

# Promoting Student Success

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## Promoting Student Success



Higher education is facing a major dilemma. Student retention and graduation rate statistics are sobering, with the 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full time undergraduate students being 59%. Shifts in student demographics have led to fewer students enrolling and increased competition to recruit students. According to the Lumina Foundation, 38% of today's college students are older than 25, 26% are raising children, and 47% are financially supporting themselves, often struggling to make ends meet.

Higher education organizations must be able to provide personalized support for their students in the moments that matter most. Currently, many students struggle to gain insight into academic progress and fail to understand the potential negative consequences of academic decisions in real time. Students deserve an easy to use system that acts as a guided pathway providing alerts, notifications, and recommendations to keep them on the right track.

With Workday Student, institutions use a full array of data to track the progress of all students along their pathway in real time, while identifying problems they face in meeting their learning goals. Workday Student gives institutions a 360-degree view of the student experience in order to provide greater personalization.

Understanding the unique needs of students before they step foot on campus and designing programs to meet those needs requires the ability to analyze data from historical admissions, student aid, and academic records to unlock trends in student success and persistence. With Workday, all student, HR, and financial data resides in a single location, allowing institutions to use real-time and historic data traditionally siloed in disparate systems and data repositories. This results in insightful and actionable analytics that give administrators all the information they need to design success strategies and programs and more effectively communicate with their diverse student populations.

Higher Education has changed tremendously and will continue to change into the future. As student success continues to be the number one focus on campuses, institutions must embrace systems that will provide agility to change in the moment. It is exciting to think about how technology can empower institutions to address their most pressing challenges. Workday Student is working with a diverse set of forward thinking institutions to empower student success and tackle critical issues on campuses, while remaining agile to shift with the ever-changing world.

Sincerely,

**Liz Dietz**

Vice President, Workday Student

# Introduction

Student success is at once one of the most important issues for colleges and universities and one of the most all-encompassing challenges for educators.

The issues involve those that start prior to enrollment (recruitment), continue at the point of enrollment (placement and remediation) and extend throughout a student's education (academic advising and progress toward completion) to graduation and planning for success after college. Strategies naturally vary by colleges' missions, yet these issues matter across higher education. And to many people, student success is about making sure all students succeed, leading to a focus on gaps in retention rates and academic success levels.

The articles in this compilation explore efforts by individual colleges and groups of colleges to promote student success. *Inside Higher Ed* will continue to track these issues. We welcome your feedback on these articles and your ideas for future coverage.

--The Editors

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# News

A selection of articles by *Inside Higher Ed* reporters

## How Georgia State Prevents Summer Melt

BY SCOTT JASCHIK // OCTOBER 9, 2017

Text messages, some automated but some with real human interaction, reach students who might never otherwise have showed up.

Georgia State University has become well-known in recent years for its [use of predictive analytics to improve retention rates](#), in particular among those who might be considered at high risk of not graduating.

Now the university is talking about another tech-based innovation -- this time one that may result in more students enrolling. The approach is the use of text messages, combined with human interaction on key academic advising and financial aid questions. So far, Georgia State is making good progress on minimizing summer melt, in which students accepted for admission and who have said that they will enroll never show up.



*Georgia State uses text messages to prevent summer melt*

Summer melt gets lots of discussion in admissions circles, much of it about students of means who (much to the annoyance of admissions officers) make more than one deposit and wait until the last minute to decide where to en-

roll. But Georgia State is dealing with another kind of summer melt: disadvantaged students who are accepted, plan to enroll but somehow fail to make it to campus in the fall. Unlike the summer melt that afflicts institutions with wealthier

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students, in which those melting end up at college, the kind experienced at Georgia State results in students failing to enroll anywhere.

In the fall of 2015, 18 percent of those who had said they would enroll as first-year students never did so. Georgia State found that most of them didn't enroll at any college and that they met multiple definitions of being at risk. Of these students, 78 percent were from minority groups and 71 percent were from low-income families.

Like most colleges, Georgia State sends lots of email messages to incoming students, with information about signing up for courses, deadlines for paying tuition, information on housing options and much more. Most of those emails provide links to relevant websites at the university, all full of information.

Timothy M. Renick, vice provost and chief enrollment officer, said in an interview that officials began to fear loss of students because they were receiving too much information and were finding it difficult to prioritize. New students receive about 300 emails from 80 offices, he said. "In the mass of emails, there was nothing to say the message from financial aid is much more important than the one about getting a locker in the recreation center." Most of these email messages weren't ever opened.

So Georgia State started using text messages during the summer before students start. With more than 25,000 undergraduates, that's

a lot of texts.

The first texts students received were general, asking if they had any questions or concerns about getting ready to enroll. As students started to respond, it became clear that many had similar questions -- about when financial aid becomes available, registering for classes, demonstrating that they had the required immunizations. These texts -- about 90 percent of them -- received automated responses.

But other text responses revealed a specific problem, and so a triage team reviewed incoming texts and assigned those needing someone to actually dig into a student's particular problem. In one case, Renick described a student from a very poor family who needed every penny possible to pay tuition. The grant that the student thought would be credited to his account wasn't showing up. The student said he wouldn't be able to afford

Georgia State without the grant.

One member of Renick's team looked over all the materials from the student and found that his Social Security number had two numbers transposed in one place. Once the numbers were put in their proper place, the grant materialized -- and so did the student that fall. It was a simple problem, but one that needed someone to go over every part of a financial aid record to find.

The result of this approach in its first year: a drop of 22 percent in the typical number of admitted students lost to summer melt. That translates into 324 first-year students who might not have otherwise enrolled.

Bill Gates recently visited the campus (below) and was briefed by students on how the text message system worked and made it possible for them to enroll. (And he's [blogging his praise](#) for the idea.)

Renick said the system shows



*Bill Gates on the Georgia State campus*

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the benefits of tech solutions, but also the importance of a human role. He said he suspected it was in the 10 percent of the text responses that required human interaction

that the university was making the difference between students enrolling or not.

The program is not without costs. The university is spend-



In the mass of emails, there was nothing to say the message from financial aid is much more important than the one about getting a locker in the recreation center.



ing some real money (Renick said it was under \$100,000) to work with the company AdmitHub on the texting software, and staffers are being given additional work to

perspective, the additional students enrolling represent about \$3 million in tuition revenue. "I'm pretty sure about a positive ROI," Renick said. ■

communicate with the incoming students. But Renick said the time and money are well spent.

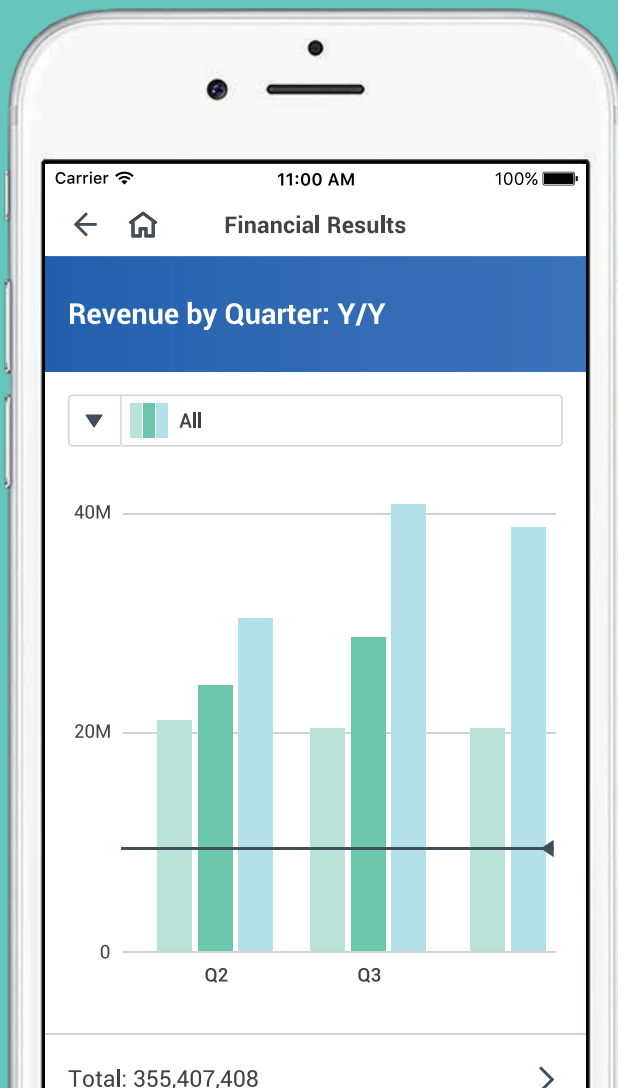
"What we were doing before was completely inadequate," he said.

