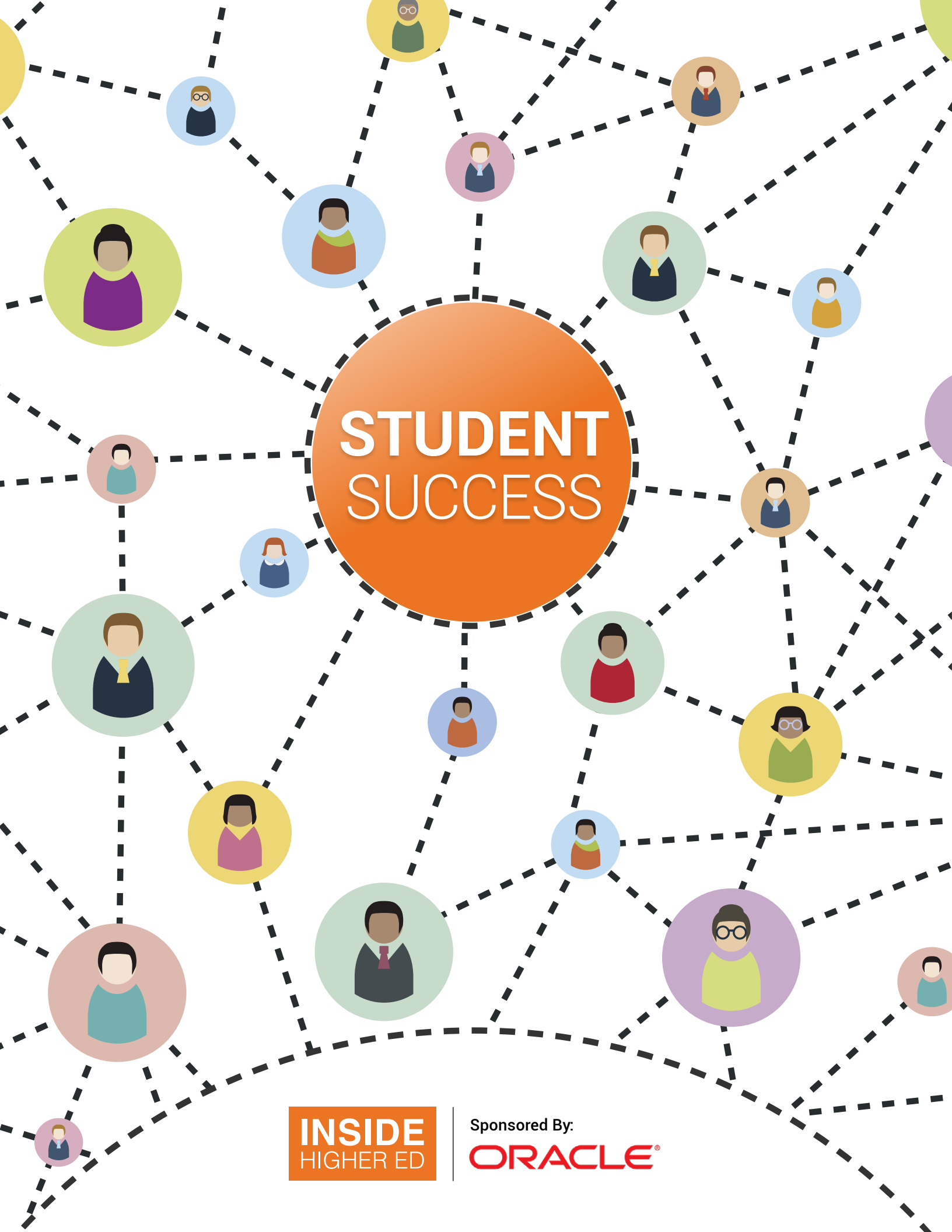

INSIDE HIGHER ED

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Introduction

Few issues are more important to colleges – all types of colleges – than student success. And increasingly, colleges realize that.

The articles in this compilation feature colleges that are changing requirements – and colleges that are putting more resources in front of students. Students need both approaches. The articles included feature success stories and the-jury-is-still-out stories. But there is much to learn.

Inside Higher Ed will continue to cover these issues. We welcome your comments and your ideas for future coverage.

--The Editors
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News

Libraries as Student Success Hubs

A new report analyzing what students need the most found they often chose the library as a top destination for services.

By Madeline St. Amour // September 30, 2019

SOURCE: ISTOCK / TOMAZL

When Karen Stout was president of Montgomery County Community College, the Pennsylvania institution changed the way the library was designed. It was co-located with the student success center and changed to incorporate more student services.

The college saw an "immediate uptick" in use from students for services other than borrowing books, like printing and technology use, according to Stout, now president and CEO of the nonprofit Achieving the Dream. She also positioned her office in the middle of the library as a symbol that she was leading with student success in mind.

Montgomery might have been on to something.

A study released Monday by Ithaka S+R, the research arm of nonprofit Ithaka, found that students see libraries as a valuable space for services, including non-academic services.

Through an initiative called the Community College Libraries and Academic Support for Student Success project, researchers first interviewed 37 students from seven community colleges about their largest needs and difficulties in college. They then created several "service concepts" based on the needs expressed by those students. More than 10,000 students at those seven community colleges were surveyed about which of those concepts would be most valuable to them and where they would most like to access them, as well as the largest difficulties they faced in attending college.

The government partner for the study was the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Most students reported wanting to leave college with more knowledge first and the ability to make more money second. The challenges the majority face are balancing school, work and family and having enough money to pay for basic needs like housing and food.

In response to the concerns students raised in interviews, Ithaka S+R developed a list of possible approaches community colleges might adopt to address students' needs: a single point of contact to help students navigate available services; loan technology; a dedi-

cated person available to help find sources for course work; social workers; childcare; information about digital privacy; community advocacy; and opportunities to display students' work.

Students were presented with the concepts and then asked which place on campus they would most like to access those services. The choices were randomized across surveys so as to avoid purposefully steering students toward libraries.

However, students most often chose the library as a potential provider for these services, according to the report.

"This project is really, in essence, about re-envisioning the role of the library," said Christine Wolff-Eisenberg, manager of surveys and research at Ithaka S+R and a co-author of the report.

The results present an opportunity to have a conversation about the roles libraries could play in wraparound services and academic support, said Braddlee, dean of learning and technology resources at Northern Virginia Community College and a co-author of the report (Braddlee uses only one name).

Each of the seven community colleges involved in the survey has agreed to pilot at least one of the programs, Braddlee said. At Northern Virginia, he plans to implement the social worker concept.

"That doesn't mean we'll hire six full-time people for each campus library, or convert librarians into [master's of social work]," he said. "What it is, rather, is that we're looking at the resources that are already available on campus."

> That doesn't mean we'll hire six full-time people for each campus library, or convert librarians into [master's of social work]. What it is, rather, is that we're looking at the resources that are already available on campus.

This includes creating displays that provide information on housing and food insecurity and referring students to resources, leveraging "the role of the library as a trusted information source."

It also includes sending librarians to the campus's Center for Student Financial Stability to learn more about available programs, and letting social workers from the center use study rooms to meet with students confidentially when there isn't other available space.

"A lot of these services are going to require deep collaboration so the library is not reinventing the wheel when other resources exist," Wolff-Eisenberg said.

While the grant does not provide money to study the outcomes of the pilot projects, the researchers plan to publish a free tool kit colleges can use to conduct the survey and find out what their own student body needs and where.

Stout intends to take the concept of placing more supports, like writing centers, to Achieving the Dream's more than 280 member institutions. She also thinks it's important for institutions to include librarians in conversations about student success.

"Librarians are a natural bridge and hub in connecting academic affairs on our campuses with student affairs," she said.

Braddlee thinks this report provides data to help librarians think of their roles in different ways. While some of the concepts can seem daunting at first, he emphasizes that institutions don't have to take them literally.

"For example, on childcare, we're not thinking that the library's going to become a drop-off daycare center," he said. "But rather, what we're saying is what can we do to make the library more family friendly, more child friendly, and might that be an example to the rest of the institution to do small things as well?" ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/09/30/students-trust-libraries-more-borrowing-books-report-says

A Community College Goes National

Rio Salado College's national division targets "education deserts" around the country. Can that strategy work?

By Lilah Burke // September 25, 2019

Rio Salado's headquarters

Rio Salado College, a mostly online community college in Maricopa County, Ariz., is one of the first community colleges to launch a "national division" targeting students all over the country to take online classes and earn degrees or certificates. Administrators say the division, which debuted last fall, targets "education deserts" where postsecondary programs can be hard to access.

"This only adds to what we're doing locally in Maricopa and how we support Maricopa residents in the state of Arizona in providing a flexible delivery model for students," said Janelle Elias, interim vice president of Rio National.

The college defines an education desert as an area more than an hour's commute from "a main campus" of a college or university, which is also how some others have chosen to define it. Some researchers also specify that that campus must be broadly accessible, meaning highly selective colleges may still be present in an education desert. Rio Salado administrators say they have identified education deserts in every state, but they did not specify how many they have found, emphasizing that they are still in the early stages of the national division.

