MANAGING THE STUDENT LIFECYCLE

A selection of *Inside Higher Ed* articles and essays
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INSIDE
HIGHER ED

The Importance of Student Lifecycle Management

Supporting learners during every stage of the student lifecycle is a "must have" competence, required of any successful higher education institution in today's demanding environment. Providing a valuable experience at every stage of the student lifecycle allows institutions to advance their mission and achieve strategic goals in the areas of growth, intelligence, quality, and efficiency.

Today's higher education market is evolving rapidly, with unprecedented forces exerting pressure on colleges and universities. Institutions are facing a range of threats that create a bleak outlook. Factors like increased competition, decreased funding, higher student expectations, and smaller applicant pools can create large challenges for institutions. On the student side, rising costs, tight job markets, and challenging demographic trends make the prospect of higher education equally daunting.

With one-third of all students changing institutions without earning a degree[1] and 70% of states transitioning or in discussions about transitioning to performance-based funding[2], higher education professionals are being asked how their institution can offer a brighter future for prospective students.

Now more than ever, administrators are being asked to achieve greater results with fewer resources and to shed light on strategies for improving the efficiency of their institutions. Hobsons understands the daunting challenges that higher education institutions face and partners with them to place the student at the center of their activities and to provide solutions that can become the center of their business processes – ultimately maximizing student success and institutional effectiveness.

We hope these articles and essays by respected experts provide you with a greater understanding of the importance of developing a student lifecycle strategy and providing a valuable experience to each student throughout their academic progress. And we hope you will join us in our mission of maximizing student success and institutional effectiveness to create the world changers of tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Todd Gibby
President, Hobsons Higher Ed

[1]Pew Research Center

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INTRODUCTION

In the now distant past, many colleges figured that they had an unending supply of would-be students, certainly more than enough to fill classes. If some dropped out, there would be others to take their places.

Today, colleges have moved to a very different attitude, recognizing that the students who might most benefit may not think to apply or enroll, and that poor retention and graduation rates waste resources of colleges and human potential of students. For many colleges, falling enrollment can upset their tuition-dependent budgets. Colleges nationwide – public and private – are focused on attracting students (or specific groups of students) and identifying ways to promote completion.

Orientation is now longer simply explaining the rules. Advising is no longer just about filing the right forms by set deadlines. Rather, every part of the student experience is receiving scrutiny – from policy makers, foundations, parents and students themselves. The goal is getting students to graduation – and, in many cases, to graduate school.

The pages that follow feature news articles on the challenges colleges are facing, and some of the ways they are responding. We look forward to continuing to track progress on these issues.

Do you have ideas about programs that deserve attention, or new issues that need addressing? Or reactions to this compilation of articles? E-mail editor@insidehighered.com

Recruitment

In the Dark on Data

By Paul Fain

Adult students aren't using College Scorecard and other consumer websites as they consider college, and they aren't interested in performance metrics like graduation rates and debt levels.

Websites that measure how colleges stack up are all the rage these days. But prospective adult students aren't using those tools, and are instead relying on information from friends, advertisements and college websites.

That is one of the central findings of a newly released report from Public Agenda, a nonprofit research group.

For example, a national survey that was part of the research found that only 18 percent of adults who were considering enrolling in college had used interactive websites like the Campus Explorer or the White House's College Scorecard. In accompanying focus groups, few said they had even heard of those sites.

Only 21 percent of the survey's respondents spoke to a counselor who advises students about how to get into college in the past year, while 30 percent said they learned about colleges from a financial aid adviser.

In contrast, 76 percent of the surveyed potential students said they learned about colleges from friends, families and colleagues. And 64 cited advertisements on TV and billboards as sources.

Yet a full three-quarters of respondents said enough quality information about colleges is "out there."

That probably isn't true, the report said.

"Despite being confident that they can find the advice and information they need to make good decisions, most prospective students lack what many experts and policymakers consider to be key pieces of information," it said.

The study, which is dubbed "Is College Worth It for Me? How Adults Without Degrees Think About Going (Back) to School," was based on a national survey of 803 adult prospective students as well as meetings of eight focus groups. Public Agenda received funding from the Kresge Foundation for the research, which was used for a previously released report on attitudes about online learning. A related report on the for-profit higher education sector is forthcoming.

The new study also delved into the contentious debate over for-profits.

Potential students had little understanding about for-profits' financing and governance structures, according to the survey. They became more skeptical about the sector when the term "for-profit" was used in the focus group and when they were told about the "basic differences" between how for-profits and nonprofits operate.

For example, researchers showed focus-group participants graphs that compared for-profits with other institutions on prices, graduation rates and loan default rates.

The focus groups appeared to be one-sided attacks on for-profits, said Noah Black, a spokesman for the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities, the industry's primary trade group.

"Much like we have witnessed in the public policy arena," Black said in an email, "if you put forth biased and one-sided information and accusations about institutions, you can negatively impact the opinions."

He said the study's principal findings, including adult students' favorable take on online courses and quality instruction, support the reasons why adult students often choose for-profits.

In its recommendations, the report suggested consideration for "leveling of the playing field for marketing to adult prospective students."

For-profits tend to spend heavily on TV and web ads that often reach this group. As a result, "more marketing of unbiased information and better

outreach by nonprofit institutions might be necessary, or at least explored," the report said.

However, Black said nonprofit institutions do plenty of marketing, including through big-time college athletics.

Don't Know, Don't Care

Adult students are a large and growing portion of American higher education. Slightly more than a third of first-time students do not enter college right after high school, the report said, and a third of undergraduates are older than 25.

This group doesn't just lack awareness about how to find data on college performance; prospective adult students aren't particularly interested in key "accountability" metrics, according to the research.
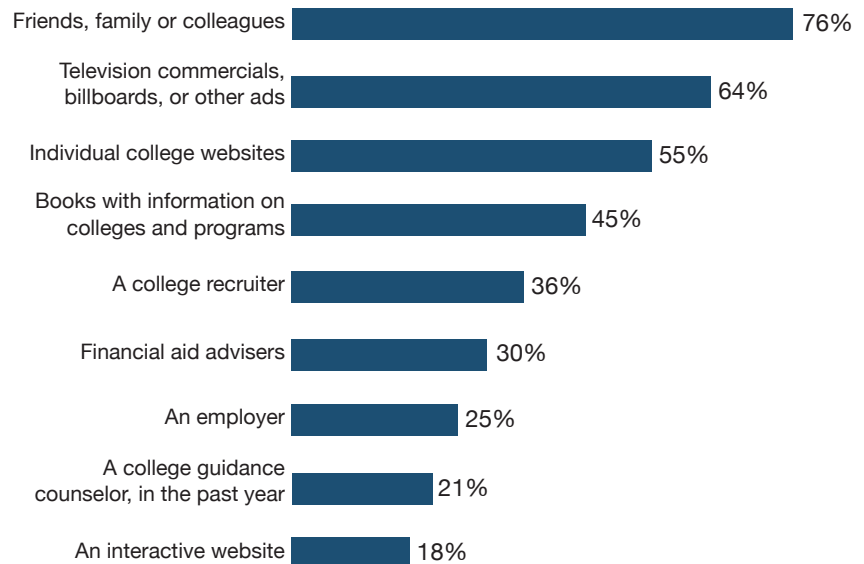
Lawmakers, foundations and consumer groups are pushing hard for colleges to make more information available about how their students fare, including graduation and transfer rates, average debt levels and what sort of jobs graduates get.

Yet the survey found lukewarm feelings among potential students about whether those measures are valuable. Only half of respondents said knowing the average debt levels of graduates is essential information about a college. Faring worse were graduation rates (47 percent) and information about what jobs and salaries graduates typically get (45 percent).

Furthermore, just 17 percent of respondents cited significant worries

Adult prospective students are most likely to learn about colleges from friends and family, commercials and specific institutions' websites.

Figure 11: Percent who say they have utilized the following resources in their college search:

Resource	Percent
Friends, family or colleagues	76%
Television commercials, billboards, or other ads	64%
Individual college websites	55%
Books with information on colleges and programs	45%
A college recruiter	36%
Financial aid advisers	30%
An employer	25%
A college guidance counselor, in the past year	21%
An interactive website	18%

about dropping out of college. That contrasts with the reality that more than half of adult students will fail to complete a bachelor's degree within six years.

"It's not going to work to just put the data out there," said Carolin Hagelskamp, vice president and director of research at Public Agenda.

One reason for the apathy about metrics, according to participants in focus groups, is a common belief that they reflect more on students than an institution. "I don't really care about what their graduation rate is, because that's on me" said a man during a focus group that was held in El Paso.

Potential students liked the information on College Scorecard and similar websites, at least when prompted to try them out by focus group organizers. And respondents who had heard of those tools gave them good marks.

Some focus group participants wondered why the websites weren't better-marketed and felt "cheated" for not having seen them before.

One woman at a Detroit focus group had substantial debt from an online degree program that she didn't finish, according to the report. "I wish I had had this information a couple years ago," the woman said. "That would have been wonderful." ∎

In Plain Sight

By Scott Jaschik

New study documents that there are groups of black and Latino males in urban high schools who are poised for college success, and who generally don't know their college options.

BOSTON -- Shaun Harper started his presentation at a recent meeting here with a slide showing interior photographs of two high schools. One showed students walking through metal detectors. The other showed a row of college banners intended to encourage students to think about postsecondary education.

He asked attendees at a meeting of the Education Writers Association to identify which one was taken during his research on the way some black and Latino male students succeed in New York City high schools. The answer was that both photos were from the study, and Harper's point was that there are scenes in New York City high schools that reflect conventional wisdom about the state of urban education, and scenes that contradict the conventional wisdom. (There are plenty of high schools without metal detectors at all, he noted.)

The slide was the set-up for Harper to preview research findings about the black and Latino male students who succeed in New York City high schools (and he said there was no reason to believe similar qualities don't help similar students in other urban high schools). The study wasn't of elite charter schools or wealthier parts of the city, but of students who had achieved academic success in regular high schools. Harper found not only that such students exist (no surprise to him, but perhaps to those who lament the dearth of such students) but that many of them have no idea that they would be attractive candidates for admission to some of the most elite colleges in the United States.

Harper -- director of the Study of Race and Equity in Education at the University of Pennsylvania -- attracted considerable attention for a 2012 study in which he identified successful black male college students and examined the factors that led to their success. This new study is in a way the flip side of that research -- as his focus was on students in New York City high schools who could succeed in college (although he also included a group of New York City high school graduates who were in college for comparison purposes).

An overall theme of the work is that there are many minority male students who are succeeding academically, but are doing so off the beaten path colleges travel to magnet schools or the suburbs. Harper started his research by going to principals of 40 high schools -- with a mix of academic records and no tilt toward high performing schools, although a disproportionate number were smaller in population size than average-- to ask for help identifying talented black and Latino male students. The students needed to have grade-point averages of 3.0 or higher, to have taken college preparatory courses, to be involved in multiple school clubs and activities, and to be interested in going to college.

Reading the established "narrative" about urban high schools, "we could easily believe that there were no young men who would fit this profile," when in fact in all of the high schools, the principals were easily able to identify many who fit the profile. Harper then conducted in-depth interviews with 325 of those students, along with 90 black and Latino male graduates of these high schools who were now in college.

He wanted to identify the qualities that left the high school students ready

Shaun Harper

for college. Much of the demographic information about the students suggests reasons why the odds were against their going to college. Two-thirds of the students' mothers and three-quarters of their fathers lacked any college degree. One quarter were low-income and half were from working-class families. Five percent had experienced homelessness. And all were male at a time when female enrollments are outpacing male enrollments, especially among underrepresented minority students. One statistic Harper said may surprise some is that 45 percent of these students had family structures with two parents. While a majority thus were in single-parent homes, a significant minority had support from two parents.

But what were the common characteristics that seemed to propel these students to succeed? Among them:

- **Parental value of education.** Many spoke of parents who related their own lack of education to their lack of money, and told their children they wanted better options for them.
- **High expectations.** The report says that "almost all" of the students in the study "remember being thought of as smart and capable when they were young boys."
- **Learning to avoid neighborhood danger.** Those who lived in unsafe neighborhoods reported parents who kept them inside whenever possible. Likewise, many of the students reported spending after-school hours in school buildings, in

settings where they could study and also socialize in safer environments than were available to them near their homes.

- **Avoiding gang recruitment.** Many said that by becoming known as smart, and by having parents who didn't let them spend time outdoors, they weren't recruited into gangs.
- **Teachers who cared and inspired.** Harper asked the students to name and describe favorite high school teachers, and he noted that none of them had difficulty doing so, describing challenging teachers who knew and cared about them. He said that the teachers of these students are working in ways counter to the image of out-of-control urban schools.
- **Reinforcement of college-going culture.** One student noted that, at his high school, every day that a student was accepted at a college, the entire school was told about this over the public address system. While college-going might not be the norm for his socioeconomic group, he came to think of college-going as the norm from hearing these messages over and over again.

Generally, the descriptions of the high school students left cause for optimism. A combination of the right encouragement from parents and teachers makes a difference, the interviews suggest. The portion of the report on college students raised more questions -- and perhaps more challenges for faculty members and administrators in higher education.

Many of the students reported that they did not have the kind of nurturing

relationships with professors that had made a big difference to them in high school. The college students were asked questions such as "tell me a bit about your relationships with your professors," and many of the students were "perplexed" by the question, the report says. "[S]ome even asked, 'What do you mean by relationship?' " the report said. "It was clear that deep connections had not been established and interactions were almost entirely confined to the classroom. 'I honestly don't even remember any of the professors' names I took last semester,' one student confessed."

The study also reinforces recent reports -- and in particular the work of Caroline M. Hoxby of Stanford University, and Christopher Avery of Harvard University -- about "undermatching" by talented, low-income students. Hoxby and Avery found that a majority of such students do not apply to a single highly competitive college, even though many of these students could get into such institutions and be awarded full scholarships.

In Harper's study, more than three-fourths of students applied only to colleges in the State University of New York and City University of New York Systems. He said that, for many of these students, there were good options in those systems, but that many who had the grades and test scores to attend more elite institutions -- including those that have the most generous financial aid packages in the country -- than those they ended up at never applied.

