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New Research Center Aims to Address Inequities in Online Learning in College

U.S. Department of Education Funds Collaboration of Researchers and Broad-Access Colleges

Menlo Park, CA, New York, NY, and Washington, DC, July 6, 2021—The U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences has awarded \$10 million to [SRI Education](#) and the [Community College Research Center](#) (CCRC) at Columbia University’s Teachers College. SRI and CCRC are partnering with [Achieving the Dream](#), a national leader in championing evidence-based institutional improvement with a network of more than 300 colleges, and a group of nine broad-access colleges—community colleges and other schools that accept more than 70% of applicants—to conduct research on how educational technology and instructional strategies can bolster students’ skills for managing their own learning.

The [new center](#) will use findings from its research program to inform the professional learning and guidance it plans to develop for higher education administrators and instructors. The center will also enable knowledge-sharing among colleges, researchers, and educational technology developers and engage voices from all three sectors in co-developing and sharing a resulting toolkit and other resources.

Skills such as planning and goal-setting, along with the ability to reflect on and improve on one’s learning, are critical to student success. College instructors often see bright students who readily grasp new concepts but lose motivation or confidence if they lack the study or planning skills to perform well on assignments and exams.

Self-directed learning skills are even more important in online courses—a growing trend in postsecondary education—which typically place more responsibility on students to manage their own learning.

SRI and CCRC—which together lead four other large research and development centers focused on improving equitable access and students’ success in school and life—are delighted to address this need by partnering in the new center. The research program will investigate how instructors can make optimal use of features often already built into online learning technologies to support student skill development, with a focus on online foundational STEM courses.

Decades of experience managing national research and capacity-building efforts will help the new center’s leaders, Deborah Jonas, director of SRI’s Center for Education Research & Innovation, and Nikki Edgcombe, CCRC senior research scholar and professor of education policy and social analysis at Columbia University’s Teachers College, ensure the center’s success.

The team brings together research expertise in teaching and learning, educational technologies, and self-directed learning skill development, with a national network of relationships it will use to convene colleges and developers.

“It’s an amazing opportunity to partner with CCRC to strengthen teaching and learning for all students,” says Jonas. “With Achieving the Dream and our partner colleges, the center will promote cross-sector knowledge sharing and national uptake of the evidence-based training resources the team will develop.”

The colleges partnering in the new center are Bunker Hill Community College in Massachusetts, Calbright College in California, Macomb Community College in Michigan, Odessa College in Texas, Palm Beach State College in Florida, Portland State University in Oregon, Tulsa Community College in Oklahoma, Virginia State University, and Wake Technical Community College in North Carolina.

The center is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305C210003 to SRI International. IES provided \$10 million (100%) of funding for the center.

About SRI Education

SRI Education, a division of SRI International, is helping federal and state agencies, school districts, major foundations, nonprofit organizations, and international and commercial clients tackle some of the most complex issues in education to help students succeed. Our mission is to reduce barriers, optimize outcomes, and ensure educational equity for all children, youth, and families. **SRI International** creates world-changing solutions making people safer, healthier and more productive. Headquartered in Menlo Park, California, SRI works primarily in education, advanced technology and systems, biosciences, and computing.

About CCRC

The **Community College Research Center** (CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University, has been a leader in the field of community college research and reform for 25 years. Our work provides a foundation for innovations in policy and practice that help give every community college student the best chance of success.

About Achieving the Dream

Achieving the Dream (ATD) leads a growing network of more than 300 community colleges committed to helping their students, particularly low-income students and students of color, achieve their goals for academic success, personal growth, and economic opportunity. ATD is making progress in closing equity gaps and accelerating student success through a unique change process that builds each college’s institutional capacities in seven essential areas. ATD, along with nearly 75 experienced coaches and advisors, works closely with Network colleges in 45 states and the District of Columbia to reach more than 4 million community college students. Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#).