials, the ballooning cost of college is putting those credentials out of reach for many Americans. Community colleges offer a relatively affordable way for students to develop high-demand skills or start on the path toward a bachelor's degree. But certificate and degree attainment among community college attendees remains low, particularly for those from historically underserved populations. CCRC's research helps identify barriers to students' educational success and illuminate strategies institutions can use to enable learners from all backgrounds to thrive in college.

WHO ARE COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS?

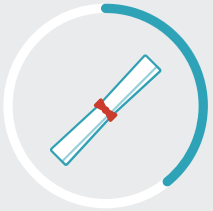


In 2016-17, **8.7 MILLION** students—or roughly **38%** of undergraduates—were enrolled in community colleges.

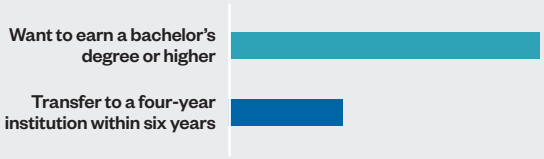
In fall 2017, **44%** of Hispanic undergraduates, **35%** of Black undergraduates, and **31%** of White undergraduates were enrolled at community colleges.

37% of community college students come from families earning **LESS THAN $20,000 PER YEAR**. In 2018-19, the average published tuition and fees for a full-time student at public two-year institutions nationally was **$3,660**, compared with **$10,230** at public four-year institutions.

WHAT ARE THEIR ACADEMIC AND LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES?



39% of first-time college students who enrolled in a community college in fall 2012 earned a credential from a two- or four-year institution within six years.



80% of entering community college students indicate they want to earn a bachelor's degree or higher, but just **29%** of those who began in fall 2011 transferred to a four-year institution within six years.

Among full-time workers age 25 and over, the median earnings of associate degree holders in 2016 were **18% HIGHER** than those of individuals with only a high school diploma.

Multiple Measures: A Better Way to Determine College Readiness

At most community colleges, a majority of new students are placed into English or math courses below the college level. Increasingly, states and colleges are asking how they can move more students into college-level courses while giving them the strong instruction and academic supports they need to succeed.

Multiple measures placement could be part of the answer. Rather than assessing incoming college students with a single standardized test, multiple measures placement uses more than one measure—including high school GPA—to determine whether students need remedial English or math. New research shows the approach to be effective in identifying students who are likely to succeed in college-level courses in spite of low placement test scores.

"I have to say I was surprised," said CCRC Senior Research Scholar Elisabeth Barnett, who is leading two studies on the effectiveness of multiple measures. "It was a much greater impact than I expected, especially in English."

New research shows multiple measures placement to be effective in identifying students who are likely to succeed in college-level courses in spite of low placement test scores.

The impact Barnett and colleagues observed is one of the early findings from the first randomized controlled trial of multiple measures, conducted through the Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness (CAPR). Researchers from the federally funded research center—co-led by CCRC and the social policy research organization MDRC—are evaluating the effectiveness of a multiple measures placement algorithm that incorporates high school GPA and other predictive measures based on a college's historical data. When colleges used the algorithm for placement, 42 percent of students placed higher in English and 14 percent placed higher in math than they would have using placement test scores alone.

Implementing such a complex, algorithm-based system is a heavy lift for colleges, which have relied almost exclusively on standardized tests to place students in the past. A second study funded by Ascendium Education Group, also conducted with MDRC, is investigating a simpler approach to placement that relies on a series of if-then questions based on high school GPA, test scores, and other measures of college readiness like noncognitive assessment results.

"That is considerably less complicated, which is its big advantage," Barnett said.

More than half of public two-year colleges now use multiple measures to assess students' college preparedness, but it's too early to fully understand how particular placement systems affect student outcomes or to anoint one as the best option. Still, enough research backs up multiple measures that Barnett is comfortable with the pace at which colleges are changing their placement practices.

The next challenge for colleges is integrating multiple measures placement into the many other developmental education reforms they are taking on—including corequisite remediation, math pathways, and integrated reading and writing courses.

Photo courtesy of CUNY ASAP

Combining Technology and Personalized Advising

Today's community college advisors are not just resources for course selection and registration. They're also vital wellsprings of knowledge who can help students navigate challenges both in and outside the classroom.