Students "indicated their counselors only promoted in-state public postsecondary options," the report says. "Some even remembered counselors advising them against applying to certain institutions. 'She told me that I probably wouldn't get into the University of Virginia, so I didn't even apply there.' We heard similar stories in our interviews with high school seniors."

In his presentation here, Harper said that he was not blaming the counselors, many of whom he said have far more students to advise than they can possiblly handle. He said that he believes that many of the counselors have adopted the attitude of trying to be sure that every student who can go to college does so, and so their emphasis is on making sure everyone applies, not on promoting the most ambitious options for talented students. (And the report notes that the same students who spoke of counselors pushing only limited options did in fact stress the importance of going to college and offered a lot of help on the process.)

But the undermatching issue is real and needs more attention, Harper said here. He described one high school senior interviewed whom he said was arguably the smartest of all of those in the New York City study.

Harper asked this student where he was applying to college, and was told of plans to seek admission to only one institution: Pennsylvania State University at Altoona. "It would be the worst undermatching ever if this kid goes to a regional campus of Penn State," Harper said. While stressing that there are many students for whom regional public colleges and universities are good choices, he said that higher education leaders need to focus more attention on recruiting students like those he interviewed, and in promoting better support for counseling services so such students get good advice.

"This kid could go to Harvard," Harper said. "I'm not going to let him" apply only to Altoona, he added. ∎

Coming Up Short

By Kevin Kiley

Loyola New Orleans becomes the second selective college within weeks to announce a major enrollment and budget shortfall. Is it a harbinger of things to come, or just a case of bad enrollment strategy?

For several years now, college officials have worried about the possibility of major economic shifts in the higher education market that might foreshadow major financial problems in the near future.

What Loyola University New Orleans experienced in summer 2013 probably won't put them at ease.

The university faces an expected budget shortfall of up to $9.5 million after first-year enrollment deposits came in almost 300 students short of the university's expected goal of 875 students. Since the deposit deadline of May 1, the college has taken steps to enroll more students, including increasing financial aid awards, and university administrators now expect to enroll a class of about 600 to 625 students.

Loyola is the second college within weeks to announce a large enrollment shortfall, following an announcement in May by St. Mary's College in Maryland that its deposits were about 110 students short of its expected enrollment goal of 470, a shortfall the college predicted at the time to equate to a budget shortfall of about $3.5 million. Loyola and St. Mary's do not have large endowments, meaning the shortfalls likely affect them more than they would institutions with more diverse revenue streams. For tuition-dependent colleges, shortfalls of 40

or 50 students are cause for concern but occasionally happen. Being off by as much as these two colleges are is much more serious.

The large shortfalls at both Loyola and St. Mary's, combined with what finance officials expect to be numerous smaller enrollment and revenue shortfalls at other institutions, raise the specter of a more widespread dropoff in higher education enrollments and revenue that college administrators have feared since the 2008 recession. The combination of increased financial need among prospective students, declines in traditional college-going populations, greater competition over students from both public and private institutions, and a decreased willingness on the part of some families, particularly wealthy ones, to pay high tuition prices – particularly at non-elite private institutions – might be resulting in a market that can't sustain so many students. St. Mary's College is public, but it bills itself as competing with private liberal arts colleges.

"I think that price increases that have been too high for too long, and the pushback has been held in check – the pushback has been more restrained than it should have been – because there was a growing economy," said Dan Lundquist, vice president for marketing and enrollment at the Sage Colleges who also runs a consulting firm that works with colleges on pricing and marketing strategy. "Now these places with high overhead, high tuition and sticker prices, they're losing ground in selectivity. And there are a lot of examples that are much

Source: Loyola University New Orleans

less dramatic than Loyola."

The full price at Loyola for students who live on campus for 2013-14 is about $48,700. For students who do not live on campus, tuition and fees total about $36,900.

Loyola's president, the Rev. Kevin Wildes, said the university has not fully explored the cause of the shortfall, but he said that much of it is likely attributable to an effort to decrease the college's discount rate – the amount of aid awarded as a share of gross revenue – by reducing the amount of aid it awarded to incoming students. "My intuition is that [we] did a much more draconian drop in financial aid than we should have," Father Wildes said. "And I think the market reacted."

If that proves to be the case, it could also be a warning to other universities – many worried about the same thing – about taking that approach. In a survey of college and university business officers released by *Inside*

Higher Ed and conducted by Gallup, 34 percent of respondents at private universities either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Our current tuition discount rate is unsustainable." About half of all respondents at private universities said decreasing the discount rate was "very important" to increasing revenue.

Many colleges still have open seats following the May 1 deadline. But the shortfalls at Loyola and St. Mary's are uncommon for those institutions and larger than most. Father Wildes said he was not aware of the shortfall until after the deposit deadline of May 1. Loyola's vice president for enrollment management, Sal Liberto, resigned in May when the shortfall became apparent.

It is likely to have both an immediate and long-term impact on Loyola. The university's annual budget is around $165 million, so the $9.5 million gap is a sizable share. In the near term,

the university has already announced a hiring freeze effective August 1. Administrators also said they're considering voluntary retirement packages, reducing some positions' hours, reducing employee benefits and increasing the university's draw from its endowment.

Some of the costs of the shortfall are likely to be spread out over the next few years, and the smaller-than-average class size will likely ripple through the university for at least four years. Father Wildes said the shortfall has also sparked discussion about the university's overall size as well as its pricing and financial aid strategies.

"We're going to take a hard look at the institution and really pull things apart," Father Wildes said. "We're going to take a hard look at the assumptions we make about the right size of the undergraduate population. For a number of years we always made the assumption of 875 freshmen. I'm wondering whether we can look at it and reshape it another way."

The publicity surrounding the shortfall and the associated cuts could also harm future recruiting efforts, though Father Wildes said he's not as worried about that.

Father Wildes said the college increased its discount rate in the years following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, partly to attract students to the campus. It recently began an effort to slowly lower the discount rate "a half a percent at a time." Last year the college's discount rate for undergraduates was about 57 percent, said Roberta Kaskel, the interim vice president for enrollment management. She said this year the discount rate is likely to be about 55 percent, but it came at the cost of fewer students. Father Wildes said he suspects that the college moved too quickly this year.

Lundquist said he's talked with administrators at multiple institutions in the past few years who are worried about their increasing discount rate and are eager to bring it down.

Father Wildes said there was nothing in the past few years that would have suggested the college would struggle to enroll students this year. Applications have increased over the past few years, with the current year seeing a record number.

Multiple studies, including an annual survey of students and their families by Sallie Mae, have shown that families are not spending as much on higher education as they did in the pre-recession years. Some of this is attributable to shifts in the market, with many nontraditional students going back to school, typically at low-cost community colleges.

But part of it is also attributable to shifts in the traditional market, administrators say, affecting places like Loyola and St. Mary's. Financial need has increased both because many parents' employment changed and because more low-income students are entering higher education. Students are also shifting their college choices, moving to cheaper options, such as public universities or community colleges.

"Loyola is not alone in facing enrollment challenges this year," Father Wildes wrote in a letter to the campus in May announcing the shortfall. "We know that many other schools have confronted the same or similar issues in the past few years. Higher education costs have been in the news, and we compete in a marketplace where price and value are key considerations in students' enrollment choices. It is not business as usual in higher education."

"The nation's economy has had a difficult time these past few years, and a lot of people don't have the confidence to pay these high tuition prices," Father Wildes said in an interview Thursday. "There are these big macro shifts, and I'm sure that's a big piece of the background that's important to this." ∎

"We're going to take a hard look at the assumptions we make about the right size of the undergraduate population."

The Cost of Need-Blind

Grinnell won't consider applicants' ability to pay, at least for two years. But college will raise loan limits and try to attract more wealthy students. Is this the future model for elite private higher ed?

By Scott Jaschik

Raynard S. Kington

Following months of debate, Grinnell College announced Saturday that its board had voted to keep the institution need-blind in admissions. That news cheered many students and alumni who were alarmed when the college announced last year that it was considering the possibility of moving away from considering all applicants without regard to financial need. Last year's announcement caused a stir among private colleges because Grinnell's $1.5 billion endowment is among the largest of liberal arts colleges, leaving many wondering if this was a sign that more colleges would move away from need-blind admissions.

While Grinnell will remain need-blind for now, the college made clear that things were going to change:

• The commitment is only for the next two years. If Grinnell can't find a way to curb growth in its discount rate (the percentage off sticker price provided by the college in aid, on average) and to reduce the share of its operating budget paid by the endowment, the board may reconsider.

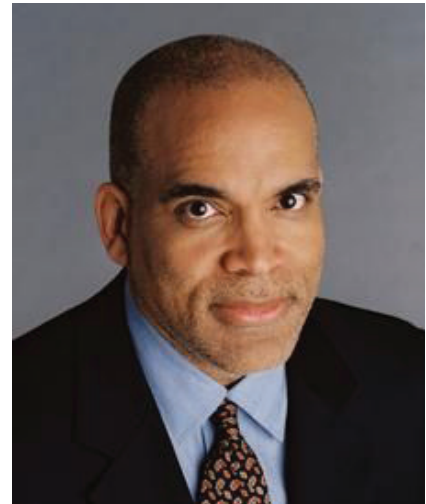• To control aid expenses, the college is raising loan limits and vowing to be more rigorous in identifying assets that may allow some students on financial aid to pay for more of their expenses.

• And to minimize the need for financial aid, the college plans to take steps -- in part by using non-need-based aid -- to recruit a greater number of wealthy students.

Raynard S. Kington, the president of Grinnell, said in an interview after the board vote that he believes all private colleges will need to look carefully at their aid policies to try to balance their desire to be generous with financial realities. "A board not asking these sorts of things is asleep at the switch," Kington said.

In the interview, as he has on campus for the past months, Kington argued that endowment size alone is not a way to judge a private college's wealth. By that measure, he said, Grinnell is well-off, but equally important for private colleges are tuition revenue and private giving, and he said that Grinnell is much less well-off than its peers in those areas. As a result, he said, the college has serious financial challenges -- even with its endowment -- that force a reconsideration of financial aid policies.

He noted that only 12 percent of Grinnell students don't receive any financial aid. While there are many private colleges where hardly anyone pays full freight, most highly competitive private colleges (the institutions with which Grinnell competes) have anywhere from 30 to 50 percent of students with enough family wealth to pay for even this expensive form of higher education.

Other key statistics cited by Kington: 50 percent of Grinnell's budget comes from the endowment payout each year, a level he said was too high, given the expectation of relatively marginal endowment growth (if that) in the coming years. And then there's the discount rate of 62 percent, up 5 percentage points over the last three years.

Those numbers have added up to an academically talented student body, and an economically diverse one -- with more than 24 percent of students eligible for Pell Grants (a higher ratio than is the case at many other elite private colleges). But Kington said that, economically, the path the college has been on is "unsustainable."

A Two-Year Window

For the next two years, he said, the college will try various strategies to shift some of those statistics. While he said that the discount rate should be in the "low 50s," not where it is, he said that the board did not set a firm target on that or any other metric. He noted that more revenue -- if donations increase, for example -- is also part of the equation. But he said that the board will need to see real change -- at a minimum an end to the increase in the discount rate, and some decrease in the percentage of budget paid for by endowment. If those changes don 't happen within two years, he said, the board will revisit the ability to maintain need-blind admissions.

One change now will be a shift in loan limits. Currently, Grinnell students are assured that no more than $3,000 in their financial aid package will come from loans. Starting next year, the limits will be raised to $3,500 for the first year, $4,500 for the second year, and $5,500 for the third and fourth years. (Since the economic downturn started in 2008, several other elite institutions, including Cornell University and Dartmouth and Williams Colleges, have raised loan expectations for those on financial aid.)

Grinnell also plans to be "more aggressive" than it has been in the past on enforcing financial aid deadlines, and on gathering data about the ability of students' families to pay for college, Kington said. In particular, he said that Grinnell would push to "make sure than noncustodial parents give financial information to
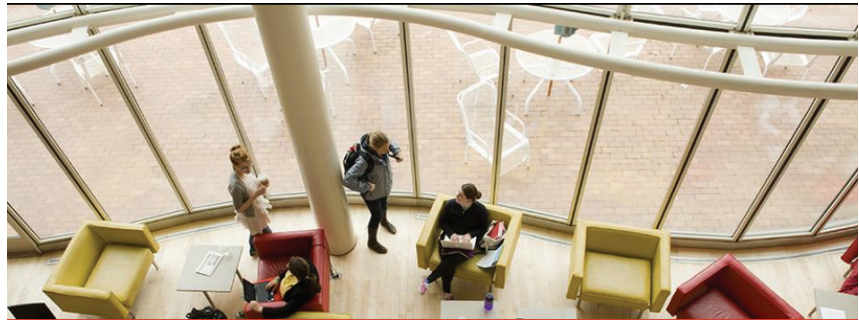
Source: Grinnell

us." He was quick to say that there are some noncustodial parents who are "not involved in the child's life," but said that there are others with assets that should be considered.

Perhaps the most controversial plan Grinnell is adopting is to try to attract more students with wealth. Unlike some of its competitors, Grinnell has long awarded some non-need-based aid. Kington said that the change was a matter of "using merit aid more strategically." By offering aid to students whose families could afford most of Grinnell's charges (or who are willing to pay most of them), Grinnell could see net tuition revenue go up even if it spends more on non-need-based aid, Kington said. Grinnell can do this, he said, without abandoning its commitment to racial or economic diversity.

Extensive discussions on campus about the financial dilemmas facing Grinnell have resulted, according to student and faculty leaders, in a general consensus that some changes need to be made in financial aid policies. Colleen Osborne, student body president, said that the most important thing to happen was the affirmation of need-blind admissions.

"I think we acknowledge that our current model is unsustainable," she said. "The issue for right now is that we are staying need-blind."

Grinnell administrators also got high points from many on campus for holding numerous forums and posting information about budget options on the college's website.

But spending more non-need-based on wealthier students rubs some the wrong way.