The courses are priced at $250 per credit hour, up from Rio's standard $85 for Maricopa residents, and are available 24 hours a day to ease student access. The launch was the result of a $5 million investment by the college's governing board and a planning grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The division currently has 600 available courses and 1,000 students. As for the success of the program so far, administrators said they saw a 12.2 percent increase in credits attempted for the spring of 2019 and are continuing to see some increases in year-over-year out-of-state enrollment for fall 2019. Out-of-state enrollment has hovered around 5 to 6 percent of Rio Salado's total in the past five years.

"We do believe these increases are early indicators of success with the national division, yet we have many strategic efforts under way at the college to improve student success and experience," administrators wrote in a statement. They did not identify a specific number of students from education deserts that they would like to enroll.

Nicholas Hillman, a professor at the University of Wisconsin at Madison who has done research on education deserts, said that generally online education can still be difficult for potential students in those areas.

"Online-only seems to be suboptimal for students that are working full-time and who are not already in the academic groove," said Hillman, who concedes he is not an

expert on online learning. "My understanding is that when online is coupled with robust support services and robust accesses to face-to-face contact and the relationships are built between faculty and students, that's when you see students really thrive and student outcomes really improve. And I just haven't yet seen it in online education."

Some research suggests that the students who are least prepared for college perform worse in online courses than they do traditional ones.

Kate Smith, interim president at Rio Salado, said the college's history of distance education makes it uniquely designed for this purpose and better attuned to the needs of students. The college was founded just over 40 years ago as a "college without walls."

"The history of Rio has always been to take education where it's needed," said Smith. "It started at storefronts, by mailing tapes back and forth, correspondence, and then we've gotten into serving in prisons."

Elias echoed the sentiment, saying that Rio Salado is better primed to take on the task than more traditional institutions are.

"Because we were designed this way in our core fundamental mission," she said, "we've designed our processes, everything to be very elastic, and that allows us a flexibility that's difficult to replicate in a more traditional college or university setting."

The college uses a chat bot, success coaches and text messaging to engage out-of-state students.

Vanessa Whaley, a portfolio executive at CampusWorks, which supported Rio Salado in the launch of its national division, said that the college understood that robust digital marketing would be necessary to reach these potential students. "The price point is a really big opportunity for students who don't have access to education," she said. "Now they get access from someone who's been in the field for so long."

Phil Hill, a partner at MindWires Consulting who has vocally criticized Rio Salado's student outcomes in the past, said he questions whether the Rio Salado model is good enough to scale and will really help students in these areas.

"It's playing to their weaknesses, not their strengths," he said. "Their strength is being a transfer school and a course filler for [Arizona State University] and some of the other universities. They just have not demonstrated with their approach that they can have high success rates or support their students who are trying to get degrees." Rio Salado officials in the past have pushed back against Hill's critiques, noting that fewer than a quarter of its students enroll seeking any kind of degree or certificate.

Hill also said that the price of courses might still make them inaccessible to many students in education deserts, who might be better served by online options at their local community colleges.

A further challenge that might face any institution attempting to engage students in education deserts might be internet access. Rio Salado officials also said they are beginning to take a close look at whether areas that lack high-speed broadband may be part of their definition of education deserts.

According to Kristin Blagg, a researcher with the Urban Institute who has worked on the topic, about 7 percent of people who live in education deserts also do not have reliable internet access that is fast enough to partake in online classes. Outside of education deserts, that number is 1 percent.

"We calculated that three million folks live in places that are in this definition of a public, broad-access education desert and who also don't have a high-speed internet connection," Blagg said. "It's a relatively small share of the population if you think about the population of the country, but it is a substantial population."

Smith and Elias both say that, in addition to their goal of making high-quality education accessible, they believe the division can serve the Maricopa community.

"This division of the college does have that unique opportunity to function as an innovation hub or as an incubator," said Elias. "We're already seeing some early technology successes that we plan to scale back to the full college and potentially could support the full district as well." ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2019/09/25/rio-salados-national-division-targets-education-deserts

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Tapping Coaches to Help Re-Enroll Students

The Texas A&M system is using ReUp Education to find students who stopped out and to help them re-enroll and graduate.

By Madeline St. Amour // September 23, 2019

SOURCE: ISTOCK / SENGCHOY

The Texas A&M University system for years has been working to re-enroll students who stopped out of college. The system's 11 universities often reach out to students who are eligible to enroll for the next semester but haven't yet, or who stepped away but have earned more than 90 credits.

But system officials realized they were missing out on a large swath of students -- those who had been stopped out of college for a year or more. A key problem was finding contact information for students who had been away that long. Students could have moved, gotten new phone numbers or gotten married and changed their names.

That's why the system began working with ReUp Education in May, said Shonda Gibson, the system's associate vice chancellor.

The system estimates that across its 11 universities, 13,000 students stopped out over the past five years who are eligible to return to college, Gibson said. ReUp re-enrolled 50 students this past summer and 300 for the fall semester.

Gibson said having a partner is critical for this work. It's difficult for campuses to track students down, and ReUp coaches also provide extra support by continuing to contact students throughout their time in college. The system pays the company 20 percent to 30 percent of the tuition rates of re-enrolled students for the service.

ReUp is the only company that focuses solely on re-enrolling students at universities, according to CEO and founder Sarah Horn. It works with colleges to find students who have stopped out, engage them and coach them to re-enroll and eventually graduate. After this fall, Horn said the company will have brought more than 10,000 students back to college since it became operational two years ago.

These students "started with us and had hopes and dreams, and they're actually in the worst situation" because they don't have a degree but might have taken on debt, Gibson said. "I view that, personally, as a failure on our part."

The campuses have programs in place to prevent students from stopping out, but sometimes that's just not possible for the students. In a survey, students cited personal commitments as the top reason they stopped out, according to information from the system. For example, Gibson has been speaking with a student whose mom is sick, so the student has to leave the university and go be with her family,

she said.

"In a year or two, my concern is that we're not reaching back out to her," Gibson said. "I think this is a whole different way of approaching students who need to step away."

Campuses also are looking at policies that act as barriers to students continuing in college. For example, students could have holds on their accounts for parking tickets or missing documents, Gibson said. The system is thinking about whether those policies are in the best interests of students. Some campuses are also looking at how to assist students with small amounts of debt on their accounts that can prevent them from enrolling for future semesters.

ReUp coaches, who are either first-generation learners or people who stopped out themselves at some point in their college careers, understand these struggles.

Coaches work with one institution to ensure they learn its policies and procedures, Horn said. They talk with students via email, text or phone depending on the student's preference, and provide information on resources and emotional support for returning students. About 65 percent of students whom coaches contact respond with interest, Horn said.

Hannah Connolly, now a junior at Texas A&M University Corpus Christi, left college a few years ago after prolonged feelings of anxiety and depression. She earned her cosmetology license and works at a spa but still wanted to finish her college degree.

> It doesn't feel like a program -- it feels like someone genuinely caring.

"The opportunity to get a college degree is really important to my family," she said.

Coming back, she had more confidence because of her success with cosmetology. But Connolly also had a ReUp coach contact her right after she re-enrolled. That coach, Erin, has been "a fairy godmother" to Connolly, she said.

Erin provided information on enrolling for courses and dealing with financial aid as Connolly readjusted to college life. She also checks in with Connolly from time to time to make sure everything is going smoothly.

"It doesn't feel like a program -- it feels like someone genuinely caring," Connolly said.

Gibson has asked the university system to try ReUp for a year and then evaluate the financial impact. Enrollment management leaders from across the system will meet at the end of October to look at the findings so far.

The system "started very light," Gibson said. All but three campuses provided a list of stopped-out students to ReUp, but some who participated provided shortened lists to test it out.

While the universities could spend money to recruit new students, because of the decrease in direct enrollments, Gibson said the system has to be more strategic and invest in different populations.

ReUp assists with that, Horn said, because it helps universities in the system understand each other's best practices and learn where there is friction.

"That feedback and transparency helps systems move forward faster," she said. ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/09/23/texas-am-system-experimented-using-out-sourced-coaches-help-re-enroll-stopped-out

Moving Away From Merit Aid

> The University of Pittsburgh isn't offering free tuition. Instead, it's matching Pell Grants and shifting merit aid after calculating how much unmet need is too much.

By Madeline St. Amour // October 18, 2019

SOURCE: TOM ALTANY / UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

When Ann Cudd joined the University of Pittsburgh as provost last September, she asked her team to look at how much unmet need the university's students have.

"The answer to that question wasn't pretty," Cudd said.

Pennsylvania has the second-lowest level of per-capita state support for higher education, according to a 2018 report from the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. And its public four-year colleges have the third-highest in-state tuition and fees in the nation, according to a 2018 report from the College Board.

To address that problem, the university created the Pitt Success Pell Match Program, which began this fall. The program takes a data-driven, targeted approach to disbursing grant aid. It provides a dollar-for-dollar match for all Pell Grants.

Cudd's office also analyzed data to find the tipping point for unmet need that caused students to leave college ($20,000 for the main campus and $15,000 for Pitt's four regional campuses). The university is providing funds to "bring students back from that cliff" and to a manageable amount of unmet need. Only first-year students are receiving this grant this year, and one class will be added each year until all classes are eligible.

Ann Cudd, Pitt's provost

"We really wanted to try to do something innovative and targeted, because we knew we couldn't get to that wonderful zero point" for unmet need, Cudd said. Eliminating all unmet need would cost around $187 million annually, which felt like an "unreachable goal for us at this point," she said.

