Speakers: Selena Cho, CJ Labassi, Tatiana Velasco, Aurely Garcia Tulloch, Amy Brown, Carl Lewandowski

Topic: CCRC's Biennial Report—What Surprised Me About My Research?

Cho: Something I find really inspiring about community colleges is that they really are the community's colleges. And this came up in my research because I was learning about how community colleges just serve so many different functions.

So they'll do everything from dual enrollment for high school students to adult and continuing education. And so, sometimes what happens is certain programs or types of courses get duplicated across different parts of the college.

In some ways this is really awesome because the colleges are truly in touch with and responsive to what the community actually needs. But also, it can lead down the line to some inefficiencies when some programs might not be relevant or as necessary anymore.

And so, yeah, I think that's just something that continues to blow my mind is just like the sheer range of work that community colleges do.

Labassi: I think one of the more striking things I remember from a randomized trial that I worked on was at the University of Michigan we tried to get more students to go to the University of Michigan, especially more low income students to go to the University of Michigan through an experiment called the Hail Scholarship.

And one of the things that we learned in that process is just how many talented students who were not going to the University of Michigan were instead going to community colleges. And just that, I think, really opened my eyes to how many talented, smart students there were on community college campuses and how much that seems to be a result of of just the more welcoming environment that those institutions provide.

Velasco: I think that for me the most shocking fact from the transfer research, which is the first large project that I worked on here at CCRC, was that so many community college students effectively wanted to get a bachelor's, but consistently over the last 10 years or more only 15-16% of them, according to our more recent data, get to complete a bachelor's.

And that was something that, to me, from a research perspective, is not only sad and interesting but it's also puzzling.

Tulloch: Another thing that is really interesting about the research that I do on dual enrollment is how much it intersects with the transfer research that we do.

Specifically when I'm talking to, interviewing, speaking with, or just talking in the field with folks about what happens to former dual enrollment students and where their credits transfer, especially if they're a "double transfer" and they're going from their high school to a community college to a university after. What's happening? What are their advising experiences and what does it look like once they get to college?

Brown: I was really surprised when I got to CCRC to learn that there's really limited research happening and research funding for projects that are focused on teaching and learning in higher ed.

And that was kind of surprising to me because students spend so much time with faculty, if you think about who they they interact with most at the institution and how important the knowledge, skills, relationships, and like ways of knowing that they gain from college. And so for the research base to be so limited was really surprising.

One light bulb moment for me in our research was last fall doing a focus group with some faculty who had participated in a professional development opportunity.

Lewandowski: One of the instructors mentioned that what was most beneficial for him was just getting the opportunity to talk to other faculty because as an adjunct instructor, he didn't normally get to interact with his colleagues.

And it made me think in new ways about how exactly professional development benefits faculty, but also in new ways about how our research could be bringing people together.