The Scarlet & Black, Grinnell's student newspaper, endorsed the idea of higher loan limits, but questioned the strategy of trying to attract more wealthy students. In an editorial that ran just before the board vote, the newspaper said: "Instituting policies that benefit high-income students to the detriment of middle- and low-income students is fundamentally unjust. It perpetuates class inequality by limiting the access of lower-income students to a high-quality education -- specifically, students who already lack many of the privileges of high-income students. Furthermore ... many of these policies would in fact decrease the student body's academic profile, which is contrary to the college's dedication to academic excellence."

Kington rejected the idea that the college would be giving aid to students who weren't academically worthy. He noted that decisions on non-need-based aid are made after students have been admitted, and said that someone "on the edge of being admitted" probably wouldn't receive such aid. He also noted that there is "a strong correlation between academic performance and economics," such that many of those who are admitted and are able to pay for most of their Grinnell education also happen to be outstanding students.

Grinnell will still be using non-need-based aid for reasons other than attracting wealthier students, he said. But it is simply trying to be "more strategic" about using this aid to attract more students who can pay most of their expenses.

A False Dichotomy?

The move by Grinnell to shift its strategy on non-need-based aid comes at a time when some private college presidents are trying to organize a movement to move away from what is commonly called "merit aid" in favor of shifting more of the money to need-based aid.

Kington said that, "intellectually and at a national level, I understand and agree that the result of the increase in merit aid over the course of the last couple of decades has resulted in more limited resources going to wealthier families," so he said he is sympathetic to that movement. But he said that at "places like Grinnell we have to use merit aid to get a diverse student body along many dimensions."

From the point last year when Kington warned the campus that need-blind admissions might be at risk, much of the focus of discussion at Grinnell has been on the importance of preserving need-blind admission. While very few private colleges are need-blind in admission while also pledging to meet full student need, as Grinnell still does, many at Grinnell became aware that it is possible to leave that group. Last summer, Wesleyan University, another top liberal arts college, announced it was moving away from need-blind admissions. (Wesleyan, however, awards all aid that it provides based on economic need.)

Even as Grinnell students are cheering the preservation of need-blind admissions, and some at Wesleyan continue to object to the decision there, Kington said that he thinks it is wrong to view need-blind and non-need-blind as a dichotomy. Indeed both Wesleyan (no longer need-blind) and Grinnell (still need-blind) will be taking steps next year that should result in more students with greater ability to pay enrolling: Wesleyan is doing so by being "need-aware" for the final 10 percent of the class admitted, and Grinnell is doing so with non-need-based aid. And both colleges are pledging to maintain efforts to enroll low-income and minority applicants.

"This idea that colleges are either looking at need explicitly or being completely blind to need is not the reality," Kington said. "We shape our application pool in all sorts of ways -- geographic, male-female balance, we look at lots of dimensions to shape a class," Kington said. "Even if we aren't looking explicitly at financial need" in admissions decisions, he said, colleges are always aware that they "have to bring in a certain amount of revenue" in the class being selected.

The Choices for Colleges

Ronald G. Ehrenberg, director of the Cornell University Higher Education Research Institute, who has written extensively on colleges' admissions and aid strategies, predicted that more colleges would be considering the kinds of moves made by Grinnell or Wesleyan or Cornell or Williams or others.

"The tradeoff between social responsibility (providing opportunities for students from all socioeconomic backgrounds to attend our institutions) and having the necessary resources to maintain the quality of programs is a difficult one," he said via e-mail. He said that there are no easy solutions.

Ehrenberg predicted that institutions that move away from need-blind or use non-need-based aid to attract more wealthy students would likely continue "the focus on lower income students, as measured by Pell Grant recipients."

But he said that there are real dangers to higher education from an increased emphasis on non-need-based aid to attract those who can pay. "If Grinnell does it, this may put pressure on Williams and Middlebury to do it and then we will see merit aid putting further pressure on need-based aid," he said.

Added Ehrenberg: "The loser in

all of this will be middle-income students, above the Pell Grant level -- institutions will respond to what is measurable. So there is a danger that the student bodies at our institutions will become increasingly bifurcated -- more Pell Grant recipients, more relatively wealthy students, fewer students in between (middle-class melt revisited)." ∎

The Customer Is Always Right?

Many prospective students favor colleges that invest more in nonacademic functions (including athletics and dormitories) over institutions that focus their spending on academics, study finds.

By Scott Jaschik

Faculty members and pundits regularly criticize colleges for investing scarce resources in facilities or athletics rather than making academic spending the priority. Think about all of those articles about campus spending on climbing walls, or the latest trend in luxury dormitories (nap pods are in).

What if such spending choices are logical, at least if one accepts that the (student) customer is always right?

Research released in January 2013 by the National Bureau of Economic Research suggests that four-year colleges that want to attract the vast majority of potential students (those who can't aspire to enroll in highly competitive institutions) may be making wise investments by spending on "consumption" preferences, even if that essentially defines higher education as (in the paper's title) "college as country club."

The study is based on analysis of college spending patterns and the choices and stated preferences of students who graduated from high school in the classes of 1992 and 2004.

All students appear to value spending on "amenities," which were classified to include student services and activities, athletics and facilities; and to make enrollment decisions in part based on such spending. (While much public discussion of spending on these areas focuses on items some might view as discretionary, this category also includes admissions, student health and all of residence life -- not just seemingly over-the-top facilities.) So in analyzing student preferences, all other factors equal, it is clear that colleges will attract more applicants (and students) by spending more on these categories of the budget.

Spending on academics is calculated in the study to mean instruction and academic support -- including all costs associated with courses, libraries, museums and other facilities that relate directly to the educational mission. It turns out that only those students who are able to consider and enroll at highly competitive institutions value academic spending enough that it would influence their decisions. So, the authors conclude, the vast majority of four-year colleges and universities will not see increased applications by investing in academics.

"One important implication of our analysis is that for many institutions, demand-side market pressure may not compel investment in academic quality, but rather in consumption amenities," write the authors, three University of Michigan scholars. They are Brian A. Jacob, the Walter H. Annenberg Professor of Education Policy; Brian P. McCall, professor of education, economics and public policy; and Kevin M. Stange, assistant professor of public policy.

"This is an important finding given that quality assurance is primarily provided by demand-side pressure: the fear of losing students is believed to compel colleges to provide high levels of academic quality. Our findings call this accountability mechanism into question. However, our findings

do not speak to the normative issue of whether consumption amenities are good or bad for students and taxpayers."

Jane V. Wellman, executive director of the National Association of System Heads, and the founder of the Delta Project on Postsecondary Costs, Productivity and Accountability, said via e-mail that she wasn't surprised by the findings, and that they backed up major concerns she and others have had about spending priorities. (Wellman is known for her work focusing not just on colleges' prices, but on how they spend their money.)

"It's the second-tier institutions that throw money at the consumer side of things, hoping to hang onto students and to move up in rankings," she said. "They can't compete head to head with the big dogs, and have found that students with money are willing to spend it on things that have immediate and tangible benefit."

At the same time, Wellman said that it was important not to judge all of higher education by these findings. She said that at community colleges (excluded from the study) and regional public institutions (only a subset of the study), "I don't think there's similar evidence of 'amenities' arms races," she said.   ∎

Orientation and Advising

The Anti-Orientation

Sewanee's new first-year transition program is one of three pre-semester freshman events there, but with a focus on place and interdisciplinary learning, this one goes beyond the typical experience.

By Allie Grasgreen

It begins for freshmen two weeks before classes start at the University of the South, with two orientation programs in between – but faculty members who teach the new first-year program at Sewanee call it the "anti-first-year program."

Really, it's more like an enhanced first-year program. It involves lectures and student bonding and campus activities and study skill acquisition. But it also involves field trips to impoverished areas and hikes and an interdisciplinary elective course and capstone projects.

"This is not about college readiness," at least, not in the traditional sense, said Josh King, a Sewanee admissions counselor who helped develop the inaugural 10-day "Finding Your Place" program, which is now under way. "It is piecemeal of what you would find at other first-year programs, but when you combine that with the sense of place, you can really understand how community works."

The sense of place concept can get pretty philosophical, but an assistant English professor, Virginia Craighill, explains it using a simple metaphor. Take the plateau on which Sewanee's campus sits, she said one afternoon after returning from a hike with students up Mountain Goat Trail, named for the railroad track students took to campus in the 1850s. (At the time, it was the steepest in the world.)

Underneath the visible sandstone of Cumberland Plateau, there's a layer of limestone, followed by conglomerate and a mixture of granite and other rocks, all shaped and scraped and created by its surrounding environment.

"They're both understanding their landscape – where they are – but also understanding where they are in the world, what their place is here in the community of Sewanee, and then understanding at a deeper level what this place has been in history," Craighill said. "We're hoping that they get to see a subject matter – such as a place – through all of those lenses so that they understand there is more than one way of looking at that place, and through that broad perspective that they'll approach their academics."

So part of the program is a full-credit, three-month elective course (factored into tuition) called Discovering a Sense of Place -- Upon and Beyond the Domain (the Domain is Sewanee's 13,000 acres of land), that brings together sections taught by faculty members in fields such as biology,

philosophy and religion. Through a series of course sections and readings, students study the natural and artificial environments on and off campus in relation to surrounding communities, settlement, and agricultural assets and resources.

So, it's a bit more than rock climbing, casino night and class registration. But all this, professors hope, will come together to better prepare these 106 freshmen for college (after they complete the optional PRE-orientation – a three-day outdoor program structured like a camp – and mandatory orientation, of course).

While some colleges are trying to integrate their various seminars, orientations and bridge programs, Sewanee's seems to be an "intentional evolution" of the first-year experience, said Jennifer R. Keup, director of the University of South Carolina's National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

Historically, colleges' transition programs have been "a bit of a baton passing," Keup said: students who need extra academic preparation will go through a bridge program, then they'll be shuffled into orientation, then handed off to residence life. Academic affairs and student affairs would each take part in some capacity, making first-year programs more collaborative than many in a sense, but never the twain would mix.

"I think this is maybe the next generation of this idea of integration," Keup said. "There's a lot of evolution toward these integrated programs, and that's very exciting because it

Faculty members Gerald Smith and Virginia Craighill lead students on a hike of Mountain Goat trail during Sewanee's "Finding Your Place" freshman program.

allows the students exposure to a lot of different types of programs and high-impact practices within one venue."

Those practices include an interdisciplinary approach to academics, exposure to the outside community, civic engagement and leadership, and personal and educational connections with faculty – which, the earlier they are formed, the greater they'll impact positive outcomes.

Craighill, who teaches the section Your Place, or Mine?: The Tension of Place in Narrative and Storytelling, has already seen a change in students' attitude and confidence level. They're more engaged and forthcoming with her than is typical at regular orientation, she said. One student from inner-city Chicago spoke in awe of the trail and her first-ever experience in such a place.

And it's been educational for Craighill, too.

"I was able to drop back and talk to one student individually and learn about him or her in a way that I wouldn't be able to do in a classroom," she said. Which is good – because Craighill, like the other professors involved in the program, will mentor their section's students for the next two years, until it's time to choose a major.

The program could heighten the return on investment for Sewanee, too. Barnaby Pung, a career development specialist at Washtenaw Community College in Michigan, found in a case study that not only were students who built strong relationships at early orientation programs more likely to be engaged in college, they were more likely to maintain an affiliation with – and donate to – their college as alumni.

At the mid-sized public research university where Pung conducted

his dissertation on alumni identity, students began with a two-day mid-summer orientation, returned for a three-day program and activity festival just before the semester started, and followed up with the same group in October.

"Several individuals commented on these connections with orientation leaders," Pung said.

At a smaller institution like Sewanee, Keup said, a program such as this can streamline the first-year experience and also build a foundation for better outcomes.

"Too often, I think, first-year experience and student success programs – they're star programs, but they're not connected to a constellation," she said. "It sounds like they're trying to introduce students to the ways of thought and the ways of learning in higher education." ∎

Another Digital Divide

More students are finding themselves in legal trouble over incendiary comments made on social media, yet online etiquette is all but absent from first-year orientation programs.

By Carl Straumsheim

More students are being disciplined for sharing incendiary remarks through social media, drawing outraged responses from peers who say online interactions don't dictate offline behavior. Despite the conflicting ideas of how students should behave on the Internet, social media etiquette is almost never discussed during first-year orientation.

The latest example of a student getting into serious trouble is that of Caleb Jamaal Clemmons, 20, who was arrested in February after telling his followers on Tumblr that "i plan on shooting up georgia southern. pass this around to see the affect it has. to see if i get arrested." Clemmons's experiment was a success. The former Georgia Southern University psychology student was arrested mere hours after the post, spent six months in jail and is now banned from social media for the five years he will

be on probation -- even though police never found any evidence Clemmons intended to act on the threat.

Clemmons joins a multitude of millennials whose online posts have attracted legal trouble, including a Texas teenager who served five months in prison for joking on Facebook that he planned to "shoot up a kindergarten," a British man sentenced to four years for inciting a riot that never erupted, and a Massachusetts high schooler who was arrested after uploading a rap that included references to the Boston Marathon bombing.

"The travesty of all of this is that people -- especially young people -- don't understand their digital interactions create tremendous legal consequences," said Bradley Shear, a Bethesda, Md.-based lawyer who specializes in social media and Internet law.

Anecdotal evidence of that can

be seen in the number of people who are calling for Clemmons to be exonerated. More than 3,000 people signed such a petition on Change.org, which states Clemmons's "whole life is beginning to unravel at its seams and may be ruined forever over one misconstrued post."

From a legal perspective, Shear said courts have acted within their rights to sanction people for online threats, however vague they may be.

"My philosophy is if you make a threat -- whether it's a phone call, whether it's an email, whatever medium you utilize -- the same law applies throughout," Shear said. "People -- especially students -- aren't given that type of education.... Students need to be apprised of the things that may happen if they utilize digital tools in a way that may create criminal issues or liability issues."

Yet even after its brush with the online threat, Georgia Southern has not added social media education to its orientation schedule. "[Orientation sessions] really don't address specifics of social media," said Casey Jones, assistant director of marketing and communications. In light of the Clemmons case, however, "it's something that may need to be looked

at."

Communications majors at Georgia Southern can enroll in an elective on social media and public relations, but lecturer Michelle Groover said students usually take it as upperclassmen. By that time, most 20-somethings are set in their social media ways. Still, Groover said social media veterans can benefit from social media education sessions.