The Pitt program will cost $25.4 million in its first year and reach 5,007 students at the campus, which enrolls about 24,500 undergraduates. Only full-time students are eligible for the grants, but there is no age cutoff. Both the Pell match and unmet-need grants are automatically disbursed by the financial aid office.

The university is paying for the new aid through cost-savings initiatives and reallocation of merit-based aid as need-based grants. It also made across-the-board budget cuts of less than 1 percent.

"My research background is inequality in higher education," Cudd said. "I've been very interested in this question of, why are we doing merit-based aid? So I came to this role with that question in mind."

Marcia Sturdivant, president and CEO of NEED in Pittsburgh, said the program is creative, strategic and mindful. NEED is a nonprofit college-access program that helps underserved high school students prepare and pay for college.

"I think it's a great idea and a very generous concept to include students who may not otherwise be able to afford tuition at the University of Pittsburgh," Sturdivant said. "I think it also speaks to the integrity of the university."

Tiffany Jones, director of higher education policy at the Education Trust, said it's "really impressive when an institution steps up to the plate" in a state with high costs for higher education and low state support.

The Pitt Success program gets a few things right over programs at other institutions, Jones said. First, it helps students pay for bachelor's degrees, not just two-year degrees, increasing their earning potential. It also provides funding beyond tuition, so a student can use the Pell Grant match for expenses like housing and books.

Merit Aid and Lower-Income Students

However, Jones said Pitt does not enroll many Pell recipients. While nearly half of K-12 students in the state receive free or reduced lunch, indicating a high population of low-income people, only 16 percent of the university's undergraduate population were Pell Grant recipients in the 2017-18 academic year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

"Where are those other low-income students in the state going to college?" Jones said. "Do they not have access to the University of Pittsburgh?"

Cudd said the university is trying to address that issue, and the grant program seems to be helping. This academic year, the number of Pell-eligible students on all campuses increased by 12.4 percent compared to last year.

"Historically, the University of Pittsburgh for the last 15 or 20 years has really been trying very hard to provide this very top-notch, first-class education, and has had to improve the quality of students in terms of their drive and motivation, and we've done a great job of raising various metrics," Cudd said.

But, by using merit-based aid to do that, she said the university started to lose lower-income students.

"We're looking to add motivated, lower-income students who couldn't come" due to the cost, she said. The university analyzed the quality of the class after reallocating merit-based aid and found that the students were just as high achieving as before.

"They just now can afford to choose Pitt," Cudd said.

Sturdivant believes the program will help increase diversity at the university.

"Students shouldn't have to make decisions on whether to continue education because of financial situations, but that's the reality," she said.

Cudd said the university has the program budgeted out years in advance. By year nine, it will be part of the ongoing budget and will regularly renew. She expects to retain more students with the aid, which will ultimately help the university and raise enrollment at the regional campuses. Cudd is also investing her discretionary strategic funding as provost toward the program for several years, she said.

The university plans to assess the program by looking at how students use the extra funds and how it affects diversity. It is also working to diversify the faculty's ranks, Cudd said.

So far, Cudd said she hasn't come up against any backlash to the program or shifting of funds.

"Higher education is coming to a real crisis point in terms of not being able to serve the goal of social mobility," she said. "I've been really heartened by the degree to which this has had pretty much universal acceptance and enthusiasm." ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/10/18/new-grant-program-pitt-matches-pell-grants-and-targets-students-unmet-need

A Second Chance at Detroit Colleges

Wayne State University and other colleges in the region are seeking to boost graduation rates by forgiving outstanding balances of students who left without earning a degree.

By Andrew Kreighbaum // October 7, 2019

SOURCE: WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
Old Main building on Wayne State campus

Dana Paglia's path to graduation at Wayne State University has been a circuitous one.

Paglia put her degree on hold in the winter semester of 2012 because her father was terminally ill. When she tried to re-enroll a year later, she was blocked by the university because of an outstanding $1,300 balance from her last semester there.

Not only was Paglia -- who was just 15 credits short of graduating -- stopped from taking more classes, the balance meant the university wouldn't release her transcript to send to other colleges.

She eventually took culinary classes at a local community college and worked for several years on food trucks in the Detroit area.

"It was fun and different," Paglia said of the detour in the culinary industry. But it was not what she envisioned when she started at Wayne State, where she had hoped to pursue a career in advocacy.

"Working 80 hours a week to make $12 an hour is not exactly what I wanted, especially since I was so close to having a whole other career I was planning for myself," she said.

Things changed quickly last fall when she got a call from Wayne State offering her a chance to wipe out her debt and re-enroll at the college. After posting improvements on low graduation rates at the university, college officials set their sights on former students like Paglia who left campus without a degree. By January of this year, she was back in classes to complete the anthropology degree she began several years earlier.

"When I got the call, it was a too-good-to-be-true type of situation," she said.

Paglia was one of the first students to enroll in the Warrior Way Back program, an initiative Wayne State launched last year that has become a model for higher ed institutions in the Detroit metro area and is drawing attention from well outside the Midwest region.

The program offers incremental amounts of debt forgiveness to students who left without graduating if they re-enroll and make progress toward earning a degree.

Warrior Way Back reflects the growing concern of many higher ed officials and policy makers with the number of students who leave college without a degree. Nearly 700,000 people in the Detroit metro area have attended college but have not graduated. People who left college without finishing are more likely to have difficulty paying off their student loans or to default on their student loans, according to higher education experts. The large number of noncompleters is also an indication of how institutions such as Wayne State have fallen short in serving many students even as those institutions have made marked improvements in retention and graduation rates.

Dawn Medley, Wayne State's associate vice president for enrollment management, said she got the idea for Warrior Way Back after listening to a radio story about a Detroit initiative to forgive parking fines of residents.

"We had been talking about re-engaging adult students. A lot of students are hindered not just by student loan debt. They were hindered because they also owed us [a balance]," she said. "What if we could set it aside like a parking fine?"

Colleges can't forgive students' federal or private loans. But small balances students owe to their institutions can often make or break their ability to complete college, especially if they've exhausted financial aid options such as federal grants and loans.

"When they came to us originally, we said based on their admission that they could be successful here. Somewhere along the way, we as an institution weren't there to be helpful," Medley said. "We see it very much as the student giving us another chance."

> Working 80 hours a week to make $12 an hour is not exactly what I wanted, especially since I was so close to having a whole other career I was planning for myself.

Wayne State students who withdrew more than two years ago, had at least a 2.0 grade point average and owe no more than $1,500 to the college are eligible for the Warrior Way Back program. Medley said the college has identified about 5,000 former students in the area who qualify and for whom they have a current address. About 60 percent were seniors when they left the college. And the vast majority (about 80 percent) have some level of financial need. Medley said she hopes eligibility requirements for the program can eventually be expanded further.

In the interim, the college is already seeing returns on the initiative. Since Wayne State began Warrior Way Back in the fall of 2018, 142 students have enrolled in the program. Twenty have since graduated, and 10 more are expected to follow suit in December. Medley said the buzz about the program has even prompted former students who left without graduating but didn't owe money to the university to inquire about returning.

Warrior Way Back is part of broader changes happening at Wayne State University in recent years. The university has received national attention for improving its graduation rate. About a third of new students at the college were completing a bachelor's degree in six years in 2014. At 13 percent, the rate was even more dismal for African American students. But the college boosted its six-year graduation rate to 47 percent by 2017, although degree attainment for black and Latino students still lags.

That improvement is due in part to more personal outreach to students by advisers and initiatives such as a summer program for entering freshmen who need remedial courses. Wayne State officials they want to cut the university's racial achievement gap in half by 2025.

"We have more support now to help those students cross the finish line," Medley said.

The Policy Perspective

Julie Ajinkya, vice president of applied research at the Institute for Higher Education Policy, said a key feature of the Warrior Way Back model is that a student's balance

is forgiven over a series of terms, so they are incentivized to make progress toward the degree. Just as important, she said, is that colleges themselves change how they support students.

"We're not just asking folks to re-enroll, crossing our fingers and hoping something is different this time around," she said.

While students benefit from finishing their degrees, colleges also stand to gain from the returning students. The balances being forgiven have already been written off by the college. And Wayne State generates more revenue from tuition and fees for those students than it loses by canceling their outstanding balances.

IHEP has created an online cost calculator that shows college leaders the potential return on investment from establishing their own debt forgiveness plan modeled on Warrior Way Back. The group completed that project with backing from the Lumina Foundation and the Kresge Foundation, which have provided grant funding to organizations in 24 cities across the country since 2017, including Detroit, to address higher ed degree attainment.

Other colleges have used creative ideas to get students back to campus, including offering scholarships. But Wayne State's focus on using institutional debt forgiveness is as significant as the way it's become a regional strategy to steer former students toward college completion.

"If you live in the Detroit area, you have an entire ecosystem of higher education that has adopted what I think is a commonsense policy allowing people to continue their education," said Dakota Pawlicki, Lumina's strategy officer for community mobilization.

Thanks in part to Detroit's inclusion in a network of Lumina "Talent Hubs," the Wayne State model has been noticed by institutions well outside Michigan.