From a financial

<https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2017/10/09/georgia-state-uses-text-messages-prevent-summer-melt>

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# The Missing Black Students

BY SCOTT JASCHIK // APRIL 16, 2018

Undermatching continues to limit opportunities for students, study finds, with impact on graduation rates as well.



iSTOCK

*Study finds undermatching remains major problem, especially for black students*

For all the talk about affirmative action, black students are the most likely to enroll at a college less selective than their qualifications would permit.

Critics of affirmative action like to talk about how some students, in theory favored because of their race or ethnicity, are admitted to highly selective colleges at which they wouldn't otherwise get in. These students may not succeed there, these critics say, because they have

been overmatched.

But [a 2012 study](#) by Caroline M. Hoxby and Christopher Avery, a study quickly viewed as significant, found a different matching problem. More than half of the most talented potential applicants from low-income families never apply to a competitive college, the study found.

College leaders vowed to fight undermatching and to take steps to make sure that more of these talented students found their way to elite

institutions.

But a study being released today at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association finds that undermatching very much remains a factor in admissions and enrollment patterns.

Further, the study finds that the students who are undermatched -- many of them minority students -- are less likely to graduate on time than are those who attend colleges that match their abilities.



The study was based on a nationally representative sample of just under 5,000 students in the Education Department's Educational Longitudinal Study database. The students were

tracked for 10 years after 10th grade, in which they enrolled in 2002. The researchers are Chungseo Kang and Darlene Garcia Torres of the University at Buffalo of the State University of New York.

They used the database so they could see the academic levels of the 10th-grade students, by various racial and ethnic groups, and to follow those students to college.

They found that 43 percent of students going to college were undermatching. That is slightly above the findings of several other studies, which have found the level to be in the range of 40 percent. (The Hoxby-Avery findings that attracted attention were about the most academically talented low-income students, not all students.)



The researchers found that those who undermatch are less likely to graduate on time, either in four years or the federal rate of six years for a bachelor's degree.



The new study found that not all types of students undermatch at the same levels.

The rate was highest for black students (49 percent), followed by white students (45 percent), Latino students (41 percent) and Asian students (31 percent).

The findings are striking, since the Trump administration is currently investigating whether affirmative action hurts the admissions chances of Asian students -- the racial group that is least likely to undermatch.

Some observers have questioned whether undermatching is as serious a problem as many say. These skeptics say that the important thing is that students go to college, and that much of the discussion about undermatching implies that the im-

portant thing is going to a prestigious college.

But the researchers found that those who undermatch are less likely to graduate on time, either in four years

or the federal rate of six years for a bachelor's degree. Generally the institutions these students attend lack the resources of more competitive institutions.

As to why undermatching persists as a problem, the authors of the new study said via email that there are multiple theories.

One possibility is that the gaps are "financially based," in which students lack access to the money to pay for the more competitive (and typically more expensive) colleges at which they could succeed. This may be based in part of some on being "reluctant to take out loans."

Another possibility is that it "could be a question of insufficient access to information about the higher education landscape." ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2018/04/16/study-finds-undermatching-remains-major-problem-especially-black>

# More Community Colleges Using Multiple Measures for Readiness

BY ASHLEY A. SMITH // FEBRUARY 28, 2018

Shift has major impact on remedial placements.

A [new study](#) from the Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness has found that an increasing number of public, two-year colleges are using multiple measurements beyond standardized tests to place students in college-level math and reading courses.

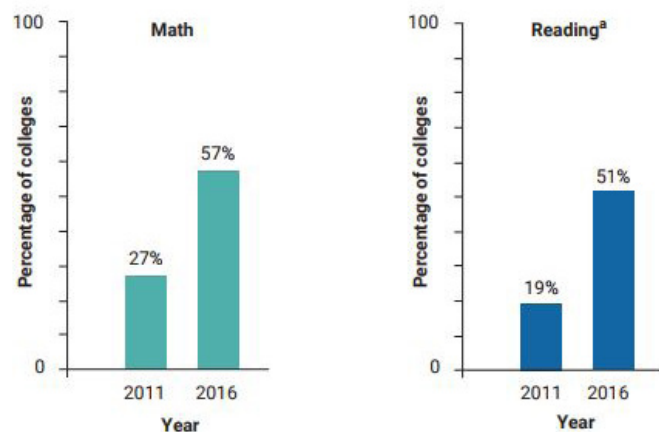
Research has shown for years that using multiple measures, such as high school performance, to determine college readiness provides colleges with a more accurate measurement to determine college success. The survey found that in 2016, 57 percent of two-year colleges used multiple measures for math placement, compared to 27 percent in 2011. When it comes to reading and writing placement, 51 percent of colleges used multiple measures in 2016, compared to 19 percent in 2011.

The report also examined the

types of developmental education two-year institutions offered. For instance, 76 percent of colleges reported offering traditional remedial math courses, and 53 percent reported doing the same in reading

and writing. However, more than half the colleges surveyed reported using a reformed type of developmental education, like compressed courses, flipped classrooms and corequisite remediation. ■

**FIGURE 1. Use of Measures Other Than Standardized Tests for Assessment Among Public Two-Year Colleges**



SOURCES: 2011 data: Fields and Parsad (2012); 2016 data: CAPR institutional survey.

NOTE: <sup>a</sup>The Fields and Parsad (2012) reading statistics are for reading placement only, whereas the CAPR survey data are for both reading and writing. Because many colleges are combining reading and writing courses, the CAPR survey grouped them together.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2018/02/28/more-community-colleges-using-multiple-measures-readiness>

# Collaborating on Completion

BY PAUL FAIN // FEBRUARY 21, 2018

New project from land-grant university association will bring 100 institutions together to work on improving student completion rates and closing achievement gaps.

A group of 100 public universities will work with the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities to produce hundreds of thousands of additional degrees while also reducing achievement gaps for under-represented student groups.

The college completion project, which APLU [announced today](#), is the latest sign of greater urgency among public universities about graduation rates and student success, aided in part by performance-based funding formulas that are on the books in 35 states.

Even a few years ago, some presidents of land-grant universities would struggle to recall the student retention and graduation rates of their institutions, said Peter McPherson, APLU's president.

"They know them now," he said. "It's clear that this is an important issue for universities and the country."

Roughly 61 percent of students

nationwide who first enrolled in a four-year public college or university in 2011 earned a bachelor's degree within six years, [according](#) to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Another 3.4 percent of these former four-year university students earned a two-year degree during that period of time, while 11 percent were still enrolled in college.

The overall degree completion rate for black students at four-year publics was 50 percent, the center found, and about 56 percent for Hispanic students. In comparison, 71 percent of white students and 76 percent of Asian students earned a degree.

McPherson said the completion effort will be a big step for participating universities and the association, which is creating the new Center for Public University Transformation to manage its part of the project. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is



providing funding for the association's initial work for the project.

"It's the right thing to do," said McPherson. "We've got to do better."

The 100 universities will collaborate together in 10 "transformation clusters," APLU said. The association will act as a matchmaker in helping to create the clusters, which will be formed around universities with common priorities. Some might include groups of institutions within states or regions, peer universities across state lines, or universities that are working on common student success strategies, according to APLU.

The focus for the collaborations

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will be to expand the use of proven completion strategies. Those might include high-touch advising and student services, co-remediation services, completion grants for students, regional transfer pathways, gateway course redesigns, and other evidence-backed approaches.

"Our focus on scaling known strategies will keep the effort lean and nimble," APLU said, "and minimize the need for costly consultants and research studies."

### A Completion 'Movement'?

The project is still taking shape, according to the group, and decisions about which universities will participate in specific clusters have yet to be made.