"I don't think you're really teaching them how to use it. You're just giving them more tools to use it more appropriately," Groover said. "Because of the age we're in, I think it is something that should be discussed in an orientation."

The lack of social media education isn't helped by this perceived generation gap between the young experts and those expected to teach them.

"To some degree, it is the assumption that the digital native already knows how to use these things, and by the time they get to college, they've had years of experience with them, so what new thing could a college orientation teach that an entering freshman does not know?" said Tracy Mitrano, director of IT policy at Cornell University (and a blogger for *Inside Higher Ed*).

Keri Stenemann, an event coordinator with NODA, the Association for Orientation, Transition and Retention in Higher Education, on Wednesday contacted the organization's key leaders to see if

their institutions discuss social media use when welcoming new students to campus. None of the roughly 25 contacts responded. Stenemann cautioned against reading too much into that result, though, since late August may not be the best time to try to reach orientation leaders.

"I am not personally aware of which of our members have training on this topic, but that does not mean it does not exist," Stenemann said.

Many colleges and universities do include some kind of social media etiquette statement in their student handbooks. Oberlin College's guidelines, for example, plainly warn students with headers such as "The Internet is Real," "Future Employment Problems" and "Your Words Could Hurt You."

"If you're not absolutely sure you want it read, don't post it," the guidelines read. "Communication

is very contextual, a pejorative word or phrase used in playful conversations with friends can easily be misconstrued."

In most cases -- Oberlin included -- those etiquette statements are not featured in any orientation sessions, which means students have to immerse themselves in their handbooks if they want to learn their institution's official stance on appropriate online behavior.

"I think the real issue is that there are more things that administrators want to cover than there is time to do so," Mitrano said. Topics that could pose more immediate threats to students such as physical safety, alcohol abuse and time management therefore take precedence. "There's really no way to offer the whole spectrum of issues involving Internet education or basic Internet competency that I have seen."
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Greeting the New Students

Small private colleges are preparing to deal with demographic shifts in their student populations.

By Kevin Kiley

SAN ANTONIO – It's somewhat fitting that the Council of Independent Colleges' annual institute for chief academic officers is here in the city that saw the highest population growth between 2000 and 2010, and the second-highest growth between 1990 and 2000, with much of that growth coming from Hispanics.

The Southwest is unfamiliar territory for many of the roughly 700 private colleges and universities represented by the council. Many are located in the East and Midwest, and the demographic groups that have contributed to this region's booming growth have not been reflected in the student bodies or admissions strategies of many of these colleges.

It is clear from one look at the institute's agenda that serving such students is a growing prerogative for many of these colleges, particularly as they face decreases in their traditional demographics, increased competition from public institutions, and mounting pressure to tap into new revenue sources.

"Many of you will have to rethink everything you are doing in terms of recruiting students," said Henry G. Cisneros, former mayor of San Antonio and former secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, in a televised message to the conference.

The demographic change poses numerous challenges to the colleges represented here. It encompasses a group of students who often need more help paying for college, which can put strain on institutional budgets, since most financial aid at CIC institutions comes in the form of reduced tuition rather than payouts from endowments. Confronting the barriers that keep many of these students from succeeding once they enroll, including poor educational backgrounds, a lack of understanding of and preparation for the rigor of college courses, and managing pressures from home (such as the expectation of involvement in family life, and financial and emotional support), is also a new challenge for many of these institutions.

The agenda here was designed to allow institutions that have historically served such groups, such as Our Lady of the Lake University here in San Antonio, to begin to share some of the lessons they've learned.

Seventy-five percent of Our Lady of the Lake's students are Hispanic, with many hailing from urban San Antonio. In recent years, the college has doubled down on the mission of providing accessible Roman Catholic higher education for students who might not have the chance to get that elsewhere. "For a long time we were missing the point that this neighborhood, in this city, was the point of this university," said Tessa Martinez Pollack, the university's president. "We're transforming students through extraordinary effort."

Population Shifts

Cisneros' talk, which opened the meeting, centered on the demographic shifts happening in the U.S., in which Hispanic students are likely to make up about half the country's population growth over the next 40 years. "Growth will not be the problem," he said. "Our challenge is to take that new demography and prepare them to take their place in the new America."

At the same time this explosive growth is happening, many of the states where the bulk of CIC institutions are located will experience declines in the number of students graduating from high school. In recent years, many colleges that had been largely regional in nature have begun to expand their recruitment efforts to help ensure robust enrollments over the long term. That is bringing about a shift in the composition of their student bodies.

Cisneros and others over the course of the institute have hit on the fact that students making up that growth in the college-going population tend to be less interested in higher education, come from underperforming public school systems, and face more financial barriers.

While public universities might

in the past have been expected to accommodate the new students, that seems less likely to be the case in coming years. States such as California have decreased funding for public higher education, and community colleges and state universities have placed limits on enrollment, some for the first time in history.

And many say public institutions currently don't do a good job serving the underprepared students they do admit, pointing to low graduation and completion rates.

CIC regularly champions numbers that show that first-generation, underprepared, and minority students graduate at higher rates from private colleges than public institutions. "There is a fundamental place for your kinds of institutions," he said. "You're smaller, and more nimble. You provide intense student experience. I think there's a critical role to be played."

Meeting New Needs

In one presentation, administrators from St. Edward's University and Franklin College talked about pre-college summer programs they designed for first-generation students to foster support networks, introduce students to the rigorous work expected of college students, and demonstrate the resources available to them on campus.

Fostering a peer support group was key to Franklin's success,

administrators said. "When we asked students what worked for them, how the program helped you, they pointed to the support they get from one another," said David Brailow, vice president for academic affairs and dean of the college at Franklin.

Franklin is trying to mimic the success of the program in other student groups, adding information sessions about college expectations to their football camp, for instance.

A tension emerged between this and other sessions about how much to recognize students as first-generation or in need of additional assistance, since that runs the risk of stigmatizing students, which then might result in drop-outs.

In another session, administrators from Mercyhurst University and California Lutheran University detailed the success they had in encouraging first-generation students to transfer from community colleges.

A major barrier that several administrators in the audience here noted is that serving such students is resource-intensive. Having adequate financial aid – often in the form of tuition discounts, since most institutions in CIC have small endowments – is key to college success for these students, administrators noted. And many colleges in this group are already struggling with discount rates around 40 or 50 percent.

Several panelists noted that potential cuts to the Pell Grant would be highly detrimental to their budgets.

Poorly prepared students also tend to require more academic advising, writing coaching, remedial courses, tutoring, face-time with faculty members, and student services, all of which cost money.

In one session, which focused on efforts to improve student retention, several college administrators talked about how their efforts had run into "plateaus." They found that, no matter how much effort they put into retention, they could not get some students to persist. At a time when there is increased public scrutiny of colleges that struggle to graduate the students they admit, these administrators worried that a low persistence or graduation rate could hurt their institutions in the long run

Changing the enrollment profile by accepting fewer underprepared students might be the only way to move the dial, they said.

But other administrators in the audience pushed back against this conclusion. Given the demographic shifts, they said, the problem of these students not being prepared and being likely to drop out is one that the institutions don't have the luxury of avoiding. ∎

"Many of you will have to rethink everything you are doing in terms of recruiting students."

Retention

Building Students' 'Cultural Capital'

Academic and student affairs officers discuss their responsibilities to help first-generation students overcome deficits in exposure to arts and culture -- and the pros and cons of requirements.

By Doug Lederman

PITTSBURGH -- Students who are the first in their families to attend college face a set of disadvantages in terms of college enrollment, persistence and graduation -- a vexing problem, to be sure, since virtually nothing can be done retroactively to change their demographic realities.

But are there attributes that commonly flow from being a first-generation college student that colleges can address?

That possibility formed the basis of a session at the Council of Independent Colleges' annual chief academic officers' institute here in November 2013, where academic and student affairs administrators from dozens of mostly small private colleges discussed the concept of "cultural capital" and the extent to which their institutions can (and should) seek to build it in students.

The term, as framed by John M. Braxton (a professor of education at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College) and based on the sociological concept crafted by Pierre Bourdieu, refers in this context to the extent to which incoming college students were involved in cultural activities such as reading books beyond schoolwork, attending concerts and plays, and visiting museums during their high school years. As is true with many traits, the degree of cultural capital that students have correlates with the educational level of their parents and the level of the students' own high school academic achievement.

And indirectly, Braxton and several co-authors assert in their forthcoming *Rethinking College Student Persistence* (Jossey-Bass), the degree of a first-year student's cultural capital relates to his or her likelihood of returning for a second year at an institution. Based on a study of 408 first-time, full-time students at eight residential, religiously affiliated colleges, the more cultural capital a student has, the greater the degree of psychosocial engagement, which in turn influences the degree of social integration, the level of the student's commitment to the institution, and ultimately to first-to-second-year persistence.

Given the increasing importance that colleges are attaching to retaining their students, Braxton said, it's very much in their interest to encourage students' involvement in cultural activities that may connect them to each other and to the institution. Braxton argued that colleges should collect (and make available to advisers and other student influencers on their campuses) information about the level of cultural capital that students come into college with, so that those who are most lacking can get special attention.

Braxton's co-presenters, administrators at South Carolina's Wofford College, discussed some of what they have done to heighten students' cultural capital to nudge their already strong first-to-second-year retention (89 percent) and graduation (80-83 percent) rates higher. Many of Wofford's students, said Provost David S. Wood, come from Southern small towns "where there weren't any plays or concerts or chamber music."

Like many colleges, Wofford has a common reading initiative for freshmen, though its Novel Experience also includes a class dinner/discussion at a fancy(-ish) restaurant that for some of the institution's "small-town South" students may represent a new cultural experience. ("Many of their towns didn't have restaurants beyond Hardee's," Wood said.) Some of Wofford's scholarship programs have requirements that students participate in cultural events on its campus or others in the area, said Roberta Hurley Bigger, Wofford's vice president for

student affairs.

Carrots and Sticks

Audience members offered up an array of approaches their colleges used to try to encourage -- and in some cases insist on -- students' participation in cultural activities.

Venita Mitchell, vice president and dean of student life at William Woods University, in Missouri, described her institution's LEAD (Leading, Educating, Achieving, Developing) Program, which offers a $5,000 tuition credit to any student who agrees to participate actively in campus life. Students accumulate points when they attend cultural and other events -- "it may be an opera singer, it may be a play" -- and those who don't accumulate enough can lose their discount in a following semester (though they have an opportunity to gain it back).

"It's now embedded in our culture, to the point that 85 to 90 percent of students are attending these events," Mitchell said.

She added: "Bribery always works."

Stetson University has a graduation requirement -- implemented not by campus administrators, but by the student government association -- involving cultural activity credits.

Other campus officials, though, questioned the wisdom and efficacy of cultural compulsion.

One administrator said that her institution, which has a lot of first-generation students, has a cultural requirement, but that "many students go but don't want to be there.... We're struggling with making these students go, because they're disrupting the experience of those who want to be there, shifting loudly in their seats and taking their cell phones out even if we've told them not to.

"How much should we force them to do this?" she asked her colleagues. "We want to give them that culture, but we want them to want it."

Peter Powers, dean of the school of humanities at Pennsylvania's Messiah College, cited a potential pitfall of inculcating first-generation and other students in a culture that's foreign to them: creating conflict for them when they return home. (That's especially true when "culture" is defined narrowly, as Bourdieu did, to mean the sort of classical music and literature that appealed to the French upper classes.) "It may look like just acquiring cultural capital to us, but it can create isolation and cognitive dissonance for them within their home communities," Powers said.

"If they start feeling, to fit in here I'm having to move too far away from my peer group back home," they may decide it's not worth it, and institutions may lose them, he said.

John Beckford, vice president for academic affairs and dean at Furman University, in South Carolina, urged campus administrators to take the long view in judging their efforts to encourage students' cultural capacity.

For 40 years, he said, Furman has had a Cultural Life Program that requires students to attend a certain number of cultural events. (The program features an Expected Conduct page.) Every few years, Beckford said, campus officials discuss the program's effectiveness, behavior issues, and the like, and debate its value. Every time they have doubts, though, alumni surveys persuade them to keep it.

"Even though students may not appreciate it at the time, our alums say things like, 'I'm very glad I was forced to go to that opera recital, that I had to listen to that lecture,' " Beckford said. "It's part of the rite of passage, and it's a responsibility we have -- it's part of the process our kinds of colleges have in developing minds." ∎

Academic Approach to Alcohol

University of Idaho ups the stakes -- to expulsion -- for students with exceptionally low grades.

By Allie Grasgreen

Beginning this year, University of Idaho freshmen will face immediate expulsion if their grade-point average is below 1.0 at the end of fall semester -- and whether or not alcohol is to blame, it's part of an effort to curb underage drinking.

The idea may be unprecedented, student affairs officials and substance abuse experts say. But as part of a broader overhaul of alcohol policies, it will likely help those students be more successful academically and also improve the overall campus climate, Idaho Dean of Students Bruce Pitman said. (Expelled students who suffered extreme circumstances such as an illness or death in the family may be readmitted via an appeals process.)

"This is both, we hope, compassionate intervention for students who, quite frankly, probably don't have a plan and would simply languish another semester accumulating bad grades and debt," he said. "but it's also about an effort to improve the dynamics of our students as well, because many of these students who quit coming to class become disruptive in their living environments."

As part of a study of freshmen retention patterns, five years ago Idaho officials started a one-day academic success program for low-performing students to attend before spring term. It became clear that while students with a GPA above 1.0 went on to do O.K. in the following semester, that was not the case for those with lower grades. Often they would go on to flounder through the spring, hurting their ability to transfer or return to Idaho if they took time off, before dropping out altogether.

Students who underperform academically often report some sort of physical or emotional challenge, said Jessica Greher-Traue, assistant director for wellness at Bentley University and a past chair of the American College Personnel Association's Alcohol and Other Drug Commission. In the Fall 2012 National College Health Assessment, students most often reported stress, anxiety and depression as impacting their academic performance.

"Alcohol is most often used as a way of coping with these issues," she said in an e-mail.

That may have been the case for students at Idaho.