Colleges in Indiana, Ohio, Oregon and Wisconsin have inquired about the program. And Eastern Iowa Community College already has its own institutional debt forgiveness program underway, Pawlicki said. But the program's influence has been largest in Wayne State's own backyard.

Model for Other Detroit Colleges

After learning about the Wayne State model, officials at Oakland University, another four-year institution about 40 minutes north of downtown Detroit, opted to target an even larger group of students -- including both students who left without a degree as well as those at risk of dropping out.

"We wanted to look at ourselves to make sure we're not increasing the problem," said Dawn Aubry, associate vice president for enrollment management at Oakland. "What can we do to make sure we're not contributing to the stop-out issue?"

College officials look for telltale signs that students may be at risk of dropping out -- lower grades, changes in majors or overall time to earn degrees -- and reach out directly to offer individual support, including advising and financial assistance.

Oakland's Golden Grizzlies Graduate Program forgives the outstanding balance of former students for each semester they make progress toward a degree. It also offers microgrants of up to $500 to those students who don't owe a balance to the university.

At Henry Ford College, a two-year college in Dearborn, Mich., officials are making the process easier for students who have left college without a degree to get an official transcript -- one of the biggest barriers for students to later earning a degree. Students who pay down half their balance can receive the transcript immediately. Those who agree to a payment plan can re-enroll in classes. The college also assigns those returning students individual academic advisers.

Daniel Herbst, vice president for student affairs at Henry Ford, said the college's president became interested in starting an initiative like Warrior Way Back after hearing Medley speak about the program.

"We're not just asking folks to re-enroll, crossing our fingers and hoping something is different this time around."

"Some schools will look at this as a way to increase enrollment," Herbst said. "For us, it's more about serving students who really need the opportunity to come back to school."

Employers Aim to Develop New Talent in Region

Local industry has taken its own interest in the debt forgiveness model to hit ambitious goals for a more educated workforce in the region. An initiative backed by the Detroit Regional Chamber has set a degree-attainment goal of 60 percent, including high-value certificates and associate degrees, for adults in the area by 2030.

The Detroit metro area's degree-attainment rate is currently 45 percent, and the population of new high school graduates is declining. So to boost the share of residents with postsecondary credentials, local colleges have to do more to reach the adult students, said Greg Handel, vice president of education and talent at the Regional Chamber. The Wayne State model for steering students back to campus appeared to be promising for other colleges in the area as well, he said.

"The idea here is taking a great idea and commitment from Wayne State to tackle this issue and seeing if we could leverage that idea and turn it into a regional strategy," Handel said.

The debt forgiveness model is just one strategy among several being tested in the Detroit area to hit degree-attainment targets. The chamber is also working with local colleges to create stronger degree pathways for adult students and also encouraging local firms to offer tuition benefits to employees who enroll in higher ed programs. The chamber is also playing a direct role in connecting students with colleges.

"There's this notion that maybe a generation ago people moved to where the jobs were. Now companies with the best jobs that pay the most tend to seek out the most educated talent," Handel said. "We need to ensure we that we have a good, solid pool of educated talent both for our existing employers and for employers that may want to expand into our region."

A generation ago, many Michigan residents were able to get well-paying jobs without continuing their education past high school, said Tiffany Jones, director of higher education policy at the Education Trust, which advocates for closing gaps in achievement for low-income students and students of color in colleges and K-12 schools.

"Those jobs are few and far between now," Jones said.

The debt forgiveness model has the potential to increase the social mobility of new graduates because their degrees will boost their prospects to get a better-paying job, Jones said. It also matters that Wayne State in particular is pioneering the new program, she said. Nearly 40 percent of the university's student body is nonwhite, and 50 percent are low income. Those students are disproportionately likely to benefit from a program like Warrior Way Back, Jones said.

She noted that the program also reflects a shift in understanding of higher ed institutions' role in their students' success.

"A decade ago, if someone dropped out, college leaders would have a hundred reasons why that was the case. All of those reasons put the blame entirely on the student," Jones said. "Higher ed institutions actually have a role in these outcomes and can do better."

Medley said that's true of Wayne State, where college officials are now more focused on how they can better help both current and former students finish degrees.

"We're a different institution than we were 10 years ago," she said.

Paglia, now 27, is emblematic of the kinds of changes college officials believe Warrior Way Back can lead to for individual students. She entered the fall semester with only one class remaining to complete her bachelor's degree but got approval to begin taking courses for a master's degree in urban planning concurrently.

And her return to college has already helped her land a new job at the Community Housing Network, a nonprofit that helps connect people dealing with chronic homelessness with housing options. The job goes "hand in hand" with her graduate program, she said. She got it after giving a presentation on chronic homelessness at the Detroit Institute of Art.

Paglia acknowledged initially feeling nervous about coming back to campus. But she said she soon realized many other students had dealt with similar challenges.

"You start to realize this is more common than you think," she said. "It was scary feeling like you didn't belong after so long, but no one made feel like I didn't belong for a second." ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/10/07/detroit-colleges-tackle-dropout-challenge-offering-debt-forgiveness

New Law Creates Pot of Emergency Funds in California

Legislation signed into law Friday will let community colleges draw from a state fund of nearly $500 million for emergency financial aid.

By Madeline St. Amour // October 7, 2019

California governor Gavin Newsom signed a suite of bills affecting higher education Friday, including Assembly Bill 943, which opens up a large pot of state funds to be used for emergency student aid.

The bill, written by Democratic assemblyman David Chiu of San Francisco and passed 40 to 0 on the Senate floor, lets community colleges use funding from the California Community Colleges Student Equity and Achievement Program for emergency student financial assistance.

There is no cap on how much money from the fund each college could decide to put toward emergency grants, but the colleges must update their student equity plans to include emergency grants as a possible intervention, according to Jen Kwart, spokeswoman for Chiu. The bill encourages colleges to take into consideration the characteristics of their own student body, including how many students could benefit from the emergency funds.

The bill was cosponsored by the California Federation of Teachers, Faculty Association of California Community Colleges, City College of San Francisco Faculty Union, Los Rios College Federation of Teachers and Scholarship America. No one voiced opposition to the bill while it moved through the State Assembly and Senate, according to legislative documents. However, the potentially burdensome fiscal impact was noted throughout the analyses.

The Student Equity and Achievement Program is already funded at $475.2 million. The money goes toward student success services like tutoring, peer-mentoring programs and equity-focused professional development for faculty.

With the new bill, funds can now be used for emergency assistance, defined as support to "assist a student to overcome unforeseen financial challenges" like housing and food assistance, textbook grants, and transportation assistance. Eligible students are defined as those experiencing an unforeseen challenge, who are making satisfactory academic progress and who are at risk of not continuing due to the financial challenge.

"With the cost of education as high as it is, many students are just one financial crisis away from being forced to drop out of school," Chiu said in a press release. "We want to give students who experience an emergency a bit of stability so they can continue their studies."

Colleges in California and across the nation have created their own emergency aid programs. A Senate analysis of the bill notes that Pasadena City College and Grossmont College both fund their programs through external sources like foundations and fundraising.

Amelia Parnell, vice president for research and policy at the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, said the association found in a survey that most

SOURCE: GETTY IMAGES / JUSTIN SULLIVAN
California Governor Gavin Newsom

colleges feel they aren't fully meeting students' emergency financial needs.

"Because emergencies are typically unexpected, it's hard to find the right balance that's needed," she said, adding that she thinks the spirit of the bill is "consistent with what a lot of campuses have said."

According to the Senate floor analyses, Chiu cites as support a February 2017 report from the Institute for College Access and Success on college costs for low-income California students. The report found that low-income students at public colleges in California can't afford college costs with the available grants, their own resources and some working income.

It also found that community colleges sometimes have a greater net price for low-income students than four-year public schools due to the limited amount of grants available for community college students.

Chiu argued that research shows emergency aid can keep students enrolled through unforeseen challenges.

Robert Shireman, director of higher education excellence at the Century Foundation, didn't work on the bill, but he said because the state's community colleges have more financially needy students, this bill could provide some needed relief.

"By allowing some flexibility with funding already allocated for student support, campuses will have an additional tool to respond to emergency situations that might otherwise cause students to drop out or miss classes," he said.

However, the Senate grappled with questions of whether the Student Equity and Achievement Program funds would be best used for this purpose. The analysis asks if the bill would "set a precedent that dilutes student equity funds intended for critical academic support service," and if expanding state financial aid programs would be more appropriate.

The Senate Appropriations Committee said the bill could redirect funds away from other student support services, which could lead to "potentially significant … cost pressure" to maintain the state's current level of student support services.

The bill received great support from higher education, however, and no recorded opposition.

Laura Metune, vice chancellor of governmental relations at California Community Colleges, praised the new legislation in a written statement, saying, "AB 943 provides California community colleges the ability to address the basic needs of students using their Student Equity and Achievement funds. This flexibility in use of resources is an important step in the movement to fix financial aid for California's lowest income students and address their true college cost as proposed by SB 291."

Other bills will affect admissions, financial aid, for-profit colleges and dual enrollment in the state, drawing praise from California Community Colleges chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley. However, several of the bills proposing tighter regulation for for-profit and private colleges were watered down or delayed before making it to the governor's desk. A bill aimed at improving admissions integrity would require at least three administrators to approve admissions exceptions. ■

Mikhail Zinshteyn contributed to this article.