In some ways the effort resembles the University Innovation Alliance, a coalition of 11 large public research universities that [formed about four years ago](#) to work together on improving graduation rates, also with a focus lower-income and underrepresented students.

The UIA, which includes the University of Texas at Austin, Arizona State University, Georgia State University and Ohio State University, has announced substantial gains in degree attainment. For example, after three years, the group said, its 11 campuses [were producing](#) 25 percent more low-income graduates per year, with 100,000 additional graduates over all projected by 2025.

Bridget Burns, the alliance's execu-

utive director, applauded the APLU project, describing the broader completion push by public universities as a growing movement.

"We've been trying to establish a drumbeat," she said. "This is all exactly what we hoped would happen."

UIA-style collaboration between research universities on academics remains relatively rare in a competitive industry, although Burns points to long-standing models like the Big Ten Academic Alliance. But increasing pressure on universities about completion rates, including by state lawmakers and in equity-minded university rankings like those produced by The Washington Monthly and The New York Times, seems to be spurring on more collaborative action.

In addition to the new APLU project, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities has [created a coalition](#) of 44 member institutions that are working on a student-success project focused on reimagining the first year of college. And the Gates-funded [Frontier Set](#) is a group of 30 colleges and universities, state systems and supporting organizations that are trying to improve student access and success.

"Working together is smarter and faster," said Burns.

Robert L. Caret, chancellor of the University System of Maryland and APLU's board chair, said collaboration is critical for student success and equity goals.

"From my personal vantage point, I have seen how collaboration between a public system and other state institutions produces important successes," Caret said via email, "as we see in Maryland by having seamless '2 + 2' partnerships with our state's community colleges so that students can easily transfer to the University System of Maryland's institutions and complete their four-year degree. There is similar potential for collaborative clusters to work effectively on a regional basis."

One of the easiest ways for a university to improve its graduation rate is to get more selective, which tends to mean fewer students who are low income or from minority groups. Likewise, pushing completion goals typically doesn't improve a university's research clout.

As a result, APLU's new project will need to thread a needle of competing interests, not to mention ever-tightening state budgets.

McPherson was confident that participating universities can improve completion rates and close achievement gaps while still striving to attract more research dollars and top students.

"There's real understanding that if you're going to broaden your numbers of low-income, less-prepared students, you need to put in effort to help them complete," he said, but adding that "I don't think degree completion will replace research, nor should it." ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/02/21/public-universities-band-together-completion-rates-and-achievement-gaps>



# Adults Reconnect in Tennessee

BY ASHLEY A. SMITH // APRIL 20, 2018

The state expands tuition-free scholarship beyond traditional-age students -- as other states follow suit -- and gets a larger than anticipated response from adult workers.



*Interest in Tenn.'s tuition-free program for adult students exceed expectations*

When Tennessee launched its free community college program four years ago, some questioned why recent high school graduates were the only ones to benefit.

Then last year, Bill Haslam, the state's Republican governor, [announced an expansion](#) of the widely heralded tuition-free benefit to all adult residents, in an initiative called Tennessee Reconnect.

Higher education officials in Tennessee expected 8,000 adults would apply for the scholarship. But as of April 18, nearly 12,000 have applied.

"Tennessee Promise changed the conversation about going to college in our state, and Tennessee Reconnect may be the next logical phase for having more Tennesseans with a college degree," said Mike Krause,

executive director of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

Tennessee isn't alone in trying to eliminate tuition for adult students.

The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, with nearly \$4 million in grants from the Lumina Foundation, is helping five states -- Indiana, Maine, Minnesota, Oklahoma and Washington -- develop pilot Promise programs

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aimed at adult students.

"At the time the grant was first given to us to use, it was a crazy concept, and now it's taken off in other states," said Andy Carlson, vice president of finance policy and member services at SHEEO.

As states and policy makers have started to examine their degree-attainment goals -- and the difficult paths to reaching them -- providing tuition scholarships for adults has become a less crazy idea, he said.

"There was a disconnect between what states needed to do to hit attainment goals and the popularity among lawmakers creating Promise programs for traditional students," Carlson said. "Policy

makers and states are starting to get this: if they are going to have the work force they need for the economy they desire, they're going to have to increase postsecondary degree attainment for some-college, no-degree students or adults who have no college education."

Tennessee isn't just giving out scholarships to qualified adults; it's also offering resources and information to help students be successful once they're enrolled. But to figure out what these students need, the state's higher education department needed to know more about them, beyond the fact that they're older than traditional just-out-of-high-school students. So

the Reconnect application included additional questions about potential students' highest level of education, time elapsed since they attended school, if they have internet access at home, whether they have children or reliable transportation, and which times they would be available to attend classes.

"The primary reason we're asking these question of the applicant is that we've also asked for an inventory along those lines of our institutions so we know what is offered at the Tennessee Reconnect community college," said Jessica Gibson, assistant executive director for adult learner initiatives for the commission.

### Reconnect Applicant Snapshot:

#### All Institutions

02/01/2018 - 04/18/2018

Total Applications Received this period = 11978

Income Level	
\$100,000 or more	5%
Between \$0-\$25,000	44%
Between \$25,001 and \$49,999	29%
Between \$50,000 and \$74,999	15%
Between \$75,000 and \$99,999	7%

Degree Attainment	
TCAT or Technical College	12%
Associate (2 year) degree	2%
Bachelor's (4 year) degree	1%
HS Diploma	84%
Master's degree or higher	0%

Internet Access	
Internet access at home	89%
Local library/free Wi-Fi	6%
Will use college/ins. Resources	3%
Do not have a computer	1%

Enrollment Status	
Attended in the past, not currently enrolled	37%
No college experience	32%
Currently enrolled	28%
N/A or no answer	4%

Class Preference	
Anytime	20%
Evenings (after 4 pm)	26%
Online	24%
Weekday daytime (8:00 am to 4:00 pm)	29%
Weekends	1%

Anticipated Employment Status	
Will work one full-time job	57%
Will work one part-time job	26%
Will not work while enrolled	14%
Will work multiple jobs	4%

Descriptives	
Average age	34.4
Percent with children	57%
Veterans	4.7%

### Reconnect Applicant Snapshot:

#### All Institutions

02/01/2018 - 04/18/2018

Top Counties by Applicants	
Shelby	1629
Davidson	1008
Knox	786
Rutherford	650
Hamilton	494
Sumner	460
Montgomery	335
Sullivan	252
Madison	234
Blount	233

Anticipated Challenges*	
Academic Preparation	9.7%
Family Responsibilities	30.5%
Finances	62.7%
Access to campus support services	2.0%
Physical or learning disability	3.2%
Time management	22.1%
Using required technology	2.9%
Work demands	27.7%

Applicants with Reliable Transportation	
No	1%
Yes	99%

Last Attended	
Less than 3 years ago	13%
Between 3 and 5 years ago	9%
Between 6 and 10 years ago	10%
More than 10 years ago	11%
Null or no answer	57%

\*Items in this sum to over 100% because applicants may select multiple challenges.

The program then maps those needs for each individual applicant onto a map connecting them to the available resources at the college they are applying to attend, she said.

"If they're a veteran, we give them information for a veteran center on campus," said Gibson. "If they have dependents and the college offers childcare or dollars for childcare, it's all presented right there up front."

So far, the state has learned that, of the adults who applied from February to mid-April, 57 percent will work full-time while attending classes, while 26 percent will work part-time and 4 percent will hold multiple jobs.

The system said 44 percent of applicants earn up to \$25,000 a year, while 29 percent earn between

\$25,001 and \$49,999. Thirty-two percent of applicants have no college experience. The majority of applicants reported having reliable transportation, while 62.5 percent said they anticipated that finances would be their No. 1 barrier to attending college.

"This belief that Americans aren't seeing the value of college just isn't true," Krause said. "Many Americans understand that a postsecondary credential is the path to higher wages. The numbers show that Tennesseans understand the way to have a high-skill job that is durable through a recession is by having a postsecondary credential ... and it might not be a bachelor's degree. It might be a short-term technical degree."

Gibson said she and other Tennessee officials expect the questionnaire to change over time.