"Academic information goes hand-in-hand with helping students resolve nonacademic challenges and circumstances that they may be facing," said Senior Research Associate Hoori Kalamkarian, who has studied advising for several years. "We're seeing those factors are just as important as students' study skills."

Institutions across the country are increasingly adopting holistic approaches to advising, in which advisors assume a role similar to that of a teacher and take on responsibilities that extend far beyond administrative functions. Holistic advisors are helping students chart their progress through their majors and supporting them as they make meaning of their college experience, reflect on their long-term goals, and develop a sense of connection to the institution.

CCRC began studying how colleges are using technology to provide student support in 2012. The center's Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success (iPASS) project has evaluated the implementation and impact of these tools, as well as how advisors can use them to support a more relationship-based counseling model. Several campuses have found ways to meld digital tools and strong advising practices to better support students.

Morgan State University in Maryland, for instance, has implemented an early-alert system that flags students who might be struggling, which the school uses to bolster its broader efforts to meaningfully connect with students.

"Their leadership, from the advising director all the way up to the president, really embraced the idea of proactive and personalized engagement with students," Kalamkarian said. "Their approach to implementing this technology didn't focus on the tool itself. It recognized that a new advising practice could be the mechanism for achieving the targeted supports that they wanted to deliver to students depending on their needs."

Several colleges implementing guided pathways reforms have also started to redesign their academic advising and are establishing different touchpoints with students as they progress through college. Ultimately, Research Associate Serena Klempin, who also works on the iPASS project, said that while technological tools may be helpful in creating efficiencies and identifying concerns, the key to the new approach is fundamentally human.

"You can't do holistic advising without building a relationship with the student," Klempin said. "I think that's been standing out a lot recently, just the emphasis that holistic support places on having a relationship as the foundation. From students, too, we've heard over and over again how much it matters to have a person they can connect to."

> **"Academic information goes hand-in-hand with helping students resolve nonacademic challenges and circumstances that they may be facing."**

How Guided Pathways Reforms Are Transforming Colleges

Photo courtesy of San Jacinto College

The numbers at San Jacinto College in Houston were eye opening. Students who graduated with an associate degree accumulated an average of 30 excess credits in their 60-credit programs, and the college lost more than 8,000 students a year, the size of a small Texas town.

A simple exercise began to show faculty and staff why it was happening. They put themselves in a student's shoes and tried to create a plan that would take them to a degree. They found confusing requirements, uncertainties about whether courses would transfer, and other barriers.

To begin to fix it, faculty and staff from across campuses were tasked with mapping academic programs and other elements of the student experience. The work allowed them to understand how students encounter the college and to design better systems with fewer barriers. It also helped them build more equitable access to programs leading to higher paying jobs.

CCRC researchers have been tracking the implementation of guided pathways at 113 colleges since spring 2016 to understand the changes the colleges are making, their approaches to managing institutional transformation, and the effects of the reforms on students.

"It is just amazing, the changes that they're implementing. And they're doing this by engaging people very broadly, everyone, from the faculty to the departmental secretaries, everybody," Senior Research Scholar Davis Jenkins said, "building understanding that the college has a major responsibility in student success."

The colleges are doing things like merging their records systems, so every staff member who interacts with a student can view his or her record and plan to graduation; tying general education courses into majors, so students understand how course content will apply to their field; and combining credit and noncredit programs within meta-majors, so college personnel can help students create plans in either division based on their goals.

"Now they're asking the student, 'what do you want to do?'" said Senior Research Associate Hana Lahr, a senior member of CCRC's guided pathways team.

The key to making guided pathways work is bringing in faculty and having them take charge, so it doesn't feel like an edict from above.

"In all of these cases, what's distinguished these reforms is that they've had faculty in the lead from the start," Jenkins said.

WHAT IS GUIDED PATHWAYS?

Guided pathways colleges clearly map programs so that students know what to do to complete a program and prepare for a career or further education and training. Students are supported to explore career and academic options, choose a program of study, and develop a full-program educational plan. Advisors, faculty, and others work to keep them on the path and ensure they are learning so they graduate prepared for the future.

Why Adjuncts Are Crucial to the Push for Student Success

Not every problem faced by adjunct faculty members requires a massive institution-wide overhaul to be solved. Sometimes, it's as simple as keeping a closet door unlocked a little bit later so instructors can get the office supplies they need.