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/10/07/money-student-success-california-can-now-be-used-emergencies

'Teachin' It'

Author discusses new book on "breakout moves" for teaching at community colleges.

By Scott Jaschik // July 18, 2019

Success rates for community college students lag those at other institutions. Why? Many factors are at work. Many community college students come from high schools where they received lousy teaching. A new book, *Teachin' It: Breakout Moves That Break Down Barriers for Community College Students* (Teachers College Press), argues that instructors make an enormous difference to community college students.

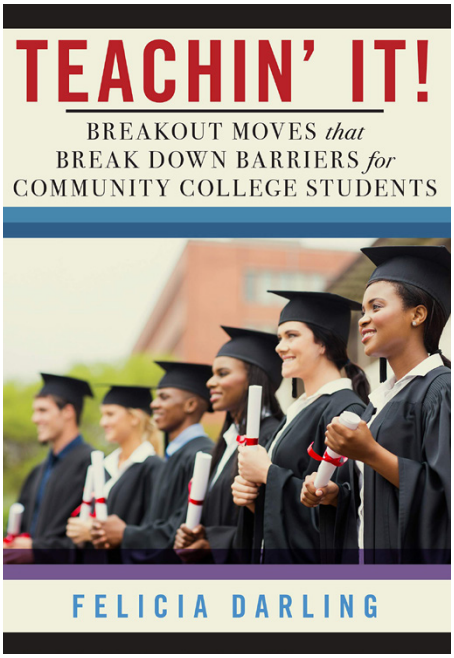
The author, Felicia Darling, a college skills instructor at Santa Rosa Junior College, responded via email to questions about her book.

Q: Graduation rates are much lower at community colleges than at most four-year institutions. What do you consider a good graduation rate for a community college? How should we judge community colleges on completion?

A: Community colleges have lower graduation rates because they have a different mission and serve a more diverse student body. Therefore, three factors should be considered when discussing "good graduation rates." First, the majority of students attending four-year universities seek to graduate with a bachelor's degree. In contrast, while many community college students do seek to graduate with an associate's degree, there is a wide variety of other aspirations represented. These include transferring to a four-year college, obtaining a certification, completing industry-specific training, exploring career options and taking recreational courses. All of these can be attained without actually "graduating" (i.e. completing an associate's degree).

Second, unlike four-year universities with entrance criteria that funnel in students with high levels of academic preparation, the open-access nature of community colleges means that some students attend even without a high school diploma or GED. Therefore students enter community college with a broader range of academic skill development and preparation. Third, due to their mission, community colleges serve more students who are underrepresented among those who possess four-year degrees. These include students of color, first-generation college students, students with disabilities, students from the LGBTQ+ community, students from low-income households and first-generation college students. While underrepresented students may be more resilient and motivated, they are also more likely to face obstacles to graduating. These include navigating a system that is discriminatory, experiencing food and housing insecurity, reintegrating into society after being incarcerated, balancing work and school, and supporting families.

That being said, community colleges should aim for a 90 percent graduation rate within three years for those students attending full-time who declare the goal of attaining an associate's degree. I would say 100 percent, but I recall, with a heavy heart, students like Lisette, a 19-year-old who began the semester with a promising A and wanted to be a nurse. She stopped coming to class after the ninth week, because she had to care for her mentally ill mother and seven younger siblings, who all lived in a homeless shelter.



Q: What are the major problems you see with traditional instruction methods as applied at community colleges?

A: The major issue with traditional approaches like the teaching is telling and the primarily lecture model is that they miss opportunities to unleash the full learning potential of the maximum number of students in the classroom. In partic-

ular, there are two reasons why traditional approaches fall short. First, community college students come from diverse cultural backgrounds and embrace a wide range of identities. Consequently, they bring a wealth of cultural knowledge to the classroom. Unfortunately, the traditional, direct-instruction approach, where the instructor is the authority, overwrites these students' funds of knowledge.

When instructors draw from students' wealth of cultural assets during instruction, they communicate that they value students' identities. Using a more egalitarian, inclusive approach like complex instruction can help illuminate students' assets. This means doing more inquiry-based, group learning where all students' contributions are taken up equally and all students are held to the same high standard.

The second reason why the traditional lecture-style approach is so problematic is that community colleges are open-access institutions, so students enter with a range of academic skill preparation and a variety of gaps in content knowledge. When instructors shift their role from lecturer to facilitator of inquiry-based learning in groups, it redresses gaps in knowledge and skills. When students work in groups with carefully crafted tasks, they can approach learning from their strength areas by drawing from their prior knowledge. In addition, they can build on the knowledge of their peers by engaging in scaffolded discussions where they negotiate meaning and co-construct new knowledge. Education psychology theory and cognition research demonstrate that students learn better in groups. This means giving more low-floor, high-ceiling tasks with multiple entry points to give the broadest access to students. Facilitating discussions around group-worthy activities allows all students to build on their prior knowledge and skills and to communicate their unique reasoning and perspectives. In addition, this approach makes student understanding of the content explicit, so instructors can refine instruction to meet the needs of more students.

Education psychology theory and cognition research demonstrate that students learn better in groups.

Q: At many community colleges, a majority of students need some remediation. Are there approaches to remedial teaching that could help many students?

A: While the majority of students entering community college place into remedial courses, there is a growing trend toward placing students directly into transfer-level courses with corequisite support courses instead. The goal is to increase transfer and completion rates of students -- especially underrepresented students. The following three instructional strategies are useful for students placed into either remedial or transfer-level courses. First, it is important to foster a growth mind-set classroom. Community college students frequently have experienced failures when learning in the past, and they may have internalized negative mind-sets around schooling and their identities as learners.

Second, doing "inreach" is a powerful instructional move. This means using instructional time or course materials to connect students with campus resources like financial aid, tutoring, mental health services, academic counseling, mentoring or student clubs. Underrepresented students make up a disproportionately large number of students placed into remedial classes at community colleges. Research indicates that completion rates improve when community college instructors connect entering students to institutional resources. The third approach is that instructors should seamlessly layer college skills into the curriculum in ways that dignify students' lived experiences. Examples of college skills are: using professional academic language when communicating with professors, knowing how to study for and take different types of tests, navigating financial aid, taking effective notes, knowing how and when to get a mentor, or code-shifting. For first-generation college students, instructors may be the only one they know with a college degree.

Q: You have extensive experience in teaching math, and math is a major stumbling point for many community college students. Would you please offer an example or two of making math instruction have more impact on your students?

A: On the first day of class, students do an activity called "Finding Your Growth Mind-Set." Students draw a picture of something they are now good at, something they got better at over time by expending great effort. This is an area where they have a growth mind-set. They draw themselves playing soccer, baking, playing guitar, speaking in public, fishing or writing, etc. Afterward, in pairs they discuss strategies they used when they made mistakes or when things got challenging in this one area where they have a growth mind-set. I scribe their strategies on the whiteboard, then we discuss how these can be applied to learning math. We circle back to their drawings and this class list of strategies as the math content grows increasingly complex and cognitively demanding. This launch activity not only reinforces a growth mind-set but also acts as a springboard for co-developing norms with students around doing the inquiry-based group work that is foundational to the course.

The second activity involves applied problem solving in groups. When I introduce the topic of adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing with positive and negative integers, I do not begin with the typical lecture on the rules followed by having students complete 20-40 problems on a worksheet. Instead, I introduce the topic by having students explore real-life, culturally informed problems that previous students gave me or ones that I created from my Yucatán study. Students work in groups of four and use visuals to solve these problems in their own ways. Then, each group explains their assumptions, reasoning and solution to their problem to the entire class. After two days of solving and presenting, students derive their own rules for using the four operations (+, -, x, ÷) with integers -- and write them in their own words. For homework, students create and solve their own real-life word problems, and these are graded with a rubric. A student from Jordan created a problem to find the distance traveled if one was to travel from the top of Mount Nebo to the bottom of the north end of the Dead Sea. Another student wrote a word problem in Spanish that she developed with her mother about business accounting.

Q: Your book talks about the importance of mind-set -- for students and instructors. Would you explain what you mean by that?

A: The research is clear. Beliefs and attitudes of both instructors and learners impact student outcomes. Many students enter college with unproductive attitudes about school and learning from their prior experiences in elementary or secondary school, with the media or society at large. For example, "Girls do not do well in math"; "People who look like me are not college material" or "People who are good at music are born that way." For community college students seeking to transfer to four-year colleges, their first course lays the groundwork for achieving that goal. Therefore, it is important for instructors to foster a growth mind-set classroom where all students recognize that experimenting, making mistakes, taking risks and expending great effort are all a natural part of being a competent and powerful lifelong learner. Furthermore, recent research indicates that when educators possess growth mind-sets, then their students achieve at higher levels, so it is important for educators to nurture their own growth mind-sets about learning, as well.