Colleges were asked whether popular offices that oversee financial aid, veterans' services and student support were open on weekends or past 5 p.m. on weekdays. They also were asked about food pantries on campus, available childcare or adult-specific orientation.

"We had a lot of reaction to the questions," Gibson said, adding that institutions left blank their responses to questions they couldn't answer. "If they didn't fill out the particular piece, it doesn't mean they're not working on it, and when it exists we'll let students know."

Some institutions are creating

summer boot camps in writing and math for adult students, she said, or adding virtual advising and nontraditional hours -- initiatives the questionnaire didn't suggest --

before the first group of Reconnect students enrolls this fall.

Southwest Tennessee Community College in Memphis is designing accelerated courses in business and computer information around adult students.

"We do have to set it up for students to complete, and having a creative schedule for students is going to help," said Chris Ezell, vice president of academic affairs at the college. "We need to design our courses around students who are parents and need to get their children to school and come in to classes themselves. We need a consistent number of offerings in the evenings, so students can start a program or finish a program rather than take time off from work."

Ezell said the college is ready and has the capacity to handle the more than 1,600 adult applicants from Shelby County, where the college is located. Southwest Tennessee will be the only college in the state this



"We do have to set it up for students to complete, and having a creative schedule for students is going to help,"



classroom are valued in the classroom, they tend to participate more. And the more they participate in their learning, the more they will stick with it."

fall with a new funeral services program, which the college is expecting to be popular with older students, and officials also are expanding programs in allied health, business and career and technical education that are popular with adult learners.

"We think this will be key for economic development as we work toward having a well-prepared work force," Ezell said. "Tennessee Reconnect can provide a ready work force for businesses and industries looking to expand and locate in Shelby County."

Some of the colleges also are working on faculty development that focuses on adult students, Gibson said.

"We need to think about the role of faculty and how important that role is, because the adult learner's main connection to that campus is in the classroom, and that's where they gain a sense of whether or not they're college material," she said. "If their experiences from outside the

The program provides an additional layer of support with its Tennessee Reconnect Community Navigators. The state pays local people who are "institution neutral" to serve as navigators by working with adults from the moment they think about going to college until they graduate.

"What these navigators become varies based on the needs of the adult learner," Gibson said. "Some adults need higher-touch support, and they provide that. Some adults don't ... but part of the navigation process and the support that is provided is emotional and psychological, in a lot of these cases. So, when those adults are thinking, 'This is too much and I can't do it,' those navigators encourage them to reach out."

Adult learners who don't apply for the Reconnect scholarship still will benefit from adult-focused services, she said, including navigators, resource maps and additional initiatives the colleges provide for Reconnect students. ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/04/20/interest-tenns-tuition-free-program-adult-students-exceeds-expectations>



# It's All in the Data

BY MARK LIEBERMAN // NOVEMBER 8, 2017

The University System of Maryland's campuses boast diverse student bodies in terms of race, income and college preparedness. Officials believe new data collection standards will improve retention and graduation rates.



*Salisbury is one of the University System of Maryland's 12 campuses.*

PHILADELPHIA -- The University System of Maryland determined four years ago that it needed a unified strategy for improving student success through standardized data collection and analysis at its 12 campuses -- including the flagship University of Maryland campus near Washington, smaller rural locations and historically black colleges. While

the main campus maintains a highly selective enrollment process, some others with large proportions of minority and low-income students struggle with lower retention and graduation rates.

"We [needed] to understand ... what does it mean when we put interventions into place?" said M.J. Bishop, director of the system's center for

academic innovation, during a panel at last week's Educause conference here. "How do we know whether or not we're making a difference when we put these interventions into place?"

What followed was a process of introspection and realignment that the system's leaders believe has moved the campuses toward a level

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playing field: standardizing disparate definitions for student success data and identifying areas where students need more help than they're getting, particularly in the classroom and before they arrive on campus for the first time.

### Evolving Priorities

The system's Board of Regents convened an academic innovation task force years earlier to address

what Bishop said during the Edu-cause conference was "low-hanging fruit" -- issues of effectiveness and efficiency including pursuing energy certification for campus buildings, fixing procurement systems and printing fewer documents on paper.

The focus then shifted to the ongoing desire to close achievement gaps for students. The system wanted to get away from what Bishop called

"rearview mirror" analysis -- wondering why, for example, a student left an institution after two years -- and toward taking proactive steps to improve learners' academic experiences and ensure retention.

The system campuses have significant variation in retention and graduation rates, according to 2016 data, the most recent available on the system's website. Data from three

	2-year retention	4-year retention	4-year graduation	6-year graduation
<b>Coppin State University</b>	61%	38%	9%	17%
<b>Frostburg University</b>	76%	56%	27%	47%
<b>University of Maryland College Park</b>	95%	87%	66%	85%

### UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF MARYLAND

campuses are listed below.

Each Maryland campus has its own corporate partner for data collection -- among them EAB (formerly Education Advisory Board), Civitas, Blackboard and several others -- but until recently the system had no easy way to compare the data or understand the information on a global level.

"Nothing seemed to be really looking at ways that we could capitalize on the collective power of the analytics across the system and begin

building upon that kind of information," Bishop said.

One of the biggest obstacles, according to Bishop, was the lack of standard definitions for terms like "retention" and "success." Because each institution had its own metrics, identifying trends was virtually impossible.

### Taking Concrete Steps

For help addressing those issues, the system turned to the Predictive Analytics Reporting framework, an initiative funded by the Bill & Melinda

Gates Foundation that offers support for institutions looking to organize data collection. The PAR framework identified traditional sticking points for creating common data definitions, which meant the system could skip ahead to fixing those definitions.

"Unless you started to have conversations about it and realized 'I thought everybody defined retention this way,' you wouldn't have unearthed this problem," Bishop said.

Five institutions in the system -- Bowie State University, University

## Promoting Student Success

of Maryland Eastern Shore, Coppin State University, Frostburg State University and University of Maryland University College -- opted for full implementation of the PAR framework last year. Those institutions were the ones within the system -- including three historically black colleges and an online university -- that most needed funding support for data collection, according to Bishop. The remaining seven forged ahead with data collection and analysis initiatives, akin to the PAR framework, that were already in progress.

In January 2016 the entire system started making use of PAR's Student Success Matrix, an inventory form that asks institutions to provide information about their formalized intervention procedures for students at four stages of their academic careers: connection (between acceptance and arrival), entry, progress and completion.

That process revealed a few key trends. Most interventions at the Maryland campuses were aimed at students during the entry stage, with far fewer influencing them at connection and completion. The inventory revealed that zero interventions were in place at the faculty level. Redundancies frequently popped up, with similar orientation programs offered

through numerous academic departments within an institution when only one was necessary.

"That was really surprising to us, since students spend most time with faculty members," Kimberly Whitehead, interim provost and vice president at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, said at Educause.

At Bowie State, for instance, the inventory highlighted that the institution's three tutoring centers don't communicate or coordinate with one another.

"We're now having conversations to bring this all together," Gayle Fink, Bowie State's assistant vice president for institutional effectiveness, said during the conference. "We wouldn't have done this if we didn't have a common framework."

Based on the inventory, Maryland's academic innovation team this spring recommended several approaches for improving student success initiatives systemwide:

- Adding more connection interventions
- Developing a more systematic approach for data sharing going forward
- Establishing a central repository for data collection
- Creating and designing templates for future interventions

## More Work to Be Done

Those changes won't happen overnight, Bishop said in a phone interview. Administrative and faculty leaders need to be consulted. Institutions with full subscriptions to the PAR framework have more intensive studies to conduct. The system's Board of Regents will expect more quantitative data to back up the qualitative analysis that's already been gathered.

"It's about getting regents to be willing to take a 10-page report that describes the institutions' reflections on these things, what they're going to do about it -- a more meaningful and actionable exercise," Bishop said.

For other systems looking to undertake a similar process, Bishop recommends ensuring that plenty of administrators look at the data, and that a centralized office oversees disparate data efforts. Still, giving campuses wide latitude has paid off so far, she said.