"It would make a difference in people's professional lives if they had consistent access to white board markers," CCRC Senior Research Associate Susan Bickerstaff said. "It's so funny, we're doing these interviews and thinking we're going to be tackling all these thorny issues, and in every interview people are talking about white board markers."

For the last three years, Bickerstaff and a team of CCRC researchers have investigated strategies for improving adjunct engagement at six community colleges around the country. Some of the challenges they've discovered, such as a locked supply closet or a lack of space to host office hours, have pretty straightforward solutions. Broadly, part-time faculty—who make up a staggering two thirds of all instructors at community colleges—often lack institutional knowledge, and improving communication, streamlining staff orientation, and making resources more easily available would help them feel like part of the campus community.

Institutions must learn more about who part-time faculty are before they can effectively address their needs.

But figuring out what supports adjuncts would benefit from is not always so simple. Though some assume all adjuncts are aspiring full-time faculty members, the reality is more nuanced. The adjunct workforce also includes current administrators, high school teachers, and others who may not have their sights set on a tenure track position. And because part-time faculty are not a monolith, Bickerstaff said, institutions must learn more about who they are before they can effectively address their needs.

"Adjuncts are extremely diverse," Bickerstaff said. "It would be a really smart idea for colleges to get some information about their adjunct faculty before making a bunch of assumptions."

For instance, a high school instructor teaching a course at a community college likely has the pedagogy down, but may be in the dark about the college's norms and practices. On the other hand, a current administrator may have plenty of institutional knowledge but little prior experience in front of a classroom.

Yet despite all the factors that separate one adjunct from another, CCRC researchers have uncovered several similarities that unite them. The adjunct experience, Bickerstaff said, is defined by complexity. Adjuncts often feel disengaged and undervalued. They "perceive themselves to be on the margins of the institution," Bickerstaff said, and they encounter obstacles to accessing very basic information and resources.

"The things that our research shows don't really address the larger problem, which is that you have essentially a two-tiered workforce," Bickerstaff said. "We can talk about all these wonderful solutions, but they're solutions within this flawed system."

Despite the numerous challenges adjuncts face, CCRC researchers found one last factor that unites part-time faculty: a passion for what they do.

"I don't think anyone we interviewed is doing it for the money," Bickerstaff said. "They're doing it because they love teaching, they love the discipline, they love the college. They feel a commitment to the community college mission."

Photo courtesy of LaGuardia Community College

The Role of Community Colleges in Tomorrow's Labor Market

The buzzwords are everywhere: automation, artificial intelligence, upskilling, job transformation. Companies are adopting new technologies to optimize every aspect of their businesses, and there is no question that the nuts and bolts of the American workplace are being upended—and quickly.

Ample research has been devoted to the future of work, but as CCRC Senior Research Associate Maria Cormier noted, there remains a gap in the literature on how community colleges are navigating this vocational volatility. That gap needs to be filled. After all, the rapid pace of technological evolution inevitably affects community colleges, which have traditionally helped train workers to fill immediate labor market needs.

"This is where people go to get an associate degree or a short-term award or certificate in precision manufacturing," Cormier said. "Community colleges are a critical part of this conversation, but by and large have not been talked about."

The rapid pace of technological evolution inevitably affects community colleges, which have traditionally helped train workers to fill immediate labor market needs.

A new CCRC research project in partnership with MIT's Task Force on the Work of the Future aims to address these concerns. Researchers will investigate how two-year institutions are preparing students for the evolving employment landscape and the implications for the design, delivery, and effectiveness of community college workforce training. The project will also focus on the relationship between community colleges and employers, assess whether industry leaders believe community colleges are appropriately preparing students for today's jobs, and allow researchers to better understand how community colleges and employers are considering the needs of students from all economic and social backgrounds in training for high-demand occupations.

The project, which officially kicked off in July 2019, centers on adaptation in three industries: health care, information technology, and manufacturing. Not only have these sectors been affected by technology, but they also continue to rely on community colleges as employee training grounds and are expected to grow in the coming years. Cormier said the project will also dig deeper into questions about what skills workers really need and how institutions can help students hone them.

"The word 'skills' is being tossed around so much: liberal arts skills, technical skills, basic skills, soft skills, 21st century skills," Cormier said. "How are students learning and acquiring these skills, and how are they getting the experience they need that will prepare them for these changing workplaces?"