"While they were physically here on campus, they were not engaging in the academic process, and conversely, they were often involved with conduct issues," often stemming from alcohol and substance abuse, Pitman said. "So we connected the dots with our other concerns about campus safety and thought that we ought to try to have a different strategy related to our academic regulations."

In the past three or four years, the university has seen "a rising tide of issues and incidents," including hospitalizations, traffic accidents and a few students falling from roofs. In that time, about 115 students have fallen into the 0.0-1.0 GPA range each year.

"Given the corollary connection between academic performance and high-risk drinking behaviors," Greher-Traue said, "one might hypothesize that asking students who are struggling academically to take time off may also eliminate some of the highest-risk drinkers within a given population."

Previously, Idaho freshmen who earned a GPA below 2.0 during fall semester would be put on probation, and kicked out if they didn't climb above that mark by the end of spring. This rule, approved by the Faculty Senate, will remain intact for students whose GPAs aren't low enough to warrant automatic "disqualification" from enrollment.

While minimum GPAs vary by institution, many colleges have procedures involving faculty, academic and student affairs staff who monitor and counsel students on whether staying enrolled is feasible or desirable, Greher-Traue said.

"It appears Idaho's proposal will increase communitywide awareness of these issues and create more of a

safety net to catch such students who are struggling in order to encourage them to take time away from school to become well enough to succeed," she said.

However, it's important that that community – bar and restaurant owners, police, parents – be involved and not just aware, said Tom Hall, director of wellness and health promotion services at the University of Central Florida.

"It is equally important to understand that underage and excessive drinking occurs in the context of celebrated campus traditions and inconsistent community enforcement of minimum legal drinking age laws," Hall, who has researched alcohol use among college students and worked with local police to decrease underage drinking, said via e-mail.

Prevention experts always say that no one measure is will stop alcohol abuse: only a holistic, multifaceted plan will. Idaho officials know this, which is why they're also creating a new position for an alcohol and other drug programming coordinator, stepping up evidence-based programming like bystander intervention, and updating their student code of conduct.

"We're going to resist the urge to just bring a talking head or two into campus to inspire and try to change behavior," Pitman said.

Students affected by the new rule will have no opportunity to contest their expulsion before it happens – only to appeal it after the fact. But Elissa R. Weitzman, an assistant professor at Harvard Medical School who directed Harvard's environmental prevention program A Matter of Degree, advocated for an "ask, assess, advise, assist/arrange" framework when helping struggling students.

"Taking the step of expelling a student seems to me to be the end result of a comprehensive assessment of what is happening with that student. There could be family issues, housing issues, learning issues, substance use or mental health issues," Weitzman said in an e-mail. "It is not clear that expelling a student is an appropriate or inappropriate response, but imposition of standards for behavior, conduct and achievement seem consistent with the core mission of an institution of higher education."

Idaho's new rule may be unique, but the sentiment behind it is not, Greher-Traue said: many colleges these days are "thinking outside the box" when it comes to prevention. For example, Bentley's nontraditional OneLess program actually targets students who already drink moderately, because even though they feel immune, they actually experience the highest rates of negative consequences. In the program's second year, those students and others report drinking less frequently and in smaller quantities, in addition to taking self-protective strategies like staying hydrated.

Idaho administrators will talk to first-year students about the new rule at their upcoming orientation.

"Perhaps it will help students in terms of setting some higher expectations, but we also think it'll help students avoid some hazards second semester – students who would frankly just be languishing, deciding what is next for them to do," Pitman said. "We'll see." ∎

'Redshirting' in Engineering

U. of Colorado at Boulder pioneered idea of giving some students an extra year, and now other universities are adopting the model.

By Zack Budryk

Following the success of academic "redshirting" -- derived from an athletic term for delaying participation to improve readiness -- at the College of Engineering and Applied Science at the University of Colorado at Boulder, other universities are adopting the model.

Boulder's GoldShirt program, which began in 2009, identifies high school graduates who need time to catch up on math, science and humanities courses before proceeding to the full undergraduate engineering curriculum. As part of the five-year curriculum, students spend their first year with an eye toward preparation for the major before proceeding to the typical engineering courses.

Tanya Ennis, director of the program, said in an interview that the GoldShirt program promotes diversity and helps the engineering program admit some students it would otherwise have to reject. "We had students that were applying, but weren't getting in," Ennis said. "There were a few people [who said] 'What if we had a place to bring students in to develop them in the first year?' kind of like the athletic redshirt program."

Students within the program take a combination of classes specifically for them and regular courses with students in the College of Engineering and Applied Science; Ennis noted that the program was "moving to more of a model where they're included in [more] mainstream courses."

At the end of the fall semester, Ennis added, GoldShirt will see its first graduate, who will be finishing the program in only 4.5 years and graduating summa cum laude. Retention rates for those in the program are similar to those of the engineering college's other students.

GoldShirt's recruitment pool is drawn from unsuccessful applicants to the College of Engineering and Applied Science, through an interview process in collaboration with the admissions office. GoldShirt students are also awarded a renewable scholarship of $2,500 a year, designed to help offset the costs of an additional year of college. Ennis said that GoldShirt classes are typically around 32 students, and that "this year will be our largest class at 34."

With an eye on GoldShirt's success, the University of Washington and Washington State University have announced that they will be collaborating on their own respective redshirting programs, both under the banner of the Washington State Academic RedShirts (STARS) in Engineering Program. STARS is funded by a National Science Foundation grant as part of an effort to increase retention rates within engineering and computer science programs. Eve Riskin, associate dean of engineering at the University of Washington, said that the program had a ready-made recruitment pool in the university's Mathematics Academy. In this program, rising high school seniors live on campus for a month and receive intensive math instruction. Underrepresented minorities are specifically targeted for the program.

"We were thinking this one month would be enough and everyone would do well and live happily ever after but some students … have struggled," Riskin said in an interview. "That's why we wished we had more time … with the students."

Part of the problem for low-income engineering majors, Riskin said, is that "[i]f you're at an underserved high school, there's a lot of focus on helping the kids graduate … you can get all As [at an underserved school] and then you come here and you're in for a big shock." This is particularly problematic for engineering, since "there's a lot of emphasis placed in engineering on how they do in the first couple of quarters." According to the American Society for Engineering Education, between 40 and 50 of engineering majors drop out or switch majors, and like Riskin, the ASEE's research cites difficult curriculum as one of the most common reasons for this.

This "make-or-break" aspect of the first year of engineering is also the

rationale for the extra year, Riskin said. "There's always been this idea about the 'weed-out' courses," she said. "People just assume that those define whether or not you can be an engineer based on your grade in there."

As a result, Riskin said, many students who have great potential as engineers are overlooked. "If we find people from underserved backgrounds or challenging circumstances who succeeded despite their lack of privilege when we put them in an engineering context that supports them, they can go on and be fabulous engineers," she said.

"The traditional stereotypical engineering image is not necessarily appealing to everybody, so what we do is… talk about [how] engineers are creative problem-solvers… they make a world of difference… and we know for a lot of our different populations, those messages resound with them," Ennis said. "I think that brings in a whole different kind of student."

Riskin said she hoped that underrepresented minority students would make up half of STARS enrollees. "We want students who are highly motivated, excited about engineering, who could just use that extra support," she added.

"[Students] have totally bought into what it means to mentor and how to help students become more successful by learning from what their experiences have been," Ennis said.

'Redshirting' engineering programs gain popularity

"I think [redshirting in engineering programs] has very high potential as it builds on a proven academic model and also incorporates psycho-social components that also have demonstrated effectiveness," said Norman Fortenberry of the American Society for Engineering Education. "I think the model is broadly applicable beyond… where it currently exists." ■

Motivation and Student Success

New study suggests that the reasons students seek a higher education can have a big impact on their grades and likelihood of staying enrolled,

By Scott Jaschik

Why did you decide to go to college?

Asking that question of new students in a more formal way might help colleges find ways to encourage more students to complete their programs, according to a new study from University of Rochester education researchers published in *The Journal of College Student Development*.

The study found that students motivated by a desire for autonomy and competence tended to earn higher grades and show a greater likelihood of persistence than did other students. (The findings were controlled for academic background and various other factors, and were based on surveys of 2,500 students at a community college and a liberal arts college that were not identified.)

The study comes at a time when many researchers are exploring the qualities that make some students more likely than others (of similar socioeconomic backgrounds and academic preparation) to succeed. Gallup researchers, for example, are reporting that students who hope they will succeed (as measured by, among other things, the ability to set goals and develop plans to achieve them) are more likely than others to succeed.

The Rochester researchers focus instead on "self-determination theory,"
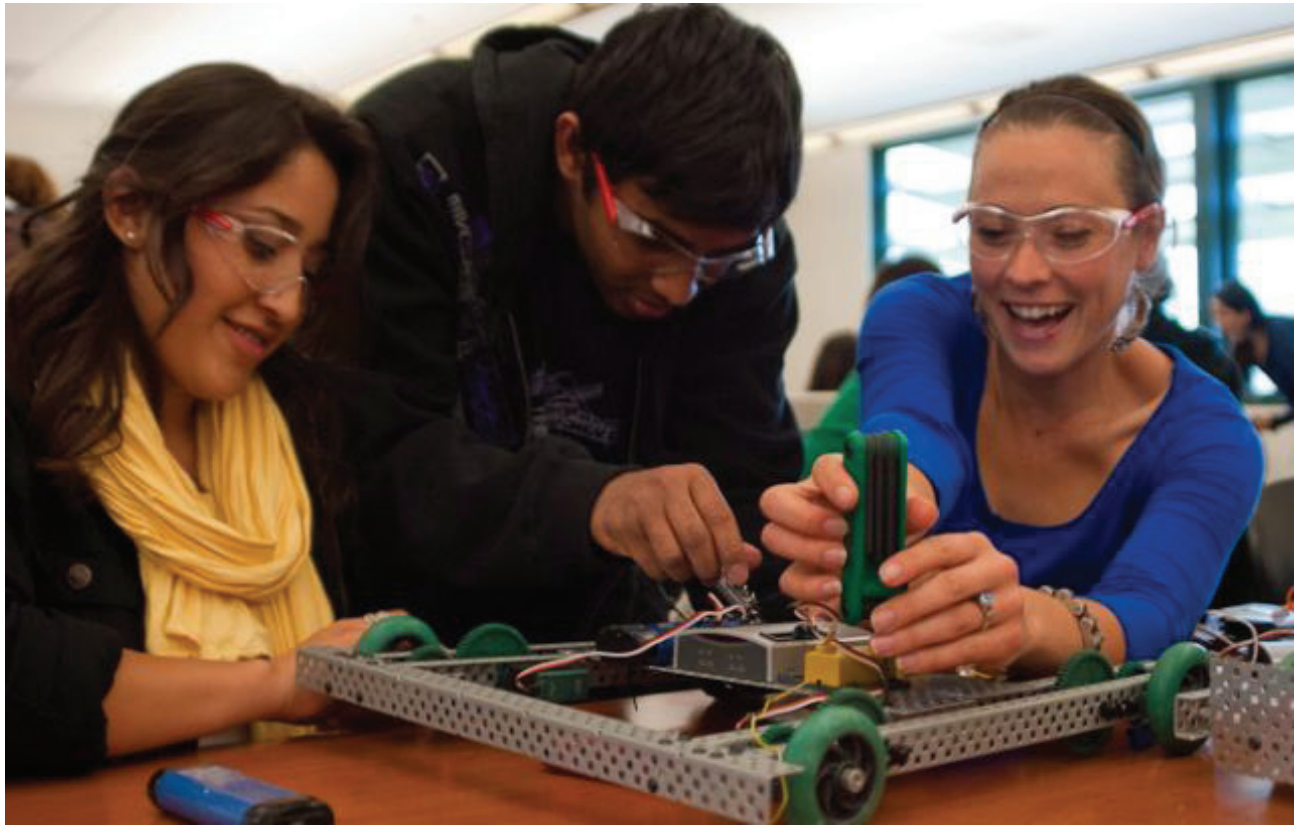
in which the reasons students seek a college education could affect their chances of success. In several instances, the researchers found that the impact of different motivations varied by socioeconomic group.

For instance, wealthier students appeared more likely than low-income students to achieve success based on their interest in studying certain subject areas. It's not that low-income students don't want to study various areas, but their motivation for enrolling in college may be more related to a desire to improve their financial situation, and that has a strong impact on their success.

Doug Guiffrida, associate professor of counseling and human development at Rochester, said that this finding suggests that those advising low-income students should be encouraged to reinforce -- for those who place a high priority on economic advancement -- the relationship between their studies and their later likely economic success.

He said that it's important to remember that "intrinsic interests matter" and can influence the success or failure of students. And that influence can be negative, the study suggests.

While much previous research has suggested that students who form social connections on campus are more likely to be retained, this study found that students who place a high

priority (in their decision to go to college) on meeting and interacting with peers tend to earn lower grades than do students for whom that is a lesser motivation. The negative impact is greater for males than for females.

Guiffrida said that learning which new students are focused (perhaps too focused) on meeting people can enable advisers to try to steer such students away from too much socializing.

The research was conducted at the Warner School of Education at Rochester, by Guiffrida, fellow professors Martin Lynch and Andrew Wall, and a doctoral student, Darlene Abel.   ■

Completion

Third Try Isn't the Charm

Most community college students take a break from college on the way to earning a four-year degree, but few make it there if they "stop out" more than once.

By Paul Fain

Community college students face long odds of eventually earning a bachelor's degree. And those odds get worse if they leave college more than once along the way.

That is the central finding of a new study that tracked the progress of 38,000 community college students in Texas. Toby J. Park, an assistant professor of educational leadership and policy at Florida State University, conducted the research. His working paper was presented at the 2013 annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education in St. Louis.

The group of students he studied first enrolled in 2000. Among them, fully 94 percent "stopped out" of college at least once, by experiencing a "period of non-enrollment."

Most of the students returned to their studies, according to the paper, which is titled "Stop-Out and Time for Work: An Analysis of Degree Trajectories for Community College Students." More than 20,000, or 72 percent, of the cohort came back to some Texas college in the sample, which used data from the Texas Education Agency,

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the state's comptroller.

Even students who eventually earned a bachelor's degree were likely to spend time away from college. Only 13 percent of the 6,200 four-year degree-holders in the sample did not stop out.