"It was not about going in and saying, 'Everybody must use Civitas,' trying to do something from the top down -- that never would have worked," Bishop said. "I hope we helped to make things explicit that weren't necessarily readily seen prior to that in terms of the lack of collecting data." ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2017/11/08/university-system-maryland-standardizes-data-collection-improve>

# Pushing for Graduation in Four

BY GRACE BIRD // MARCH 21, 2018

Texas A&M University at San Antonio pushes students to earn 15 credits a semester -- a task that may not be easy when many have responsibilities at home.

Full-time students are more likely to graduate than part-time ones, according to a [growing body of research](#). And seemingly, the fuller a course load, the better: students who take 15 credits a semester are more likely to graduate than their classmates who take 12 -- since an average of 15 per semester ensures a degree in four years.

The idea has been pushed by various state and federal lawmakers in the past -- the Obama administration backed the "15 to Finish" campaign about [two years ago](#). However, critics say the approach can fail to consider students with jobs and other responsibilities at home.

In keeping with the notion that momentum spurs graduation, Texas A&M University at San Antonio, which was originally a transfer-only institution enrolling junior- and senior-level students from community colleges, stepped up efforts to encourage students to take 15 credit hours per semester after it began enrolling fresh-

men in 2016. More than half -- 53.6 percent -- of its students are currently enrolled part-time.

Most students at the university are first generation (78 percent) and low income (81 percent qualify for financial aid), from underrepresented minority backgrounds (about 70 percent identify as Latino). Also, the majority are commuters -- the college opened its first residence hall in August -- meaning they may not use academic services as often as students at other universities who live on campus. Historically, students with these demographic characteristics tend not to graduate on time, and many don't get to graduation.

In 2016 the university started its "finish in four" graduation pledge. Kimberly Nañez, director of the student success office, said graduating in four years benefits students financially, in keeping costs down, as well as academically, in ensuring that their educations continue uninterrupted. The pledge program accepted 92



*Students at Texas A&M at San Antonio*

students in fall 2017, up from about 30 last spring.

"We are trying to increase engagement and persistence. If students are in 15 hours per semester, they are more likely to engage in on-campus activities and persist with us," Nañez said.

Students must take an average of 15 credits a semester (not including summer courses) to graduate in four



## Promoting Student Success

years -- taking 12 will leave students 24 credits shy after four years. But for students with jobs and other responsibilities, full-time study may not be feasible.

The majority of students at Texas A&M San Antonio come from low-income, first-generation and minority backgrounds, and many work part-time. Luz Cano falls into this category. The 23-year-old education major, who takes 12 credits a semester, balances her study with raising two children and holding a job as an elementary school substitute teacher. While Cano manages her time carefully, fitting her classes into two days a week, she said she often works late into the night.

"I would love to take 15 credits if I didn't work," Cano said via email. "I could just focus on school. Since that is not the case, I try to juggle work, school, homework, projects, my kids and life. Although I wish I could do more, taking 12 credits is within my capability and my comfort zone."

Although San Antonio has a disproportionate number of students like Cano, who have significant responsibilities in addition to their studies, the college is pushing students to graduate on time. Those in the "finish in four" program are assigned an advis-

er to offer guidance on which classes they should take to stay on track toward their goals, as well as help minimize the costs of tuition and debt. To qualify, students must be in the first semester of their freshman year and be taking 15 credits.

The program is considered to be a "deal" between teacher and student. To continue in the program, students must complete an average of 15 credits a semester, maintain at least a 2.5 grade point average, refrain from taking leave and notify the university when a required course isn't available. In return, the university pledges to offer students all required courses necessary to graduate, provide an academic adviser to regularly assist in class scheduling and give financial aid by the census date.

"We know the prerequisites, the best classes to take -- but they may not know," Nañez said. "It's not always possible for students to take 15 credits, but it's definitely preferable."

To assess the results of efforts to encourage on-time graduation, the university compared how many credits freshmen in the 2016 and 2017 cohorts took. Of students in the 2016 cohort (not just those in the program), 78 took 15 credit hours or more, and 479 took 12 hours or more. In 2017,

124 students took 15 credit hours or more, while 547 enrolled in 12 hours or more. In addition, students who took 15 or more hours in their first semester achieved a slightly higher grade point average than their counterparts who took 12 to 14 hours. In terms of retention rates, 86.5 percent of students who started in fall 2016 continued to the spring semester, while 68.2 percent enrolled in a second year.

The college has extended its services to family members of students, to help relatives who may not have pursued higher education understand its demands. An initiative named after the college mascot, the Jaguar family program, includes orientations, a newsletter and volunteer opportunities to include and inform parents.

The "family first" program, a free, nine-week, hourlong seminar, teaches parents of first-generation students about how the university works and how best to support their children. "Many of our students have full-time jobs, huge responsibilities. They have competing responsibilities at home," Ashley Spicer-Runnels, assistant vice president for student success, said. "We have tried to put mechanisms in place to help them be more resilient." ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/03/21/texas-am-university-san-antonio-encourages-students-graduate-four-years>

# Making 4-Year Graduation the Goal

BY GRACE BIRD // MARCH 1, 2018

UNC Asheville is building a program offering free summer tuition after sophomore and junior years to those who need an extra course or two to finish on time.



UNC ASHEVILLE

Many students no longer enjoy summers off, and some colleges are seeing this months-long break as key to promoting on-time graduation. But the cost of attending classes may discourage students from enrolling in the summer.

The University of North Carolina at Asheville has come up with a remedy: free summer courses. The university is offering students who

are one or two classes shy of junior or senior status (60 or 90 credits) free summer courses to encourage them to complete the 120 credits required to graduate in four years. The six-year graduation rate at Asheville is 60 percent, according to Deaver Traywick, interim senior director of student success. And the four-year rate, according to the U.S. Education Department, is just

under 40 percent.

The second, expanded pilot, called the "first to finish" program, covers tuition for four general education courses, each worth four credits, in the summertime (HUM 214, Communities and Selves; HUM 324, The Modern World; and HUM 414, The Individual in the Contemporary World; and ARTS 310, Arts and Ideas). According to

## Promoting Student Success

Traywick, the university selected these courses because they help fulfill the university's [liberal arts core](#) requirements. Undergraduate summer school classes at Asheville cost \$288.80 per credit hour for in-state residents and \$610.80 for out-of-state residents.

This year, the program has expanded significantly, with Asheville set to offer 75 to 100 students one or two summer classes. The initiative is funded by a \$95,000 grant from the University of North Carolina system.

Last summer, the university accepted 23 of 38 applicants to the original pilot, the "back on track" program, after advertising directly to 148 individuals who met the requirements and were one or two courses away from being seniors at the end of their junior year. Of the 23 students, 19 are on track to graduate this May. The program was funded by a \$31,500 grant from the state university

system; individual packages averaged \$1,369 each. While Asheville pledged to cover room and board as well, all 23 students had housing arrangements and didn't need that money.

Asheville's interim chancellor, Joseph Urgo, said that the pro-

only college in the state university system to offer free summer tuition to rising seniors. But according to Andrew P. Kelly, senior vice president for strategy and policy at the system, the initiative may pilot at other UNC campuses. Western Carolina University announced a

similar [program](#) recently -- the college is set to offer 70 scholarships of \$500 each to matriculating low-income students or those who attended the school for a year but have yet to earn 30 credits,



The program focuses on low-income, rural and first-generation students. Of the 23 students selected last year, two were from rural counties and 10 were eligible for Pell Grants at some point during their enrollment.



gram focuses on low-income, rural and first-generation students. Of the 23 students selected last year, two were from rural counties and 10 were eligible for Pell Grants at some point during their enrollment.

To Urgo, graduating in four years has both academic and psychological benefits. "It can change your personal narrative," he said.

At the moment, Asheville is the

to attend six to eight credit hours' worth of summer school.

Kelly said Asheville's program is a "smart idea" because it challenges the traditional academic calendar and gives juniors "a bit of a nudge to stay on track."

"Many of our institutions are interested in this and we're actively considering ways to leverage the full calendar," Kelly said. "Asheville is a really important test case." ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/03/01/asheville-expands-program-encourage-time-graduation>

# Unprepared and Confused

BY JEREMY BAUER-WOLF // JANUARY 17, 2018

A new study says students don't feel confident they can find a job or succeed when they land one.