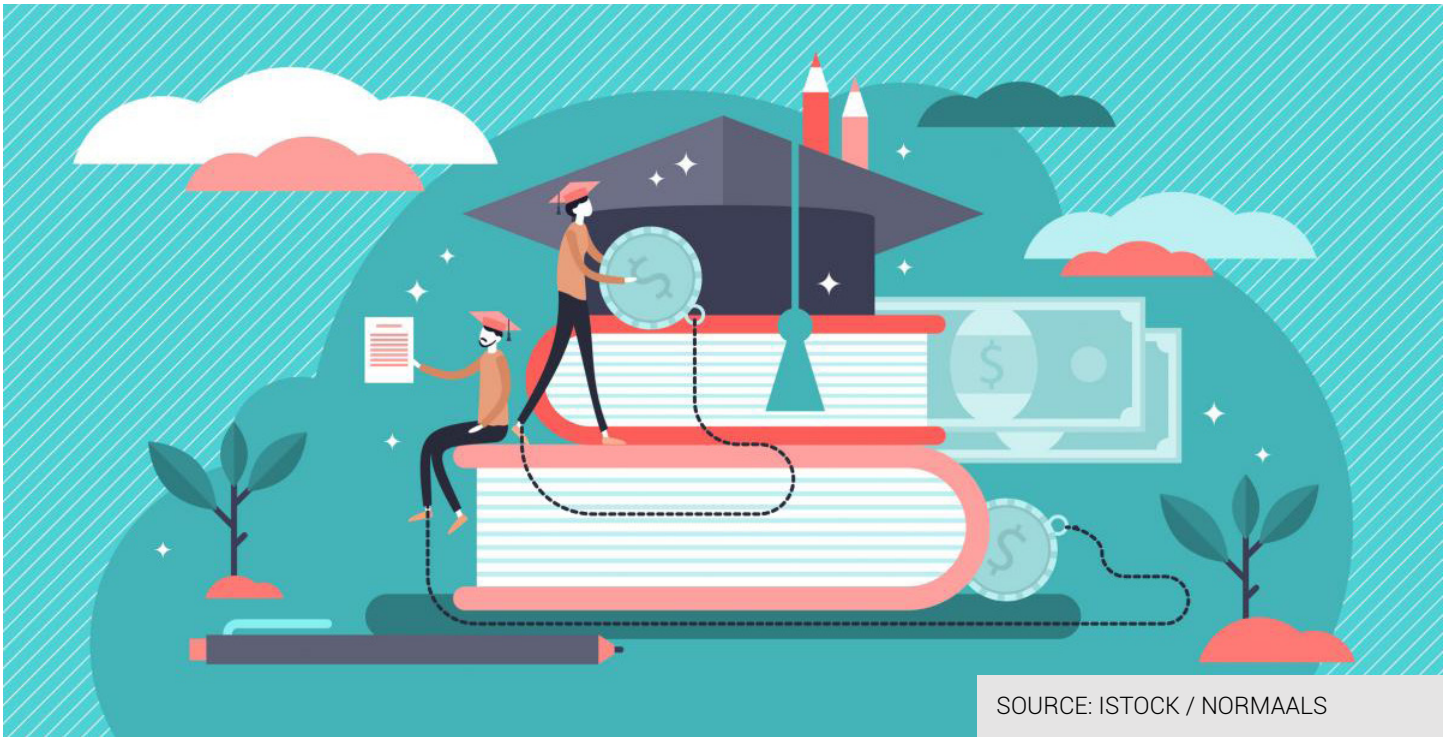
In addition to fostering their own growth mind-sets, it is also important for educators to cultivate an equity mind-set. We know that when educators have differential expectations for different students based on their ethnic/racial, linguistic or socioeconomic background, then the achievement gap widens. Therefore, educators need to frame their instructional moves with an equity lens. This may mean exploring their own implicit bias, writing a positionality statement or educating themselves about the cultural backgrounds and histories of their students. This work to cultivate an equity mind-set is particularly important when teaching students who are subjected to discrimination on a daily basis, like students of color, students from the LGBTQ+ community and students from low-income households. By cultivating an equity mind-set, instructors ensure that classroom instruction does not perpetuate these unfair systems but instead disrupts these larger systemic inequities at the classroom level. All students should feel invited to communicate their unique perspectives in the classroom as part of their journey to develop their identities as powerful learners. ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/07/18/author-discusses-new-book-breakout-moves-community-college-teaching

Data-Driven Accountability

As new datasets on student results become available, the Lumina Foundation taps group of regulators and experts for new approach to assuring quality in higher education, with focus on equity and colleges' financial health.

By Paul Fain // September 10, 2019



SOURCE: ISTOCK / NORMAALS

Better and more specific data is becoming available about what works in higher education, and what doesn't.

As a result, accreditors and federal and state policy makers face new choices about which measures of student success and value to include in their oversight of the industry, as well as how to assess the financial stability of institutions in an increasingly volatile market.

Amid this backdrop, the Lumina Foundation pulled together a group of regulators, college leaders and workforce experts to develop a starting point for a new model for advancing quality and equity in postsecondary education. The 20-member task force, which released a report on their conceptual model today, hopes it will start a broad conversation across higher education, with implications for lawmakers and regulators.

"Profound changes in the economy, in society, and in educational systems and institutions require equally profound changes in the way we regulate the sector and assess the quality of college degrees and other credentials earned after high school," the report said.

The project is grounded in trying to establish what a quality postsecondary credential is, and what it takes to develop, offer and identify one.

The foundation defines quality credentials as degrees, certificates, industry certifications and other credentials that have clear and transparent learning outcomes and that lead those who earn them to meaningful employment and further learning.

The task force's new model takes that starting point and seeks to create a "reform umbrella" that covers both curricular changes by institutions and systems shifts by the so-called triad, the three regulatory legs of U.S. higher education: state agencies, the federal government and accreditors.

Equity is a heavy focus of the model. The task force's report cites

that for decades, inequities have persisted for underserved student populations. Black, Latino and American Indian students in particular earn postsecondary credentials at far lower rates than more privileged students.

"[T]he task force believes that quality and equity are inextricably linked and that new reform efforts must integrate these priorities," the report said. "Without improved quality, there can be no meaningful equity. Without improved equity, claims for quality ring hollow."

Getting Tougher When Warranted

In recent years, policy makers and academic researchers have been able to use new and more detailed data on results for students. Some of these datasets come from state governments and the private sector. And, for the first time, the feds have begun publicly releasing program-level data on outcomes, with a plan to publish data on graduates' earnings and employment.

A key question for the task force is "when do you share the data, and with whom?" said Debra Humphreys, Lumina's vice president of strategic engagement and the task force's co-chair. "It's a really fine line to walk."

For example, she pointed to the model's partial focus on the financial stability of colleges. As institutional closures mount, some of them abrupt, accreditors and government agencies are facing pressure to better monitor and oversee college finances, and to warn students and potential students of colleges that appear to be on the brink.

Yet releasing more detailed information on college finances could have unintended consequences.

"You could have signaling that's wrong and would cause a closure," said Humphreys. "We shouldn't make decisions based on one data point, like ever."

But better public information clearly is needed on which colleges are stable, according to the task force. State agencies can do more, Humphreys said, adding that Lumina would be steering grants to states for this purpose. And the stakes are high for students, particularly those who are low-income.

The goal is for regulators to "be a little tougher about when the signals go off," Humphreys said.

Lumina also recently announced new grants to two regional accreditors, the Higher Learning Commission and the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC). The funding is aimed at expanding the use of results in accreditation, Lumina said. It also seeks to promote student protections and transparency, and to better understand and monitor the financial health of colleges and new business models.

WSCUC will use its $745,000 grant to build on momentum and tools for results-driven accreditation, said Jamienne Studley, the commission's president and a former Education Department official during the Obama administration. That may include enhanced measures of student success, a new set of triggers to decide when to devote extra attention to review institutions' enrollment practices and strategies to better monitor financially fragile institutions.

"We are being more intentional about being aware of student success outcomes," said Studley, who is a member of the task force.

One driver of the effort, she said, is an "understandable hunger" from students and parents for more information on the return-on-investment from postsecondary education and training. The challenge is to balance that sort of outcomes-based oversight and transparency about data with avoiding "bright lines" and too much of a focus on financial issues, both for students and institutions.

"What besides employment and money do you measure?" Studley said.

The commission is thinking about more comprehensive ways of monitoring institutional risk factors, including data on graduation rates, borrower defaults and enrollment patterns. Studley said that means doing more peer-based comparisons and other attempts to give a broader context for evaluating risks.

"The numbers help you find out where the important things are to discuss and address," she said. "They're not the end of the game." ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/09/10/lumina-convened-task-force-releases-quality-assurance-model-focused-outcomes-equity

OPINION

High-Impact Practices Work

At a time when some people question the value of higher education, preparing students for successful, satisfying lives through such practices is crucial, argues Richard F. Vaz.

By Richard F. Vaz // June 4, 2019

Research on student learning and success in college has produced compelling evidence that high-impact teaching practices benefit students greatly. Exposure to such practices has been linked to greater gains in learning and retention compared to what occurs with traditional instruction, according to the National Survey of Student Engagement and other studies.

High-impact practices can help students develop skills that are essential in the workplace and that transfer to a wide range of settings -- such as communication, problem solving and critical thinking. In addition, they can give an institution a distinctive and competitive edge at a time when many colleges and universities are struggling to maintain enrollments.

How, then, can we ensure that more students experience well-implemented high-impact practices? What can we do to help more institutions make certain that every student will have those experiences?

