CCRC COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH CENTER
TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Georgia West Stacey
(212) 678-3394
georgia.stacey@tc.columbia.edu

Is It Possible to Improve Community College Completion Rates?

New Book diagnoses why past reform efforts have fallen short, and describes emerging evidence on a promising new model

NEW YORK, NY (April 1, 2015) — President Obama's proposal for free community college tuition generated intense national excitement, but it also drew attention to the distressingly low completion rates at these institutions. In a new book ***Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success***, the nation's foremost authorities on public, two-year colleges dive into the question upon which the future of the president's proposal hinges: Can we significantly improve the rate at which these open-access colleges graduate their students?

Authors Thomas Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins of the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Columbia's Teachers College draw upon the past twenty years of research to provide a comprehensive diagnosis of why community college reform efforts have thus far failed to significantly increase national completion rates, which today hover at 39 percent. They describe how most community colleges employ a "cafeteria-style self-service model" of education. The cafeteria college emerged in response to historic calls for expanded access to higher education and offers a wide variety of courses to serve the diverse needs of its students. But it is an exceedingly complex institution and students must assemble the elements of their education with little help or direction.

Ultimately, a model that incentivizes enrollments in courses is not the best model to maximize student completion. The problem lies in the design of the colleges, the authors argue, and therein too lays the solution. Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins set forth evidence indicating that only a fundamental change in how community colleges are organized can bring about significant gains in student success.

Successive chapters in ***Redesigning America's Community Colleges*** address the following questions:

- Why do so few students complete community colleges? Is the fundamental problem one of academic preparedness, affordability—or are there other factors at work?
- Is the historic community college mission of expanding low-cost access to college fundamentally at odds with our nation's relatively new focus on increasing the rates at which students earn degrees?
- Why have promising reforms in areas such as remedial education and academic advising failed to increase overall college completion rates?
- How is the typical community college organized, and how does this organization impede rather than support student progress?
- What can behavioral economics tell us about the structures and supports that students may need to successfully complete a degree?
- Are there any reforms that have worked in improving community college student outcomes?

- Is it possible for community colleges to achieve the large completion gains called for by the Obama administration and several states and foundations? What must colleges do to make significant progress toward these ambitious goals?

Redesigning America's Community Colleges draws upon rigorous empirical data analyses, qualitative fieldwork illuminating the perspective of students and faculty, and partnerships with colleges implementing innovative reforms, to clarify the challenges facing students and colleges, and to describe a reform model that holds the promise of bringing about the long-sought transformative improvements in college attainment.

The release date for the book is April 9, 2015. For a review copy of the book, please contact Michael Giarratano at Harvard University Press: michael_giarratano@harvard.edu.

To speak to an author, or for television and radio samples of the authors, please contact Georgia West Stacey, georgia.stacey@tc.columbia.edu.

The Community College Research Center (CCRC) (http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/) is the leading independent authority on the nation's nearly 1,200 two-year colleges. Founded in 1996, CCRC conducts research on the major issues affecting community colleges in the United States in order to identify practices and policies that expand access to higher education and promote success for all students.