Few college students feel expressly confident that they have the skills and knowledge to find a job or succeed in a workplace, [according to a new study](#).

The report from Gallup and Strada Education Network, a former loan guarantor that expanded its mission last year, represents one of the most comprehensive compilations of students' opinions on this subject -- and the results are "disappointing," representatives from the organizations say.

"Students are not nearly as prepared as they could or should be, and they actually know it while they're in college," said Brandon Busteed, executive director of Gallup's higher education division.

More than 32,500 students from 43 randomly selected four-year institutions, both public and private, responded to the survey last year. About 34 percent of those students

indicated they were confident that they would graduate with the know-how to succeed in the job market, and 36 percent said they believed they had the skills and knowledge to be successful in their careers.

A little more than half of students thought their major could lead to a "good job."

Students who studied liberal arts were the least confident in their knowledge and skills and their job prospects. Only 28 percent of liberal arts students reported they were confident that their knowledge and skills could lead to success in the job market, per the study. Science, technology, mathematics and engineering majors expressed the most confidence that their major would lead to a job (62 percent). While the study categorized STEM as separate from liberal arts, it's also the case that some science and mathematics majors are considered liberal arts majors



by many.

Also of note was that as students progressed through college, their confidence in their skills and possibly landing a job diminished. About 56 percent of first-year students were assured their major could result in a good job, but that dropped to 51 percent for senior students.

Many students reported they didn't take advantage of the traditional services to help them in these areas, such as career centers. Nearly 40 percent of students never visited their college's career center, accord-



ing to the report. The report did not address why students didn't visit the career centers.

Students expressed more confidence when they had talked to an academic adviser or a

faculty member about their careers, though. About 57 percent of the students who said a professor or another staff member started a conversation with them about a job felt confident in finding a job after graduation.

First-generation college students, students who aren't white and students over the typical college age -- defined in the report as older than 24 -- all took advantage of their institutional resources more than others did, or reported that they were more helpful for them.

For instance, both black and Hispanic students reported more than white students that their academic advisers were helpful in selecting courses, choosing a major and identifying career opportunities.

About 39 percent of white students said their adviser was helpful in picking a major, versus 45 percent of black students and 40 percent of Hispanic students.

Colleges should invest in training for their faculty so they can discuss careers with students, said Busted.



Students are not nearly as prepared as they could or should be, and they actually know it while they're in college,...



rics -- meaning students reporting positive interactions with staff and faculty -- there are institutions that value and emphasize very intentionally moving the needles on these

"These are not high-cost things that universities can do," he said. "Educating faculty, telling faculty you can make a big difference."

But colleges should not entirely move away from the formal channels of helping students, such as career centers, said Carol D'Amico, executive vice president of mission advancement and philanthropy at Strada, which focuses on underserved populations.

Many of these minority populations rely on advisers and the centers, as the data reveals, D'Amico said.

Asked how much responsibility the institutions have to remedy this issue, or if it is primarily student perception, Busted said that data not included in the report showed that institutions vary vastly in how well they handle career help.

He declined to name which colleges had more success with their programs.

"The fact that there is a huge spread in performance, that there are some doing very well on these met-

aspects," Busted said.

Other findings from the report:

- Students 24 years old or older believed they had the skills to successfully navigate the job market (41 percent) more than did their younger counterparts (32 percent).
- Only 44 percent of students younger than 24 said they would enroll in the institution they selected if they had to pick again.
- About 53 percent of students younger than 24 would select the same major if they could have a redo.
- A small number of students have visited their career center frequently -- about 7 percent have gone four to five times, and another 9 percent have dropped in more than five times.
- About 18 percent of students said the career center was helpful in applying for a job for after graduation. ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/01/17/study-college-students-dont-have-confidence-theyll-land-job>



## CUSTOMER

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## CHALLENGES

- Retroactive calculations—using 468 individual spreadsheets—created an administrative nightmare.
- Manual payments were causing significant risks.
- With no department self-service, administrators were spending disproportionate amounts of time entering data into Excel spreadsheets.
- Current environment lacked integrations between finance, HR, and payroll, preventing a clear view of these critical functions.

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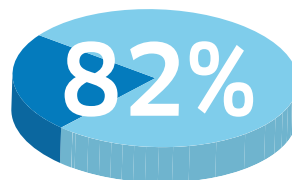
**350+**

Annual hours eliminated for 2 FTE's to complete the load process

## WORKDAY PAYROLL RESULTS

**31% Reduction**

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**Reduction** in payroll groups



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# Views

A selection of essays and op-eds

## Creating Social Change and Student Success

BY KEVIN KRUGER AND CATHERINE PARKAY // DECEMBER 18, 2017

Kevin Kruger and Catherine Parkay suggest three ways higher education can successfully use behavioral science to increase student completion.

In 2001, more than a quarter of American teenagers [smoked](#). Smoking-related illness was the leading cause of preventable death in America, yet the public health community remained unable to achieve a large-scale reduction in teen smoking. Even explicit warnings about the deadly consequences of lighting up seemed to have only a negligible impact.

It wasn't until a team of social marketers, working with the American Legacy Foundation, tried an unorthodox approach that real progress was made to combat this seemingly intractable challenge. Instead of threatening teens, they used a social call to action, encouraging youth to reject manipulation by tobacco corporations. Teens, re-

search found, craved a feeling of social acceptance mixed with rebellion -- and the anticorporate message fulfilled that desire. Thanks in part to efforts like the [truth campaign](#) and the application of behavioral science, public health leaders have been able to significantly reduce teen smoking.

Behavioral science has gone mainstream across all sectors and represents a powerful underlying force in consumer life, from browsing music to planning travel online. Improving social outcomes sometimes requires counterintuitive tactics. Higher education professionals, too, have an opportunity to deploy behavior science principles and techniques to help solve the seminal challenges in postsecondary ed-



iSTOCK/DrAfter123

ucation: increasing completion and closing achievement gaps.

Here are a few simple strategies for applying those principles and techniques to improve student support and nurture stronger outcomes.

**Flip the script on stigma and**

## Promoting Student Success

**peer pressure.** Students who don't succeed in college and graduate might have done so if they'd only received the proper support. Colleges and universities usually offer that support, but one of the challenges facing student affairs professionals is that a stigma is often attached to such services. Students feel that taking advantage of support is a sign of weakness or defeat -- or that support is something to seek out only if you're in significant trouble.

Yet the reality is that all students, even the most high-performing ones, can benefit from a helping hand, and that it's typical and beneficial to engage with these services. To alleviate stigma and promote the

use of support services, student affairs professionals can use data and information about student peer groups to make support-seeking behavior the norm, not an exception.

For example, one institution texts incoming students a graphic showing why current students reach out to student affairs staff. The reasons included needing a sounding board for an important decision, wanting to explore career options before selecting a major and desiring to celebrate an important academic milestone. Students have also received texts with factoids, such as the percentage of peers who already contacted their advisers.

In addition, the college shares the results of a survey showing that students who had at least one meeting with their success coach were less stressed and had higher grade point averages. By pre-empting concerns of students who might look at campus services as a crutch, institutions can promote higher overall engagement across a broader range of students.

**Use nudges to stimulate contingency planning.** The old adage



Those resources support students in developing plans for common issues, such as unplanned expenses, loss of child-care services or a work-related emergency that might derail their participation in classes.



that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure applies as strongly to student success as it does in health and wellness. That is especially true for the growing majority of post-traditional students who are either first-generation college-goers or are balancing their studies with busy lives full of work, family and other commitments. A simple invitation to do a little contingency planning can make all the difference before life events threaten to derail a student's progress.

One student services team approaches this challenge by providing simple planning tools: short videos combined with a worksheet or

checklist. Those resources support students in developing plans for common issues, such as unplanned expenses, loss of child care services or a work-related emergency that might derail their participation in classes, campus activities or homework. To encourage students to engage with those resources, they send text messages along the lines of, "Want to be less stressed and avoid life getting in the way of your studies? Students who spent five

minutes with this simple planning tool say it made a big difference."