However, the study found that 76 percent of those degree completers took only one break from college. After stopping out after a second time, the percentage of returning students completing a bachelor's degree decreases substantially.

"If you leave twice," Park said, "you're not going to come back."

Park could only guess at the reasons why. But he said a second stop-out could be indicative of "systematic barriers" to a student ever earning a bachelor's degree, as opposed to the initial problems of adjustment and "exploration" for a first-time community college student.

The study found some variation among racial and ethnic groups. Interestingly, a second departure appears to be less of a problem for Hispanic students in the study,

who nonetheless had relatively low graduation rates.

"The Hispanic population does come back and stay enrolled," said Park.

The study did not factor in associate-degree completion, Park said. As a result, some students who graduated from community college are listed as dropouts in the following chart. And "graduation" in the study refers only to successfully earned bachelor's degrees. (The term "censored" in the chart is for students who were still enrolled.)

Two-year degrees can be a final destination for students, experts have found, and one that leads to good-paying jobs. Park said he hopes to include associate degrees in future iterations of his analysis.

'Work Less, Study More'

There are many reasons why community college students stop or drop out. A common one is that many work while they go to college, often holding down full-time jobs.

Park's study looked at the impact of wages on whether students earned a bachelor's degree. He found that a raise can be bad news, at least when it comes to academics. And that negative impact on educational outcomes is disproportionate, Park said, particularly on graduation rates.

"While a percent increase in wages has a roughly 4 percent effect on the odds of stopping out," according to the study, "we see a whopping 13
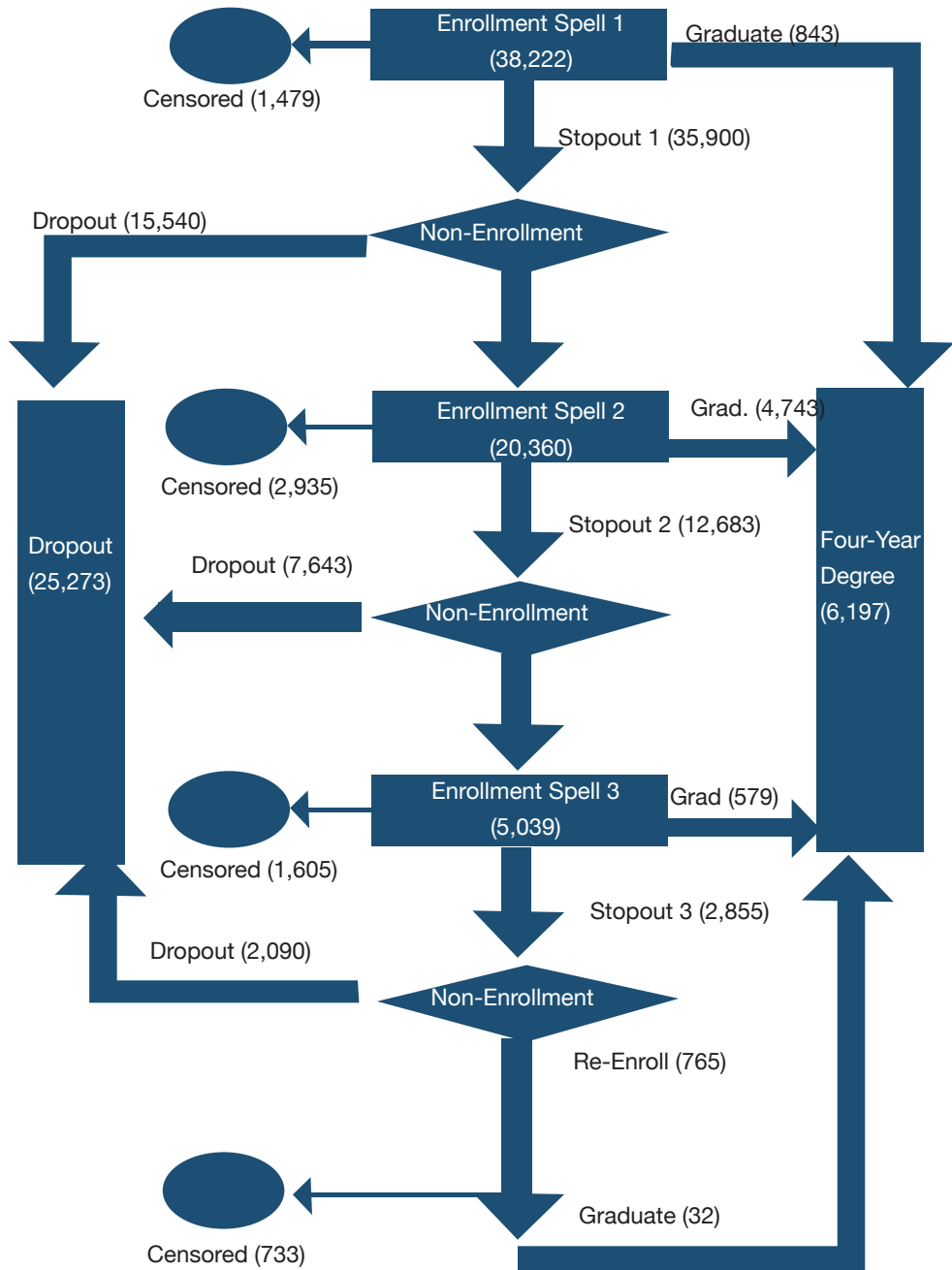
percent decrease in the odds of graduation."

Not working isn't an option for many community college students, as the study notes. But the "work less and study more" model clearly pays off for students who want to eventually earn a bachelor's degree.

"While many factors influence overall success, it appears that those students who are working while continuously enrolled experience lower rates of academic success," the study said. "Put differently, these students are working hard for the degree, yet not succeeding in attaining it."

In his paper, Park argues that policy makers and education experts should consider using data about financial aid and wages to "provide a more complete picture of the college completion process for community college students."

That picture is bleak. Nationwide, only one in four community college students earn a bachelor's degree in six years, the study said. Likewise, 84 percent of the students in the Texas sample failed to earn a bachelor's in six years, although 21 percent of those students were still enrolled in college.

When community college students in the study successfully transferred to a four-year institution, they were more likely to stay enrolled. They also were able to better weather a stop-out period.

"Perhaps those students successful in transfer are able to 'see the light at the end of the tunnel' in terms of degree completion," the study said.

"The successful transition between the two and four-year sectors, it appears, is important not only in graduating students, but also in keeping students in the pipeline toward eventual graduation." ■

Flowchart:

Enrollment Spell 1 (38,222)
→ Censored (1,479)
→ Graduate (843)
→ Stopout 1 (35,900) → Non-Enrollment
Non-Enrollment → Dropout (15,540)
Non-Enrollment → Enrollment Spell 2 (20,360)

Enrollment Spell 2 (20,360)
→ Censored (2,935)
→ Grad. (4,743)
→ Stopout 2 (12,683) → Non-Enrollment
Non-Enrollment → Dropout (7,643)
Non-Enrollment → Enrollment Spell 3 (5,039)

Dropout (25,273)

Four-Year Degree (6,197)

Enrollment Spell 3 (5,039)
→ Censored (1,605)
→ Grad (579)
→ Stopout 3 (2,855) → Non-Enrollment
Non-Enrollment → Dropout (2,090)
Non-Enrollment → Re-Enroll (765)
Non-Enrollment → Graduate (32)
→ Censored (733)

Walking the Walk on Completion

Community colleges are trying proven completion strategies,
but typically with only a limited number of students.

By Paul Fain

Most community colleges have begun using a suite of expert-approved strategies to get more students to graduation. But those programs are often just window dressing, as relatively few students participate in them.

That's the central finding of a new report from the Center for Community College Student Engagement. And Kay McClenney, the center's director, places blame for the shallow adoption of "high impact" completion practices squarely on colleges and their leaders, rather than on students.

"Requiring students to take part in activities likely to enhance their success is a step community colleges can readily take," McClenney said in a written statement. "They just need to decide to do it."

The study draws from three national surveys that seek to measure student engagement at community colleges that collectively account for 80 percent of the sector's enrollment. One is the center's flagship survey -- the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE).

In early 2013, the center released a report that used the surveys to identify and describe 13 promising approaches to increase student retention and graduation rates at community colleges. The new study, tracks how many students are participating in those projects and whether their participation increases engagement and their odds of graduating.

Eighty-four percent of community colleges offer student success courses, according to the report, but only 20 percent of students took one.

The 13 strategies include the use of academic goal-setting, student orientation, tutoring, accelerated remedial education tracks and student success courses (see box for full list). While experts and faculty members might not agree on whether all of the practices work well, there is an emerging body of evidence that they help boost completion rates.

For example, the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program has in recent years developed metrics to rate the performance of community colleges. Every one of the institutions that has made Aspen's top 10 lists has used at least some of these practices, said Josh Wyner, the program's executive director.

"We see a lot of these when we're doing the prize," he said.

Those high-performing colleges typically roll out completion programs to large numbers of students, Wyner said. To use the parlance of the day, the colleges "scale" them. But that isn't happening at most colleges.

For example, 84 percent of two-year colleges offer student success courses, which are designed to help new students navigate college and get off to a good start. The courses are particularly helpful to large numbers of lower-income, first-generation college students who attend community college, and who rarely get the support of family members who know the skinny on how college works.

Yet only 20 percent of surveyed students took a success courses during their first term, according to the report.

The other 12 practices showed similar gaps between being offered and being used. Take tutoring, which has obvious benefits to struggling

High-Impact Practices

Academic goal setting and planning

Orientation

Accelerated or fast-track developmental education

First-year experience

Student success course

Learning community

Experiential learning beyond the classroom

Tutoring

Supplemental instruction

Assessment and placement

Registration before classes begin

Class attendance

Alert and intervention

students. Fully 99 percent of the surveyed colleges offer some form of tutoring, but the report found that only 27 percent of students had taken advantage of it during the current academic year.

David Baime, senior vice president for government relations and research for the American Association of Community Colleges, praised the study, which he called rigorous.

"The report is a clear call for community colleges to provide an array of structured experiences and expectations for students to make their success more likely," Baime said via e-mail.

Just Do It

The main reason community colleges can't go big with completion-oriented strategies is money, their leaders say.

"The reality on campuses is that funding limitations and in some cases longstanding practices do impede progress," said Baime.

While money is indeed tight at most community colleges, McClenney doesn't fully buy that explanation.

She points to the Houston Community College System, which requires all new students, and those who transfer in with fewer than 12 credits, to take success courses. Persistence rates for those students improved, according to the study, by 9 percent for one cohort.

Likewise, Kingsborough Community College, part of the City University of New York system, has created learning communities, which are blocks of two or more courses that groups

Peer tutoring at Minnesota's Inver Hills Community College

of students take together, that now serve 1,200 students each semester. Only 12 percent of community college students participate in learning communities, which the report identifies as a promising practice that more than half of surveyed institutions offer to some students.

Both of those urban institutions have plenty of fiscal challenges, McClenney said. And if they can make it happen at scale, "you can't tell me you can't do it."

For colleges to ramp up completion-oriented practices, she said they probably have to quit doing something else. That's the eternal challenge in higher education, which can always add programs but struggles to cut them.

"First you have to decide to do it," McClenney said. "Then you have to decide what to stop doing."

For example, the study looked at the impact of encouraging students to work with advisers to set academic goals and create a plan for achieving them. To do that, McClenney said colleges might need to change the role of advisers, many of whom are focused more on the psychology side of counseling than on academic planning.

Wyner agreed that being strategic about cutting back is a key to improving completion. But that requires strong decision-making and planning by colleges leaders, which he said is often lacking at community colleges.

"It's happening in some places, but not enough," said Wyner.

A Common Problem?

Nobody is saying that taking the college completion leap is easy. Just ask Klamath Community College.

The college, which is located in Oregon, recently introduced mandatory advising and orientation and the elimination of late registration for courses, among other initiatives. Its enrollment dipped by 20 percent after those changes were made. That in turn cost the college 7 percent of its annual budget, which is largely enrollment driven.

But that sort of initial pain should pay off in the end, said McClenney and other experts, both for students and institutions.

The report stressed that it's important for colleges to carefully craft their completion strategies. That includes the quality of design and implementation of programs, as well as their scale and intensity.

Baime said many community college leaders feel optimistic that "the ways, if not all the means, to significantly greater student success are at hand."

In some ways the center's report echoed the tough words of an opinion piece Inside Higher Ed ran earlier this week. That article, which an anonymous community college administrator wrote, took the author's college to task for allowing students to sign up late for classes and make other last-minute decisions, like applying for financial aid.

In an interview the administrator, who requested anonymity because her bosses strongly disagree with her opinions, concurred with the report's central tenets.

She said many community colleges fail to do strategic planning very well. And the window-dressing approach to completion isn't rare either, she said, with lots of pilot programs that don't get a full treatment.

"We're piloting ourselves to death and not really thinking about how we do long-term shifts," she said. ∎

Success in the States

New student success centers take the completion agenda to the states, with a faculty-driven feel. More could be on the way.

By Paul Fain

Keeping up with the national college completion "agenda" can be tough. Foundations have created a messy mélange of strategies and organizations, often under the watchful eye of policy-minded state lawmakers, with the goal of getting more students to graduation.

To try to pull together some of those threads in a coherent way, community college leaders in five states have created statewide "student success centers." And that approach may soon spread.

The Kresge Foundation has provided start-up cash with three-year grants for the success centers in Michigan, Arkansas, Ohio, Texas and New Jersey. The foundation is now looking to fund three more, having recently released a request for proposals jointly with Jobs for the Future, a nonprofit group that receives funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, among others.

Caroline Altman Smith, a senior program officer for Kresge, said the goal is to knit together viable completion strategies in a central place in each state. The new hubs become places for both administrators and faculty members to share intelligence and bring ideas back to their campuses.

Kresge didn't come up with the concept for student success centers. Smith said the idea was "bubbling up organically" in several states.

A recently released policy paper from Jobs for the Future tracks the genesis of the centers. The first step came when a "critical mass" of community colleges signed on to the completion-oriented reforms led by Achieving the Dream, a national organization, according to the paper.