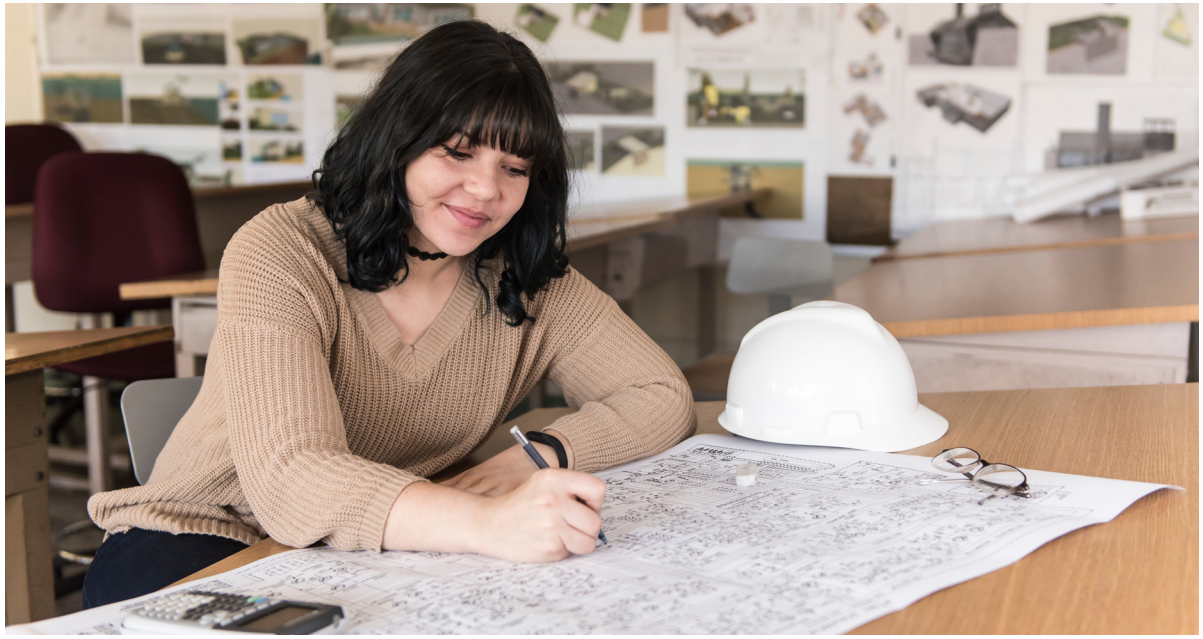


Photo courtesy of Westchester Community College

A More Deliberate Approach to Addressing Equity

Photo courtesy of CUNY ASAP

Nearly 40 percent of Asian and 21 percent of White high school students in the United States took an Advanced Placement class during the 2015–16 academic year. Just 12 percent of their Black peers and 17 percent of their Hispanic peers did the same. Asian and White students were also more likely than their Black and Hispanic peers to enroll in dual enrollment courses. To put it simply: The students who participate in college acceleration programs do not look like the students sitting in America's high school classrooms.

Previous research has shown that programs like AP and dual enrollment boost academic outcomes, and CCRC is investigating how high schools and colleges can ensure that those benefits are fully extended to underrepresented racial minorities, such as Black and Hispanic students, as well as lower-income students.

"We wanted to focus on how to improve access to and success in college acceleration opportunities like dual enrollment and AP for underrepresented populations specifically because that's really where the biggest need is," Senior Research Associate John Fink said. "The key question is how to identify and address disparities in terms of who is benefitting from them."

To complete this work, researchers are working on several studies to better understand gaps in access to dual enrollment and AP, equity in outcomes among dual enrollment students, and practices that have led to strong outcomes for underrepresented dual enrollment students. This mixed-methods work draws on observations and interviews from fieldwork in high schools and colleges. It also incorporates analysis of multiple large administrative datasets, including a national census from the U.S. Department of Education that details school-level access to dual enrollment and AP programs.

But this isn't the only way CCRC is addressing systemic disparities that afflict America's education system. Internally, a CCRC team is developing an equity framework to guide the center's research, which will establish a process of reflection and practice to help researchers sharpen the equity focus at various points throughout their projects. The framework will encourage them to examine how they're formulating their research questions, analyzing their data, and communicating their findings. The idea is to make a deliberate effort to examine and explain subgroup differences and further sharpen the focus on equity so that the research and resources we develop can contribute to reforms that promote more equitable student outcomes.