High-impact practices -- which include project-based learning, community-based learning and undergraduate research -- have several features in common. They promote active engagement, requiring students to spend considerable time on task. They involve collaboration, both in and out of classroom settings. Students are asked to take responsibility for their learning, while faculty members assume coaching and mentoring roles.

Fundamentally, these practices can push faculty members and students out of their comfort zones, and they may not succeed without thoughtful implementation and institutional support. Project-based learning, for example, builds on the idea that students should not just know things but also be able to do things with that knowledge. That's a new paradigm for some students and faculty members. Often, it involves applying knowledge to an open-ended problem with no single correct solution.

The benefits of having students tackle authentic problems are powerful. Problems that communities or organizations face are almost always interdisciplinary and require consideration of a range of stakeholders' perspectives. Students need to understand those problems, set goals, collect and analyze information, and develop solutions through an iterative process that involves revision and synthesis of new knowledge.

I have spent my career at an institution that requires authentic, "messy" projects across the curriculum. In a recent study, alumni attributed an array of professional and personal benefits -- better interpersonal skills, leadership abilities, a stronger personal character, the development of a sense of mission -- to their project experiences. Based on this and other evidence, a few years ago, we launched a program for other colleges and universities interested in advancing project-based learning in their curricula.

Project-based learning at York College of Pennsylvania

To date, we've worked with more than 120 institutions of all types -- not just similarly STEM-focused institutions, but also community colleges, public and private comprehensive institutions, liberal arts colleges, and research universities. While some are looking to develop more effective and engaging pedagogy for specific courses or disciplines, many are trying to rethink general education in distinctive ways and even to transform their institutional identity. As we work with these institutions, we see patterns of resistance to adopting high-impact practices, including the following.

■ Faculty members may feel obligated to cover a large body of information, even in the face of evidence that such coverage does not necessarily result in learning. As a result, some believe they have no choice but to rely on lectures to convey content. In addition, they may fear a loss of control if they use active learning strategies in the classroom.

■ Students who are used to a passive learning role may resist high-impact practices, as well. Active learning requires that students take more responsibility, and that can be uncomfortable, too.

■ Faculty members may have never experienced high-impact practices themselves and can be unsure how to provide structure that will support active student learning.

■ Both faculty members and students may have had bad experiences with teamwork. Effective student teamwork doesn't just happen; it requires intentional support and structure, including attention to how students are evaluated in team settings.

Across a wide range of institutional types, we've also seen common strategies for successful curricular change emerge. Here are some of the lessons we've learned.

■ Investment in faculty development and support is essential. Rethinking the teaching strategy for some or all of a course requires time, effort and a little courage. Institutional support helps. For example, the Teaching and Learning Collaborative at Wake Forest University regularly offers faculty development programming to promote high-impact practices, and the university makes course redevelopment grants available to interested faculty.

■ Faculty members benefit from examples of high-impact practices, preferably in their disciplines, and also from seeing evidence of their effectiveness. I was recently at an inspiring showcase event at York College of Pennsylvania where faculty and students from across campus presented examples of project-based learning assignments in different disciplines to colleagues and administrators.

■ Students and faculty members benefit from tools and models to promote effective teamwork, including equitable participation and evaluation. Examples include processes for team formation, templates for team contracts, protocols for self- and peer evaluation, and rubrics for evaluating effective teamwork.

■ Informal or formal communities of practice that consist of educators who can encourage and learn from each other's successes and challenges can help sustain change. Nebraska Wesleyan University has an informal community of practice, a group of about 30 faculty members from a wide range of disciplines sharing ideas to integrate project-based learning across the curriculum.

■ Curricular innovations warrant an assessment plan, so the resulting evidence can be used to monitor student success and drive program improvement. Bellevue College in Washington has brought multiple high-impact practices together in its RISE Learning Institute in an effort to spread these practices across its campus. As part of that work, they are in the process of developing a robust, faculty-driven assessment plan with tools that can be used in multiple disciplines.

■ Sustainable change requires more than policies and practices; it involves a shift in focus away from what faculty members do and say to what students do and learn. That type of culture change can't be rushed or imposed from above; it has to emerge from a coalition of the willing.

It's increasingly difficult to predict the opportunities and challenges that today's students will face in the coming years. At a time when the value of higher education is increasingly questioned, it's essential for colleges and universities to prepare students for successful and satisfying lives. The abilities gained from project-based learning and other high-impact practices -- especially transferrable skills related to collaboration, communication and creative problem solving -- can position students for a solid, certain future and provide a blueprint for higher education institutions to make their value to society more evident.

Bio

Richard F. Vaz is professor of interdisciplinary and global studies and director of the Center for Project-Based Learning at Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/06/04/why-colleges-should-involve-more-students-high-impact-practices-opinion

Faculty Members Are the Key to Solving the Retention Challenge

It is essential to build a culture of success for students in the classroom, department by department, writes Carl J. Strikwerda.

By Carl J. Strikwerda // September 4, 2019

The biggest challenge that America faces in higher education is graduating more of our students. Providing access to education is a major issue, but if students fail to finish, they can't gain the value of a postsecondary degree.

Nor can the United States remain competitive as a nation in the global economy. We once led the world in the percentage of college graduates in the adult population. Depending on which measure is used, we now rank as low as 19th. The decline is not because we send fewer young people to college than other nations do. The gap comes from our failure to graduate students, even after six years.

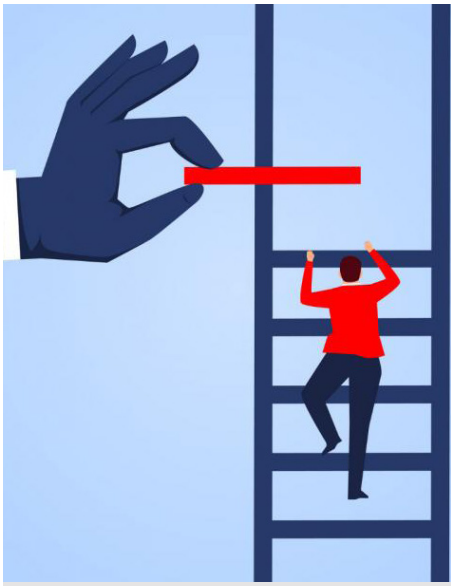
Why is this the case? For a large portion of young people, it's because they don't make adequate progress toward their degree. The United States has more than 3,000 four-year colleges and universities. The American Talent Initiative, using IPEDS data, has found that fewer than 300 of these institutions graduate at least 70 percent of their students within six years. Nationwide, only 59 percent of students graduate within six years. If we add in community colleges, the largest single sector within American higher education, the picture is more troubling still. Only 14 percent of community college students who say that they plan to get a four-year degree actually obtain one within six years of beginning community college.

The failure to have more students graduate is a human and financial tragedy. From the human perspective, it leaves millions of families with less of an opportunity to advance economically, embitters them toward society as a whole and dashes the dreams of young people for a better life. The financial implications are equally troubling. Millions of students leave college with loans that are all the more difficult to pay because they lack a degree to earn a higher income.

In fact, the student loan crisis is disproportionately a crisis for those without degrees. The likelihood of default is actually in inverse correlation to the size of the debt. Almost one in four of those with less than $5,000 in student debt are in default, while only 7 percent of those with more than $40,000 in student debt are in default. Meanwhile, colleges and universities collectively spend billions on students who do not graduate while still having to spend more to recruit, advise and teach new students to take their place.

On top of that, the students who suffer from this defeat are disproportionately those who can least afford a setback. The correlation between those who succeed or fail in college and students' family income is a close fit, even after controlling for test scores and high school grades. The higher the income of the parents, the likelier students will find a way to graduate. The lower the family income, all things considered, the more likely they will not.

Many of the students failing to graduate clearly have the intelligence and desire to succeed. True, many fail due to personal issues, finances, prior educational gaps or family problems. Too often, however, we in higher education have failed them. Advising, financial aid counseling, student support systems and campus climates all have to play critical roles in order to help students graduate.



SOURCE: ISTOCK / Z_WEI

The Most Direct Way

Even more important, the research and money being poured into helping improve retention often doesn't flow to those who are crucial to student success: the faculty and department chairs, program directors, and deans who shape faculty culture. Faculty members are often the most direct way to help at-risk students.

Colleges and universities reach out to at-risk students in myriad ways, with registrars, advising

centers and financial aid offices all playing important roles. Yet students may decide to ignore such efforts. By contrast, if students do not show up for class and turn in their work, failure is guaranteed. No matter what else colleges and universities do for students, success in the classroom is essential.

In the last analysis, then, it is instructors who control their fate. Colleges and universities can often do more, at less cost, to help at-risk students by concentrating on how to reach them most effectively in their academic work than by other means, as important as they may be.

Departmental culture, therefore, is also crucial to students graduating. Even at colleges and universities with low graduation rates, there are bright examples of departmental success. Conversely, at the three institutions where I worked over the last 20 years, all of which had admirable retention rates, the variance among departments could be striking. Some departments retained as many as 90 percent of their first-year students into the sophomore year, while others retained as few as 60 percent.

The best indicator, furthermore, is not retention in a department itself, given that as many as 30 percent of bachelor's degree students switch majors at least once in the first three years, and 9 percent change more than once. The best indicator is whether or not students leaving a major also leave the institution as a whole and fail to graduate. The engineering department at one college made a major contribution to the college's overall retention by quickly advising students who were failing about other possible majors. Rather than leaving the college, more of those students changed majors and graduated.