"The colleges and their supporting associations came to believe that their hard work could be strengthened and amplified if there were some statewide, cross-college supports in place," the paper said, including common data sets and professional development opportunities.

That works for Achieving the Dream, said Carol Lincoln, a senior vice president for the group. The centers

make up for a "missing structure" in each state, she said, and help to "spread lessons more deeply."

The Ohio center got off the ground last year. Ruth Silon, who taught English at Cuyahoga Community College for 34 years, is its director. "You have 23 separate cultures" at Ohio's 23 community colleges, Silon said. The center is trying to help create a "state culture" around college completion.

The five existing centers are all in states with relatively decentralized community college systems. Arkansas and Michigan were the first ones created. They're also the most extensive.

California could soon be in the mix. The state's 112 community colleges are somewhat autonomous. Observers said a state student success center in California could play a role in helping to coordinate the growing number of completion-oriented strategies that are occurring around the huge system.

Scott Lay, president and CEO of the Community College League of California, said community college officials in the state are discussing whether to apply for the Kresge grant.

"Our goal would be to set this up so that it's a resource for faculty," Lay said. There would be a payoff for administrators, too, he said. "We need to attention to metrics by senior leadership."

The Front Lines

The five success centers all have relationships with their state's community college associations. But they also have separate budgets, per Kresge's design, which keeps them independent. Small staffs of one or two full-time employees run the centers. They also have advisory boards.

Ideally, the centers will find more money through fund-raising and government grants. In Arkansas, for example, the center helped the state win a $15 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor in 2011.

They also help foundations spot promising ideas within each state. Smith said the Michigan-based Kresge has leaned on the that state's center as an "intermediary" between foundation staff and community colleges.

"We can't have a relationship with all 28 of the colleges," she said.

Kay McClenney is a fan of the centers. McClenney, director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement, said they can take completion strategies from Achieving the Dream or similar groups, like Completion by Design, and both broaden and deepen the impact of those approaches at the state level.

"The fact that they are close to home helps," she said.

There are critics of certain tenets of the college completion agenda. Performance-based state funding in particular tends to rankle some professors.

The student success centers, however, feature a prominent role for faculty members, more so than have some national conversations about student success.

The centers all "place special emphasis on engaging faculty in the leadership of reform efforts," said the Jobs for the Future paper, "so that reforms gain support and traction on the ground."

Ohio's success center has a particularly strong faculty focus. The center, like those in other states, hosts meetings for faculty members to trade notes and hear from outside experts.

Kathy Pittman, an English professor at Hocking College, a two-year institution located in rural Ohio, has attended workshops hosted by the state's center. Speakers who made an impact on her included officials from the Community College of Baltimore and Patrick Henry Community College, which is located in Virginia.

"We compare notes," she said. "It saves other colleges from having to jump through all the hoops."

Pittman also led a discussion at a center-sponsored symposium. She described for her peers how she teaches remedial English to fire science students. Many of her students already work in the field. So one way to increase their engagement, Pittman said, is by using reading material that relates to their work -- so-called "high-interest material."

That lesson can apply to instructors at other two-year colleges around the state, she said, even if they aren't teaching fire science students.

Pittman said the center has gotten a boost from Silon herself being well-steeped in teaching practices.

"She totally understands where faculty are coming from," Pittman said. "She's really done a good job of provoking conversations around the state." ∎
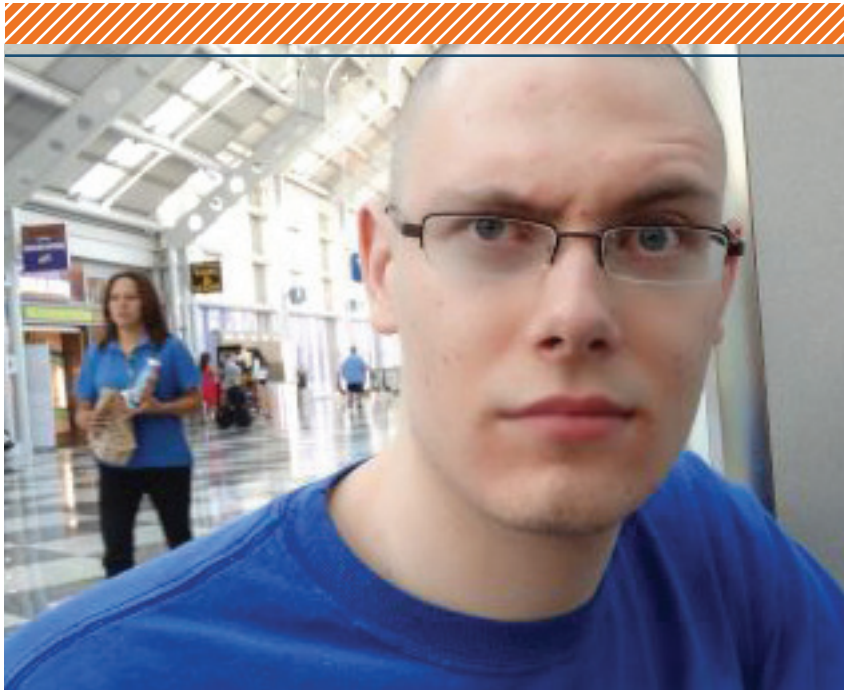
Zach Sherman, College for America's first graduate

Experimental College's First Graduate

Competency-based education takes a major step forward in its challenge to seat time as College for America awards its first degree.

By Paul Fain

A groundbreaking form of competency-based education now has its Patient Zero. Zach Sherman, a 21-year-old sanitation worker in Ohio, earned a self-paced associate degree from College for America in early June -- just shy of 100 days after he enrolled in the online program.

Sherman is the first completer among a group of five College for America students who have successfully earned its competency-based general studies degrees. Southern New Hampshire University launched the college in January. It is one of three institutions now offering "direct assessment" academic tracks, which are not based on the credit hour standard.

That means students can control how fast they move through the program's task-oriented homework, assignments and assessments. There are no formal instructors at the college -- only academic coaches and reviewers who determine if students have mastered each task by checking each assignment and sending them back to students for more work until they demonstrate competency.

In three months Sherman earned the equivalent of 60 credits, even though the 120 competencies he mastered do not track directly to credits.

"The emphasis is what you know and can do," says Kate Kazin, College for America's chief academic officer.

The degree program wasn't easy, Sherman says.

He works nights at a ConAgra Foods plant in Troy, Ohio, which is north of Dayton. The facility makes Slim Jim snack meats. Sherman typically pulls 56-hour workweeks, with a cleaning shift every night from 10 p.m. to 6:30 a.m. Sometimes he dials it back to 48 hours a week, but he says he needs all the pay he can get.

"I'm buying a house right now," says Sherman.

His studies came in the daylight hours after he got off work. Sherman says he would get home, shower, eat something and start plugging away at his College for America assignments. The tasks included writing papers, learning how to use software tools like Excel, creating presentations and participating in group projects.

Sherman began on March 1. He took only a few days off during the months he was working toward the degree. He worked for several hours every day before calling it a night (day, really, given his work schedule) and going to sleep before his next shift.

His pace was steady at the beginning. But after one phone conversation with his college-assigned coach, Andrea, he decided to step it up. Her encouragement was what he needed.

"From that moment on something really clicked in my brain," he says.

"The institutions have to have real, serious institutional control to ensure that there isn't progress that isn't warranted."

Coaches at the college are both full- and part-time employees, all based in New Hampshire. They have backgrounds in social work or coaching, and went through a "rigorous" training process, according to the college.

In the groove now, Sherman began working for up to six hours a day on the coursework. He says he averaged at least 30 hours a week in May. "That last month got pretty crazy."

Sherman had worried that the self-pacing at the college would encourage him to procrastinate. But the opposite happened, he says, and he actually accelerated as he went along.

Sherman says the assignments and course material -- much of it open-source documents that the college steers students toward -- were a good balance of challenging and manageable. He had to resubmit some assignments more than once to get the mark of mastery (there are no grades).

One time it took him three or four times to get an assignment right, which he says was a "flustering" experience. But after another of his chats with Andrea, some of which lasted an hour or so, he successfully completed it.

"I really needed her at the beginning and at the end" of the degree program, says Sherman.

Competency or Bust

College for America enrolls about 500 students, its leaders say. The bulk of the students enrolled through partnerships the college has inked with big employers like Anthem, ConAgra, FedEx and the City of Memphis.

Sherman is not typical of most students who attend College for America or other competency-based programs. He's young – a traditional-aged college student. In contrast, the average age of a student who attends Western Governors University is 36. (Western Governors is the most established of competency-based institutions, although it does not offer direct assessment programs.)

His situation is also somewhat unusual, Kazin says, because he is single and lacks the family responsibilities of most adult students. That helped him push through 80-plus-hour weeks.

Few students will move as quickly through the program as he did. The expected average time to degree is two years, according to college officials. (The college has posted videos of interviews with several students, including Sherman.)

However, Sherman is in the program's wheelhouse for one key reason: This was only college option he felt he could try.

"Most of our students are really not looking at other alternatives," says Kris Clerkin, College for America's executive director. "They're not shopping around."

Sherman grew up in nearby Piqua, Ohio. The small city was a manufacturing powerhouse, specializing in automotive parts. But most of those jobs have dried up. Sherman graduated high school there, having gone through a vocational track, which he says he enjoyed.

He enrolled in the local Edison Community College a year after earning his high school diploma. He attended the college for only a year before quitting.

"It was going fine," Sherman says. "But I started at ConAgra and working crazy hours. It wasn't really plausible for me."

When pressed, Sherman also says the traditional college classroom experience was underwhelming. His faculty and coursework at Edison were good, he says. But going to class reminded him of elementary school.

"I don't necessarily like that sit-down format," he says. "It felt like we were robots at times."

Sherman's peer group -- younger students who for some reason don't make it through community college -- is hardly a small one.

"There's a vast population that hasn't been served by traditional higher education," Kazin says.

The timing was right when Sherman heard about College for America at a town hall-style meeting at his ConAgra plant, which employs about 800 workers.

Another plus was the free tuition.

College for America didn't charge its initial pilot group anything, thanks to discounts fronted by Southern New Hampshire and a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Next month, when the college enrolls a new cohort, it will charge subscription-style fees. The "all-inclusive" tuition rate is $2,500 per year.

College for America will offer financial aid. And because the program has received approval from the U.S. Department of Education (as well as its regional accreditor, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges), students can qualify for Pell Grants. Employer partners will also kick in tuition subsidies.

The feds have also granted approval to a direct assessment program at Capella University. Northern Arizona University is currently pursuing that approval. Both universities have earned a green light from their accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Direct assessment doesn't look much like most people's notion of college. It has critics. And College for America, Capella and Northern Arizona will feel extra pressure to get it right as the first programs out of the gates.

"The institutions have to have real, serious institutional control to ensure that there isn't progress that isn't warranted," said David Bergeron, a former official the U.S. Department of Education who recently joined the Center for American Progress as an expert on higher education. "There's tremendous scrutiny that's going to be applied."

That said, direct assessment has plenty of promise, Bergeron said. "Wouldn't it be great if we had an educational system that rewards people for moving with pace?"

Next Steps

Students cannot transfer college credits into the program at College for America because the degree isn't based on the credit hour. But they can use their knowledge and learning from previously taken college courses to more quickly demonstrate competencies. And the college's associate degrees can be "translated" into course equivalencies if a student or graduate attempts to continue his or her studies elsewhere.

Unlike Sherman, Michelle Coppola enrolled in the online degree program with no college experience under her belt. The 43-year-old employee at Anthem, a health insurance giant, had not been in school for more than two decades.

"I had never gotten to go to college," says Coppola. "It was never a possibility for me."

The Manchester, N.H., resident began living on her own at 17. After she got married, her now ex-husband opposed her attending college.

In January the account service representative and her fellow Anthem employees received an e-mail from the company about College for America. Tuition was free.

"It was a no-brainer," Coppola says. "I wanted it so bad."

She and about 40 other employees signed up for the 10 available slots. But College for America admitted all of them.

Like Sherman, Coppola says the coursework was challenging. She also leaned heavily on her coach, Bob.

The program's learning objectives are based in part on the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP), a Lumina Foundation project to determine what earning a college degree should signify in terms of learning. The associate degree's 120 competencies are organized into about 20 "task families" and around 10 competency clusters.

Coppola liked the control of the self-paced College for America.

"I'm typical Type A," she says. "I don't like to wait for other people."

She's the fifth graduate, although college officials are still auditing students' work, so that number isn't firm.

Coppola got into a weekly ritual, which began on Monday with reading material for her assignments. Tuesday she did required research. Then, on Wednesday, she dug into the tasks, usually wrapping them up on Thursday. On Friday she reviewed her work and submitted it.

Sometimes her studies leaked into the weekend. Over all, Coppola says she spent two or three hours per weeknight on the assignments.

Students' work is assessed by 15 reviewers, who are essentially the college's faculty members. Kazin says they typically have advanced degrees and college teaching experience in their subject areas of expertise.

Reviewers are required to send "actionable" feedback to students within 48 hours, Kazin says, although they are averaging a turnaround of less than 30 hours so far.

The college is ready to ramp up quickly by hiring more reviewers if enrollment climbs. They'd better be, as Southern New Hampshire's president, Paul LeBlanc, says the college is aiming for an admittedly optimistic enrollment goal of 350,000 students by 2018.

College for America is considering several new direct assessment degrees, officials say, including a bachelor's degree in communications, with specialties in health care management and business. That degree won't be ready for primetime until next year. The college is also working on associate degrees in a "health care context" as well as in sales and distribution.

"These are the first of many programs that we'll create," says Clerkin.

Both Coppola and Sherman say they'd be interested in a bachelor's-degree option at College for America. But first they want to use their new associate degrees to see if they can advance in their companies. Both have applied for new positions.

The real test for competency-based education is the value of credentials in the market place, said Michael Horn, co-founder and executive director of the Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation. He hopes the approach takes hold, in part because traditional college sometimes holds back students like Sherman.

"That's really educational malpractice," Horn said.

Sherman threw his hat in the ring for a sanitation supervisor job at the plant. He says that he's talked about his College for America degree with ConAgra human resources staff, and that they were impressed by the credential.