**Make motivation and reflection a daily part of the student experience.** One thing is certain: every student's academic jour-

ney has its ups and downs, and quitting becomes an easy way out when goals are abstract, unclear or distant. Staying connected to one's core motivation for pursuing education and taking time to reflect on the wins and lessons is vital for success.

One student success coach we know has some handy tips for

keeping students motivated and connected to their purpose. She asks incoming students to find an image that represents how their life will be better with a credential -- maybe a photo related to their dream job or a picture of the kids they'll be offering a better life. She then has them make



## Promoting Student Success

it the home screen image on their phone, so they are reminded every day of why the struggle matters. To encourage reflection during the year, she often sends her students a text such as, "Did you know that Michael Jordan didn't make his high school varsity basketball team until his junior year? Think of a time you didn't hit your goal. How did it make you stronger?"

When a student's goals are clearly grounded in their own interests and passions, overcoming challenges becomes its own reward.

These are just a few examples of the many innovative ways that student affairs professionals around the country are applying behavioral

science to college access, retention and completion efforts. Slowly but surely, student success experts and researchers are beginning to see these efforts pay off. For example,

“When a student's goals are clearly grounded in their own interests and passions, overcoming challenges becomes its own reward.”

economists Caroline Hoxby from Stanford University and Sarah Turner from the University of Virginia and Stanford University are showing how behavioral science principles can [improve student enrollment decisions](#). Similarly, former First Lady [Michelle Obama's Up Next initiative](#)

is entering its third year of using [the same mobile messaging tactics](#) used by successful tech companies to streamline the financial aid and enrollment process and reduce summer melt.

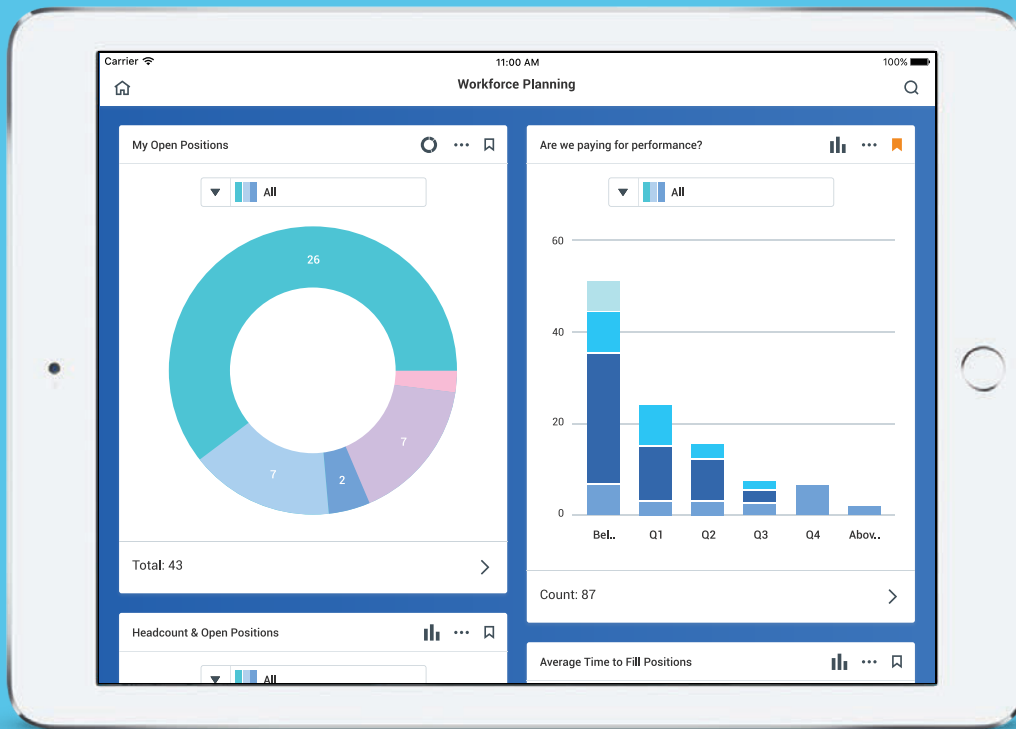
To be sure, achieving social change on a large scale starts with individual behavior. If there were ever a challenge that called out for such an approach, improving college completion would be it. By embracing the surprising insights and sometimes counterintuitive choices that behavioral science has to offer, higher education practitioners are tackling education's biggest challenges at their roots -- and beginning to show real progress. ■

### Bio

Kevin Kruger is president of NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. Catherine Parkay is research programs director at InsideTrack.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/12/18/applying-behavioral-science-techniques-improve-student-graduation-rates-opinion>

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# Where Analytics Go Wrong

BY JEFFREY AIRD // SEPTEMBER 13, 2017

Jeff Aird says until higher ed uses analytics in a self-aware and brutally honest way, it can't fix the growing problems with student success and retention.

Colleges and universities have traditionally looked at completion and achievement gaps through an institutional lens. We naturally look outward to identify most problems. We see a K-12 system that produces depressingly low levels of college preparation. We see "at-risk" students with full-time jobs, family pressures and unrealistic expectations.

But what would happen if, instead, we looked at the institution through the lens of the at-risk student? What would they see as the problem? What could they teach us about our institutions?

Most student analytics initiatives follow an interventionist model. Students follow the traditional admissions and enrollment process until at some critical point they act in such a way that suggests their likelihood of success has declined. This behavior could include hav-

ing done poorly on an early exam, missing a few class periods, dropping a course, or not meeting with their adviser. Algorithms and statistical models identify these markers and signal the institution that intervention is needed. The hope is that this "just-in-time" extra support will meet the students when they most need it and help them solve their problem.

The trouble with this model is that it focuses on building new processes to fix the student's problem. It largely ignores what we can do to keep students from becoming at risk in the first place.

The interventionist model, at least as played out at most community colleges, assumes that students bring with them unique and individual characteristics and background, which, when played out in the higher education system, predispose them to become at risk for failure.

The belief is not only that the power of analytics can identify these students early enough, but also that these large, bulky and bureaucratic institutions can customize individual interventions to increase the likelihood of completion.

When a recent vendor of student analytics software explained to me that his tool could "identify which students are unlikely to return next semester," I couldn't help but let out a small chuckle. I responded by saying, "Yeah, it's not that hard; just start pointing." Community colleges interact with students in nonlinear ways and often experience more than 50 percent turnover of students every year. I didn't need help finding the at-risk students. They were everywhere. I needed to better understand why the systems and processes in our college were not already helping them.

What if we could genuinely view

our institutions through the lens of at-risk students? What do students think as they fill out the application? Why do they decide to take a certain course? How do they feel about the assignments they are given? We would begin to see that the choices, behaviors and actions we deem “at risk” are often explained as natural and even expected outcomes given the way we design their experience. We would discover that much of the student success problem resides not in at-risk behavior, but rather the business model, systems and processes that produce at-risk students and then try to fix them.

Perhaps we don't need to intervene with students, but rather with ourselves?

### Exposing Institutional Problems

We need a new business process: one that better matches the needs, desires and expectations of our students. Instead of trying to fix the student, we would put our efforts on exposing and solving the institution's problems. We need to let our student success problem solve ourselves.

Could we transition our efforts at implementing an interventionist analytics model to a formative process model? A formative student analytics model focuses on looking at the

institution through the student lens. Shift the focus from creating new supplemental support systems to improving or eliminating the existing processes. Imagine having intricate, detailed and actionable information about all students as they are going through our admissions, orientation, classes, food services, advising, midterms, registration,

Bonchek is not an educator, but his message rings true to those who serve community colleges. While community colleges are admittedly a more recent development (at least compared to their university peers), they were built upon a nearly ancient educational model. This model certainly is not obsolete, but, to borrow from Bonchek, “it is decidedly incomplete.”

The single greatest challenge faced by community colleges is unlearning the assumptions of structure, design and organization that are nearly ubiquitous. The

sector is permeated with obsolete mental models. We see a K-12 system that produces depressingly low college preparation. We see at-risk students with full-time jobs, family pressures and unrealistic expectations. While these factors are largely true, by putting them as the focus of our interventions, we block a perspective of a true self-reflection needed to improve organizational design.