> On top of that, the students who suffer from this defeat are disproportionately those who can least afford a setback. The correlation between those who succeed or fail in college and students' family income is a close fit, even after controlling for test scores and high school grades.

Far too little information exists on how to help academic departments ensure that students succeed, in spite of the obstacles that they face. What I have learned from my experience and the internal institutional data that I have worked with are the following:

- **Individual instructors -- especially in the first semester and first year -- make a huge difference.** If colleges are willing to collect data at a more granular level, it almost always reveals that certain professors have learned how to reach at-risk students effectively and teach them skills to survive at the college. Other instructors can, and should, learn from them.
- **Introductory courses are crucial make-or-break arenas.** Special care must be taken in developing curricula and creating opportunities in these courses for tutoring, office hours and study-skills sessions.
- **A slow ramp beats a deep dive.** At-risk students perform better if they take the most difficult courses at a measured pace, rather than a demanding load in the first semester. Departments with lower retention rates can consider redesigning their curricula and adding ways for at-risk students to catch up.
- **It's important to share relevant information widely.** Many instructors, academic departments, department chairs and deans lack information on their role in retention and graduation. They typically would be happy to help their institutions do better in retention and graduation, but they don't have the data, examples of best practices or incentives to change their cultures. Providing such data and clear incentives, and sharing the best practices from the most successful faculty and departments, can make a major impact.
- **Non-tenure-track faculty members and adjuncts are essential partners.** Often, they teach the majority of first-year students. Many are experts at reaching at-risk students. They can share their insights with other instructors and benefit from more support and training on how to help improve retention.
- **Collaborative efforts pay off.** Culture eats strategy, if not for breakfast, as Peter Drucker may or may not have said, then at least by

the time of the midmorning coffee break. By fostering a culture of collaboration, departments can rally around the goal of retention and make a difference on their own, even if money, a strategic plan or leadership from above are absent.

At one university where I consulted, a department and the dean were at loggerheads over the department's insistence on running its own internal advising center for first-year and sophomore students. The duplication in effort and money seemed unwarranted. Then I talked to the department chair. She pointed out that her department had one of the highest retention rates, even controlling for students' background and preparation. She explained that the university advising center too often treated all courses, instructors and class schedules as the same. "With students at risk," she said, "we know that we have to steer them to certain instructors, certain classes and schedules, or we won't see them back in a year." Other departments that I've worked with at institutions large and small have revamped their first-year curricula so that at-risk students take an easier initial load, are monitored carefully and then helped to catch up or advised on other majors if they don't do well.

The goal for a department should be to help students do their best and keep them at the university, even if they switch majors. Too often, innovative departments are islands of success. They have helped at-risk students stay and graduate because a chair, veteran faculty member or dean created a culture where retention is a common goal.

Research, funding and leadership at the level of the university are essential if we are to change the trajectory of failure for millions of students. But just as important will be grassroots efforts -- supported by presidents, accrediting bodies and foundations -- to build a culture of success department by department. Making a change could help millions of students and their families, contribute to economic opportunity, burnish higher education's reputation, and restore a bit of faith in the American dream. ■

Bio

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Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/09/04/faculty-must-play-bigger-role-student-retention-and-success-opinion

An Open Letter to College-Bound Students and Their Parents

A group of enrollment managers offers advice.

By 24 Enrollment Managers // September 16, 2019

SOURCE: ISTOCK / JACOBL

There are few times more exciting to work on a college campus than the start of a new academic year. Across the country, thousands of new students descend on institutions of higher learning, each student with their own talents and aspirations, eager to share their understanding of the world, excited to discover more about who they are and what the world has to offer. Those of us working in college admissions offices are grateful and humbled to watch this happen every fall, as bright, able students begin a journey of discovery as strangers and emerge from the experience knowing more about themselves, each other and the possibilities that await after graduation.

To be sure, the process of starting college, and the application process that accompanies it, can have its moments of anxiety and uncertainty. Applying to college opens students to scrutiny in ways few other events in life do, and the uncertainty that accompanies the college application process can be rife with doubts. The same can occur in the initial few days of the first year of college, or even subsequent years, as students see the academic and social challenges awaiting them, many wondering if they are up to the tasks required of them.

Recent studies suggest more students are experiencing bouts of anxiety, doubt and depression over the transition to college, and life in general, than ever before. Increasing competition for limited spots at some colleges, concerns over the ability to meet the financial demands of college attendance and general concern if the student is heading in the right direction are just some of the factors contributing to this increase. Combined with what other reports see as rising personal and social pressures, it is easy to understand why more students than ever before are looking for reassurance at a time of transition that seems to offer so little of it.

To those students applying to college this fall, we say to you -- we hear you, and we are here to help. Out of the thousands of higher education institutions in the United States -- be it a four-year college or university, a two-year college, or a technical training program -- not a single one runs an Office of Judgment. The purpose of an office of admission is to authentically represent our institution and the experience it can provide. We review each applicant and determine if that stu-

dent's talents, goals and interests will be best served by our school, without exceeding our capacity to serve all students who enroll.

It's been said that no one goes into college admissions because they want to see how many students they can reject. This isn't always easy for students to understand, especially when there are more qualified applicants than room to admit them. But that is a limitation of the college, not the students. There are many places where you can shine, and the application process give you the opportunity to explore all of them.

Our work with you is designed to nurture and encourage you in every step of the application process, to create a dialogue that allows you to bring forth the best, clearest picture of who you are, what you think about and what our institution can do to help you grow. If your work on an application finds you wondering where to turn for help, support or reassurance, contact us. Helping you is not our job; it is our privilege.

Recognizing that many of life's challenges aren't related to college, it is important to realize you also have local support to help you with any issues that may come up in your life. Understanding that teachers and school counselors are often faced with high numbers of students to serve, these professionals have a remarkable track record of stepping up and offering help to students who ask for it. From reviewing drafts of admissions essays, to listening to your plans for the future, to connecting you to other professionals who may offer greater help with other challenges, the educators and support teams of your local schools are here for you as well.

To those students starting their college careers this fall, we say welcome. Our work with your application for admission may be over, but our help in welcoming you to campus and assisting with a smooth adjustment to your new academic home is never over. Our colleagues in other parts of the college, including student services, academic support and the faculty, know there is more to a successful college transition than good grades and a strong classroom experience.

"If asking for help feels uncomfortable, know that every student feels that way. It may look like everyone in college is walking around with great confidence, but nearly no one is."

If asking for help feels uncomfortable, know that every student feels that way. It may look like everyone in college is walking around with great confidence, but nearly no one is. College is a new world, with a new language, culture and norms. It's more than OK to acknowledge that you need some help making sense of this new world, and research shows that's much more likely to happen if you find a peer or mentor to connect with. It's also the No. 1 reason you'll come back for the next semester, and the next year, and graduate. Start with the one person for whom asking feels the least awkward. People who work for colleges are there for one reason -- your success -- and they want to help.

To the parents looking for the best way to promote strong, healthy, autonomous life habits in their children who are college bound, we strongly urge you to play an active role that puts the student at the center of the application and transition processes. The skills needed to complete a college application require the same levels of judgment, organization, collaboration, leadership and initiative that make for a strong college experience. Now is the time for students to refine those skills by practicing them and receiving constructive feedback that allows them to reflect, regroup and try again if necessary.

A regularly scheduled weekly meeting to discuss college application issues in high school and transition issues in college, typically around 20 to 30 minutes, provides a healthy avenue of reliable support and structure your student can count on. There will be ample opportunities to take steps to support your child in this process, but as is the case with almost every parental duty, the vital steps are to listen more than speak and to love the child you have, not the child you want.

Cultural and technological ad-

vances have created opportunities for students that were difficult to imagine even a handful of years ago, yet this abundance of choice seems to have brought new levels of hesitation, doubt and stress for many young people. Our work as admissions professionals -- as educators in our own right -- is to do everything we can to clear the field of opportunity of as many of those doubts as possible, and provide each student with the opportunity to realize the very best in themselves, in others, and in the world they will help shape.

Bill Conley
Vice president for enrollment management
Bucknell University

Bob Herr
Vice president for enrollment management and dean of college admissions
Drew University

Jody Chycinski
Associate vice president and director of admissions
Grand Valley State University

Deren Finks
Dean of admissions emeritus
Harvey Mudd College

Laurie Koehler
Vice president, marketing and enrollment strategy
Ithaca College

Greg MacDonald
Vice president, enrollment management
Lafayette College

Ken Anselment
Dean of admissions and financial aid
Lawrence University

John Ambrose
Interim executive director of admissions and recruitment
Michigan State University

Robert Springall
Vice president for enrollment management
Muhlenberg College

Gregory Mitton
Associate dean of admission/ director of financial aid
Muhlenberg College

Gerri Daniels
Executive director, admissions
Northern Michigan University

J. Carey Thompson
Vice president for enrollment and communications, dean of admission
Rhodes College

Heath Einstein
Director of admission
Texas Christian University

Angel Perez
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Trinity College

Matt Malatesta
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Union College, N.Y.

Clark Brigger
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Eric Furda
Dean of admissions
University of Pennsylvania

Gil Villanueva
Associate vice president and dean of admission
University of Richmond

Timothy Brunold
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