"I really do feel it's going to help me move up there," he says. "They're really big on degrees." ∎

Scorecards Get an A

California's community colleges get graded with new completion scorecards. Experts say the data are among the best provided by a public college system.

By Paul Fain

California's community college system on Tuesday unveiled Web-based "scorecards" on student performance at its 112 colleges. The new data tool is user-friendly and often sobering, with graduation, retention and transfer rates for each of the colleges and for the overall system, which enrolls 2.4 million students.

The scorecards include breakdowns by race, ethnicity, gender and age. They also feature more than just simple graduation rates, with measures like the percentage of students who complete 30 credits and data on how students who placed into remedial coursework fared in comparison to students who were prepared to do college work when they enrolled.

For example, about half (49.2 percent) of students across the system earned a degree or certificate or transferred over the six years they were tracked. But 71 percent of those who were prepared for college successfully completed, compared to 41 percent of students who needed remediation.

Also included in the scorecards are retention rates, which are based on the proportion of students who remained enrolled for their first three consecutive terms, and a section on career technical education as well.

System officials cautioned that the results should not be used to weigh colleges against each other. After all, rural campuses like the College of the Siskiyous serve different student populations than does Long Beach City College, an urban institution.

"The system was not designed as a method of ranking institutions," said Brice W. Harris, chancellor of the

community college system.

However, colleges will be scrutinized by how they perform over time on the scorecards, which will be updated each year. And the baseline established for an institution during the most recent academic year, 2011-12, can be compared to data from the previous four years, showing whether colleges are improving or not.

Some students and their families will no doubt use the scorecards, which are available on a central website and on the sites of local colleges. But observers said the primary audiences for the data are college leaders and state policy makers, some of whom have pushed performance-based funding for the two-year system.

"It has already created considerable conversations on our campuses and in our communities," Linda Thor, chancellor of the Foothill-De Anza Community College District, said in a phone call with reporters. And importantly, Thor said, those are conversations "based on data" rather than anecdotes.

Just the Facts

Experts on higher education data and proponents of the college completion agenda praised the new scorecards, saying they are both meaty and easy to understand.

Daniel Greenstein, director of postsecondary success strategy at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, said the community college system had done a good job selecting a handful of the most important measures of completion. And he said he liked the Web tool's simplicity.
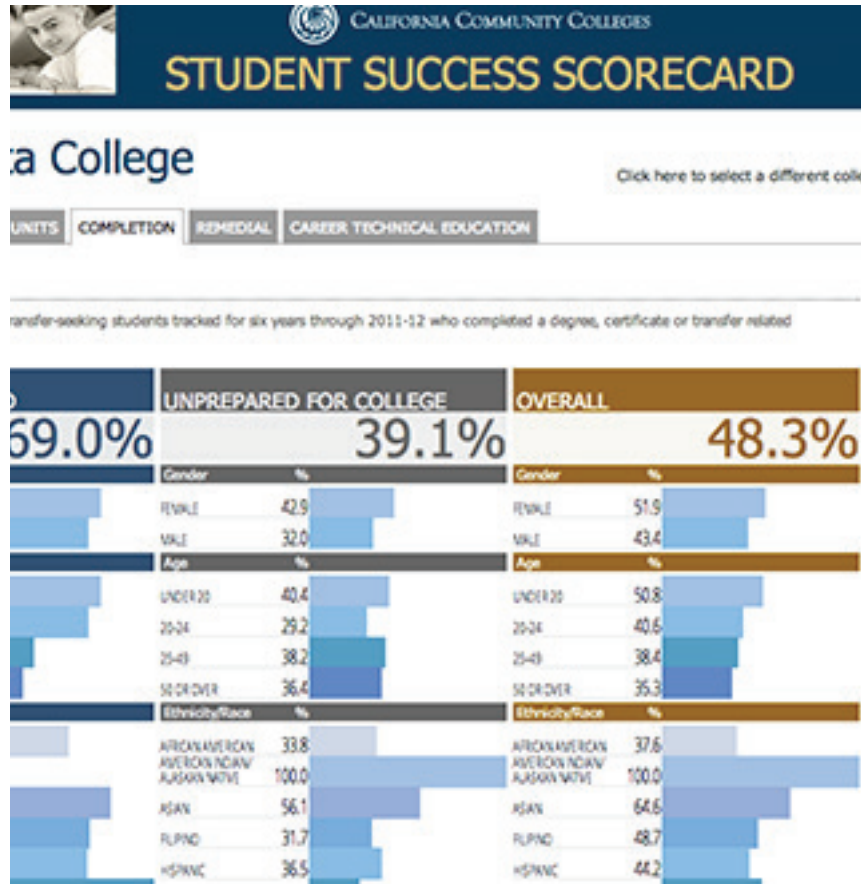
"It's not trying to spin," he said, with an approach he described as "here's the data."

The academy has long bemoaned the shortcomings of federal graduation rates, which typically focus on first-time, full-time students. Community colleges in particular enroll many students who fail to show up on standard measures, like those featured in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

California's two-year system, however, deserves credit for advancing that conversation in a productive way, said Nate Johnson, a higher education data expert and a senior consultant for HCM Strategists, a health and education public policy and advocacy firm.

"They've actually proposed something different and put it out there," Johnson said, "rather than just throwing stones at IPEDS."

The colleges didn't need to provide much new information for the scorecards, system officials said. Much of it is currently collected under a process dubbed the Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges (ARCC), the creation of which the state's legislature required in 2004.

But the scorecards do include some new information, and plenty of

> **Colleges will be scrutinized by how they perform over time on the scorecards, which will be updated each year. And the baseline established for an institution during the most recent academic year, 2011-12, can be compared to data from the previous four years, showing whether colleges are improving or not.**

additional ways to disaggregate and analyze it. Several additional layers will be available, system officials said, with some of that information available only to colleges.

Employment figures are not featured in the scorecards. But the system is working on an earnings tracking tool that should be publicly available next month, according to a spokesman, with median annual wages for students two and five years after they enter an academic program.

One data point that several experts praised was the measure of how many students complete 30 credits toward a degree or certificate. Research shows that students are more likely to graduate and earn more in wages if they clear this "momentum point," according to system officials.

Colleges will be able to use the 30-credit statistic and other, similar measures to identify promising practices that will help more students complete, said Jan Friedel, an associate professor of educational policy at Iowa State University.

Friedel said the scorecards are perhaps the most detailed that a state system makes publicly available.

"They're at the forefront of the completion agenda," she said. "I'm impressed."

Broader Reforms

The scorecards grew out of a broad series of reforms to the California community college system. Central to that effort has been a report by a state task force, which recommended several shifts for the colleges, some of them controversial.

For example, the state's community colleges have long been fiercely protective about their open-door admission policies. But the report has successfully pushed for the two-year institutions to make tough choices about giving priority to students who are most likely to earn a credential.

The report also called for the creation of scorecards based on bulked-up data sets. The system made good on that request this week.

The release of the scorecards "represents an important step forward in making the colleges more transparent and accountable for institutional and student performance, and hopefully will provide some momentum for other changes to be made at the campus level," said Lande Ajose, associate director of California Competes, a group that has been critical of the colleges' governance.

Amid years of deep budget cuts, California's community colleges were forced to turn away 600,000 students. The task force was created in part to come up with ways for the colleges to cope. The financial crisis has eased a bit for the colleges, thanks largely to a tax hike proposed by Gov. Jerry Brown that voters approved last fall.

Harris has vowed to continue pushing the task force's recommendations, even if the budget situation continues to improve.

The overarching goal of the scorecards is to "help more students achieve their educational goals on time," Harris said. And he said the public data will encourage colleges to work harder to improve themselves.

"This level of transparency is in the best interests of the citizens of the state," said Harris. ∎

Graduate School

The Future Graduate Students

New data from ETS illustrate gaps by race and nationality in GRE scores, and differences between graduate population of Americans and non-Americans.

By Scott Jaschik

Test-takers who took the GRE in 2012-13 were more likely to be a bit younger and a bit more science-oriented than those who took the exam the year before. And in the quantitative portion of the exam, in particular, foreign talent appears to be outpacing American.

These are some of the findings in the latest "Snapshot" of GRE test-takers, released by the Educational Testing Service.

While not everyone who takes the GRE applies to graduate school, and not every graduate program requires the GRE, the statistics provide numerous hints on the population that will be enrolling or seeking to enroll in graduate school – both in master's and doctoral programs.

In 2012-13, likely a result of the continued tough job market for new college graduates, the percentage of GRE test-takers who are 18-22 years old increased to 37 percent, from 34 percent the year before.

Another notable shift was that those who identified a degree in natural sciences as their intended field of study was up to 32 percent, from 27 percent the year before. The next most popular fields were engineering and social sciences (at 13 percent each), and humanities and education (at 6 percent each). Note: 25 percent were either in "other" fields or had not yet decided.

As is the case with most standardized testing, the GRE total scores for the year reveal significant gaps by race and ethnicity among American test-takers.

The GRE report demonstrates the continued importance of the foreign student population to American graduate education. Non-U.S. citizens represent about one-third of all GRE test-takers.

In key ways, the data show differences between the American and non-American population – and particularly the population from Asia, which accounts for the countries sending the most students to American graduate programs. For example, 58 percent of GRE test-takers in the United States are women, and 62 percent of test-takers in Asia are men.

The GRE analysis also includes average scores by test-takers' home countries. The data show many countries outpacing the United States, especially in the quantitative category. But the data should be viewed with some caution. In many parts of the world, it would only be the absolute top students who would aspire to come to the United States for graduate education, while the American cohort includes students with a range of academic records. Nonetheless, the figures illustrate why, in certain fields, foreign talent has become so crucial to

Average GRE Scores by Race and Ethnicity, U.S. Citizens

Group	Verbal	Quantitative	Writing
American Indian	150.9	147.4	3.6
Asian	152.9	153.8	3.8
Black	146.7	143.3	3.3
Mexican	149.9	146.8	3.6
Puerto Rican	149.4	146.3	3.4
Other Hispanic	150.5	147.4	3.6
White	154.1	150.7	3.9

graduate programs.

The figures show numerous countries besting the U.S. significantly in the quantitative category that may be key for science and technology programs. The U.S. average is 149.9, far below the averages for China (163.4), Taiwan (160.4) and many other countries. The United States does better, compared to most other counties, in the verbal and writing sections, not surprising given that those growing up in an English-language educational system would be at an advantage. But this advantage doesn't hold for all countries. Germany tops the U.S. in two GRE categories -- and ties in writing. And when it comes to countries where students would have been educated in English, the U.S. isn't necessarily superior. Canada and Britain have averages well above the U.S. in all three GRE categories.

While ETS released data from many countries not included below, the table that follows includes all of the countries in which at least 1,000 people took the GRE in 2012-13 ∎

GRE Average Scores by Country

Country	Number of Test Takers	Verbal	Quantitative	Writing
Bangladesh	1,664	145.7	155.8	2.9
Brazil	1,430	149.8	151.3	3.0
Britain	1,559	157.2	153.1	4.3
Canada	5,510	156.0	153.8	4.2
China	42,357	146.6	163.4	2.9
Colombia	1,294	148.6	150.2	3.0
France	1,269	153.7	156.9	3.4
Germany	1,555	153.6	155.9	3.8
Ghana	1,225	145.9	146.8	3.1
India	56,782	144.7	154.3	2.9
Iran	6,326	142.4	157.4	2.9
Japan	1,374	145.1	156.6	3.0
Korea (South)	4,870	148.3	158.8	3.1
Mexico	2,499	148.9	149.1	3.1
Nepal	1,556	145.5	154.8	3.0
Nigeria	2,932	146.8	147.6	3.1
Pakistan	1,955	148.7	153.5	3.4
Russia	1,101	148.3	155.7	3.1
Saudi Arabia	4,288	137.8	142.4	2.1
Taiwan	2,742	145.3	160.4	2.8
Turkey	2,713	144.5	158.5	2.9
United States	337,782	152.9	149.9	3.8

Surge from India

First-time international graduate enrollment is up 10 percent, largely due to students from India.

By Scott Jaschik

First-time international graduate enrollment is up 10 percent this fall, largely due to a substantial increase from India, according to a report being released by the Council of Graduate Schools.

The 10 percent increase over all follows two years in which the gains were 8 percent, and one year at 3 percent. The first-year figure is key to many universities that rely on international graduate students because the long duration of many graduate programs means that many of those who start will be enrolled for a number of years.

By far the most dramatic change this year is a 40 percent increase in new graduate enrollments from India,

Change in First-Time International Graduate Enrollment, by Country

Country	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Brazil	n/a	n/a	+14%	+17%
Canada	n/a	n/a	+4%	+3%
China	+20%	+21%	+22%	+5%
India	-3%	+2%	+1%	+40%
Mexico	n/a	n/a	+5%	-2%
South Korea	-3%	+0%	-2%	-12%
Taiwan	n/a	n/a	-2%	-8%

which have been relatively stable (up or down a few percentage points) in recent years. That gain compensates for a much smaller increase this year from China (although those enrollments are also still going up). The table above shows some of the fluctuations. The Council of Graduate Schools has started breakdowns for some countries only in the last two years, which is why the figures are missing before that.

The enrollment gains were reassuring to council officials in part because this year saw a decline in the growth of international graduate applications -- to 2 percent, down from 9 percent the prior year, and 11 percent the prior year.

That slowdown led some to fear that graduate programs might have to dig deeper into their pools to meet enrollment targets. Debra W. Stewart, president of the council, said in a statement that "the continued growth in first-time enrollment is a sign that decreasing applications have not yet damaged the strong pipeline of international graduate students."

By field of study, the new data show growth in new international graduate students for every disciplinary area except the life sciences. The biggest gains this year were in physical sciences and engineering. ∎

Change in First-Time International Graduate Enrollment, by Field

Field	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Arts and humanities	+5%	+5%	+5%	+9%
Business	+2%	+9%	+15%	+6%
Education	-7%	+12%	+8%	+3%
Engineering	+3%	+6%	+12%	+17%
Life sciences	+0%	+1%	+1%	-3%
Physical sciences	+9%	+12%	+4%	+18%
Social sciences	+4%	+2%	+9%	+1%

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