CCRC has not taken on a charge like this so explicitly in the past, Senior Research Scholar Nikki Edgecombe said, in part because of the inherent equity focus of studying open-access institutions.

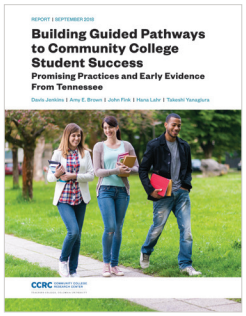
"The way that we thought about it is that we study community colleges, we know community colleges don't have the status of some of the other institutions of higher education, and we thought implicit in our commitment to community colleges was a commitment to equity," Edgecombe said.

The current political moment and the economic and social forces that have shaped the last decade, however, demand a more deliberate approach. And by committing to help identify inequitable structures and processes, CCRC hopes to move the community college field forward as a whole.

"What we're aiming for is to create some of those tools and resources that help us do this work more mindfully and better, that really drive new or different conversations in the field," Edgecombe said. "Then, ideally practitioners on the ground will create interventions that we can then assess that are squarely focused on eliminating inequitable systems."

Connecting with Our Audience

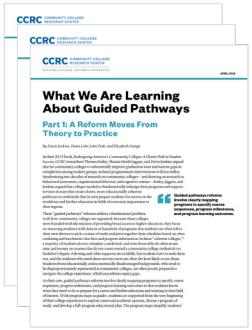
SOME OF OUR MOST POPULAR PUBLICATIONS | 2018–19



Building Guided Pathways to Community College Student Success: Promising Practices and Early Evidence From Tennessee

By Davis Jenkins, Amy E. Brown, John Fink, Hana Lahr & Takeshi Yanagiura

September 2018



What We Are Learning About Guided Pathways

By Davis Jenkins, Hana Lahr, John Fink & Elizabeth Ganga

April 2018

Understanding the Needs of Part-Time Faculty at Six Community Colleges

By Susan Bickerstaff & Octaviano Chavarín

November 2018

Multiple Measures Placement Using Data Analytics: An Implementation and Early Impacts Report

By Elisabeth A. Barnett, Peter Bergman, Elizabeth Kopko, Vikash Reddy, Clive Belfield & Susha Roy