Too many of us see a perfect educational model with broken students. If we could unlearn our current model, we would discover that much of the student success problem resides not in at-risk behavior, but rather the organizational model itself. Think of it -- we have a model in which nearly four in five stu-

“What if we could genuinely view our institutions through the lens of at-risk students? What do students think as they fill out the application? Why do they decide to take a certain course?”

etc. We could learn from the students how to make those processes better, how to improve their learning and how to increase engagement.

What if this information was readily available to both front-line staff and managers to learn from, respond to and improve by? What if we could build a system so student-centric that few students actually ever became at risk? What if we built a system that works for at-risk students rather than trying to help them through a system that creates them?

### New Rules Required

This will require what Mark Bonchek calls “unlearning” in his November 2016 *Harvard Business Review* article “Why the Problem With Learning Is Unlearning.”



## Promoting Student Success

dents are at risk. We intentionally funnel students into a system we know isn't built for them and then we try to "intervene" around the edges to plug the holes. Instead of trying to fix the students, we need to put our efforts into unlearning the model.

We treat students as passive consumers even when they would rather be co-creators in a mean-



If we could unlearn our current model, we would discover that much of the student success problem resides not in at-risk behavior, but rather the organizational model itself.



ingful educational experience. We continue to operate as a linear and transactional model even though students don't interact with us in a linear fashion. It's admittedly scary

nity colleges.

Until we use analytics in a self-aware and brutally honest way, we will only be working around the margins. ■

and unclear how we embrace the nonlinearity of the learning journey, but as we shift to focus on building continuous learning-centered relationships with students, we will more fully meet our purpose as commu-

### Bio

Jeff Aird is vice president for institutional effectiveness at Salt Lake Community College.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/views/2017/09/13/analytics-alone-cant-improve-student-success-and-retention>

# Collaborating to Find Solutions Out of Remediation

BY W. THEORY THOMPSON AND DANAE MCLEOD // JANUARY 24, 2018

We should better inform students about the placement exam and allow them to retest after they've received more instruction, write W. Theory Thompson and Danae McLeod.

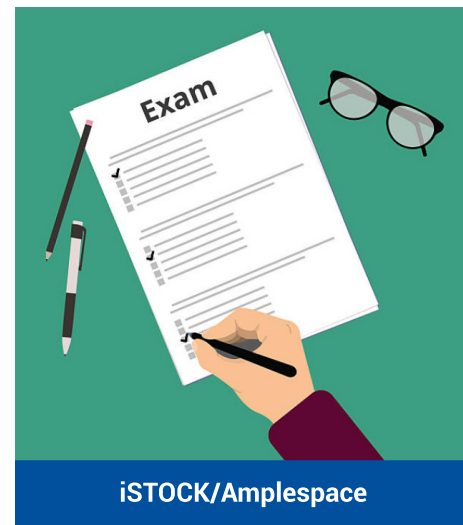
The problems surrounding remedial college requirements have been receiving a lot of attention lately. The conversation often focuses on the rising costs students pay for these classes and the high attrition rates.

The fact is that many students who enter community colleges need remediation. A 2016 [study](#) by the Center for Community College Engagement found 68 percent of students enter with at least one developmental class requirement. A [report](#) by Education Reform Now diagnoses the main problem as a deficient high school education that underprepares students to enter college-level courses. But community colleges play a significant role in locking students into these courses by outdated approaches to placement testing and by failing to alert and inform students about the

college entrance exam.

Many students entering community colleges show up to take college placement tests in reading, writing and math with little to no preparation. They do not know what is at stake: performing poorly lands students in remedial classes that will cost them a lot of money and significantly increase the chances that they will drop out.

When students don't do well on the SAT or ACT, they can pay to take the test again. But community college placement exams usually do not allow retesting and students are stuck with remediation if they have scored poorly on their first attempt. Indeed, an average student who shows up to take the college placement exam with no preparation will land in multiple levels of remediation in math, reading and writing.



A student with such remedial requirements will have to complete 24 (non)-credits of class time. It will take a full-time student one year to complete those requirements, draining their financial aid for credit-bearing classes and weakening their resolve to stay in college.

As members of communi-

ty-based organizations in the Bronx, we work with low-income, first-generation college students, and we are acutely aware of the issues surrounding community college placement-testing practices. Many of

the students with whom we work -- students with high school equivalency degrees, returning adult students and students attending night school ([Young Adult Borough Centers](#)) to earn their diplomas -- require significant educational intervention to pass the college placement exam.

Our advocacy group, [Bronx Opportunity Network](#), consists of seven community-based organizations working toward college persistence and completion for Bronx residents. We provide college-level instruction to help our students start college with the least amount of remediation possible. We have been collaborating with City University of New York community colleges, in particular, to help improve their remediation programs.

Bringing in students with fewer remedial requirements is an especially pressing issue for CUNY colleges because of the expansion of [ASAP](#) (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs) in CUNY institutions. Students in ASAP receive more academic and financial supports to ensure they graduate within three years, but they're only eligible if they



“Meeting students where they are is a significant factor in making sure they stay in college and graduate.”



accountability, helping them to persist together. And those of us who work in community-based organizations and also serve as adjunct professors at CUNY community colleges

have no more than one remedial requirement. A study of incoming students in 2016 at Bronx Community College by the Office of [Institutional Research and Testing](#) reported that only 9 percent of students who took the college placement test were exempt from remediation -- leaving 91 percent of incoming students in remediation.

Through our collaborative work with CUNY, we have developed strategies to shift students seamlessly from our college-bridge programs into college. One major coordinated effort is that our students can take a group retest of the college placement exam after completing a bridge program. That agreement allows us to know where our students score initially and to tailor our curriculum so they learn what they need to pass the college placement exam.

Another initiative invites students to test out of remediation once they're in college through free summer and winter intensive math and writing workshops at the community colleges. We send our students to CUNY colleges in cohorts to increase the sense of community and

teach first-year seminar classes so that our students continue learning from us on campus. We are pleased with the results so far: our students enter college with fewer remediation requirements, the ability to start earning credits immediately and higher retention [rates](#).

The problem of remediation in our education system should be addressed on a nationwide level. We hope to see a more significant shift away from remediation and toward [corequisite classes](#) following the model of [Guttman Community College](#). But until more significant reform occurs, we have two primary recommendations for the collaborative work that community colleges and community-based organizations can do to ameliorate the problem of remediation as it currently stands.

**Better inform students about preparation options for the placement exam.** Community colleges need to do a better job of informing students about the placement exam and the repercussions of performing poorly. Students who know that they are going to be tested perform better than students who are simply

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assigned a test date in their admissions letter.

In 2016, the admissions office at Bronx Community College started talking about the importance of preparation for the college placement exam at new students' information sessions and then scheduled students for test-prep workshops automatically instead of making it optional. After instituting that practice, they saw a significant increase (an estimated 10 percent) in students testing out of the lowest level of remediation. It should be noted that the test-prep workshop offered by Bronx Community College and Hostos Community College focuses on test-taking strategies and computer use, not on academic preparation.

Also, since community colleges don't prepare students academically to take the exam, we recommend

that they route students to agencies that offer college-bridge services. Community-based organizations have the capacity to prepare students to start college, and community colleges need this service. We know that better coordination of those referrals will help more students enter college with fewer remedial requirements.

**Allow students to retest after they have received interventional instruction.** Students should not be locked into courses based on their initial placement test scores. In higher education, we don't require that the ACT and SAT be taken only once, and we shouldn't be putting such restrictions on community college placement exams. Students who perform poorly on their exams should be allowed to retest.

We understand that allowing a retest for all students could sig-

nificantly flood an already overburdened system. So our recommendation, for now, is that students who enroll in a college-bridge program should be allowed to retest after they have received a certified number of interventional instruction hours. To make that happen, community colleges could certify more community-based organizations to provide interventional instruction and direct students who test into remediation to them.

Meeting students where they are is a significant factor in making sure they stay in college and graduate. Both community colleges and community-based organizations are working to better educate students. We must establish strong collaborative partnerships to deepen our impact as well as to allow students to make use all of the resources available to them. ■

### Bio

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2018/01/24/two-practical-recommendations-improving-remediation-essay>



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