September 2018

COMMUNICATION METRICS

52,000
Website page views per month

3,500
FAQ page views per month

12,000
Twitter followers

↑ 14%
since September 2018

2,030
Facebook likes

↑ 15%
since September 2018

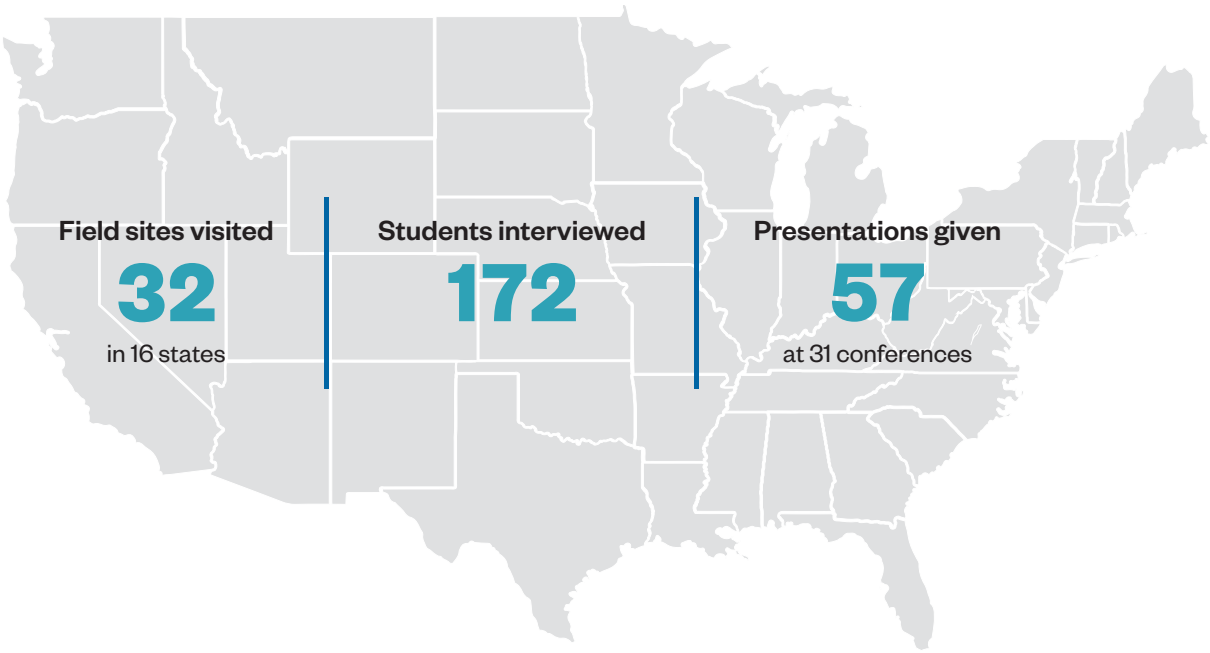
5,549
Newsletter subscribers

32
Publications
since September 2018

254
Mentions in the media
since September 2018

Engaging with the Field

SITE VISITS & PRESENTATIONS | 2018–19



TRAINING EDUCATION RESEARCHERS

126
Graduate students have been employed by CCRC since 1996

44
students have earned master's degrees at Teachers College

69
students have earned doctorates at Teachers College

CCRC alumni are currently:

- Enrolled in PhD programs at UC Berkeley, Stanford, and Harvard
- Working at American Institutes for Research, Education Northwest, Hudson County Community College, Westchester Community College, UC Irvine, Rutgers University, George Washington University, Vanderbilt University, and several other universities

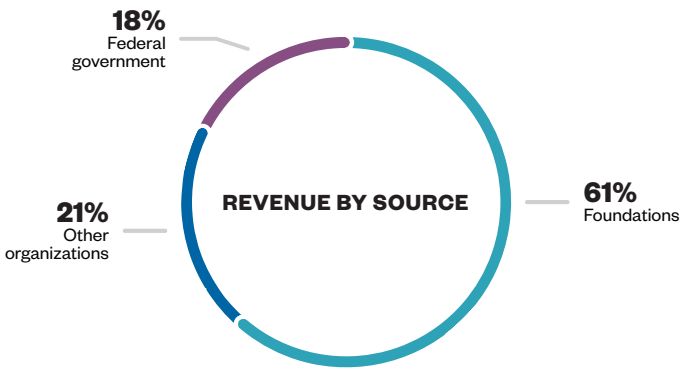
STAFF AWARDS | 2018–19

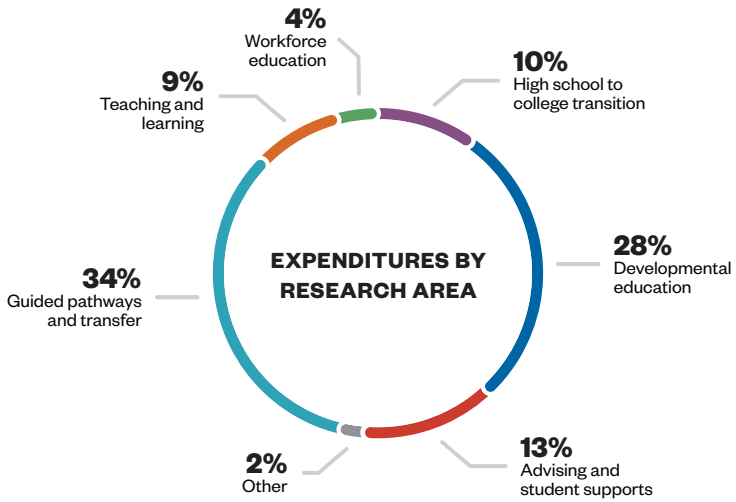
Maggie P. Fay
Research Associate
Named a 2019 ECMC Foundation Career and Technical Education (CTE) Research Fellow by North Carolina State University

John Fink
Senior Research Associate
Awarded the NISTS Transfer Champion–Catalyst Award by the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students

Thalia Rodriguez
Project Assistant
Awarded a Fulbright fellowship to teach English in Brazil

A Financial Snapshot: Fiscal Year 2018–19





Cumulative Total of Active Grants

$43,249,547

Annual Budget

$9 million

CCRC FUNDERS

Achieving the Dream
American Association of Community Colleges
The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
Arnold Ventures
Ascendium Education Group
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Capital One Foundation
The Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation
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Education Commission of the States
Foundation for California Community Colleges
Institute for Evidence-Based Change
Jobs for the Future
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JPMorgan Chase Foundation
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