Why Metrics Matter

Introduction

Metrics are central to just about every national or state effort – and most institutional efforts – to promote student success. Gut instincts just don't count for much these days without solid evidence about the impact of various policies and proposals.

But that doesn't mean every metric used is the right one. As colleges rely more on data, many educators are subjecting those metrics to scrutiny, and asking if in fact the right things are being measured.

The articles in this compilation explore some of the things colleges are measuring, how the data are used to improve teaching and learning, and the debates over these strategies.

Inside Higher Ed will continue to cover the use of metrics. We welcome your reactions to these articles, and your suggestions for future coverage.

--The Editors
editor@insidehighered.com

Why Metrics Matter

The father of modern business management, Peter Drucker, once famously said, "If you can't measure it, you can't improve it." And while Drucker was referring to creating measurements within businesses to improve performance, he might just as well have been speaking about education.

Instructors have always known that substantial formative feedback allows students to course-correct and adjust their performance along the way. Today, with new tools available, that measurable data is far more sophisticated than ever before. No longer is it a simple matter of looking at a test or assignment score — the kind of data available to modern teachers can enable a snapshot of student performance that goes far beyond simple insights.

In a modern learning platform, rich data visualizations and advanced analytics give instructors and institutions the information they need to make evidence-based decisions that will help improve student outcomes. For example, learner performance metrics such as course logins, participation indicators, grades, and other outcome indicators show where students are struggling or succeeding.

But even that kind of measurement — which relies heavily on instructors analyzing the numbers manually to make predictions about future student performance — is starting to become dated.

That's why D2L pursued an artificial intelligence (AI) strategy years ago. We knew that AI could perform predictive analysis far faster than any human, and those predictions will lead to improved outcomes for students and even instructors.

We moved in that direction ahead of the curve. We have always been an education company first and foremost, and we believe that staying true to your mission by investing in — and embracing — emerging technology in service to that central mission can drive you closer to your goals. After all, improving the way the world learns is our mission.

We realize there is some reluctance to adopt AI technology in some circles because of a fear that AI will replace faculty. We believe, paradoxically, that AI tech will make education more human.

The truth is, AI cannot take the place of an instructor in a classroom, but what it can do — and what it is already doing — is provide tools that adapt learning pathways, offering predictive assessments of engagement levels and spotting at-risk students. By helping provide a predictive snapshot of student performance, AI allows more time for instructors to use their judgment to intervene and share timely feedback.

Over time, both faculty and students will leverage insights from AI to gain an edge. They will be better equipped to make assessments, take faster action, and provide quality feedback, which will lead to a better and more human educational experience.

Because, in the end, it's up to us to act and help improve learning for the good of students.

John Baker
President & CEO
D2L
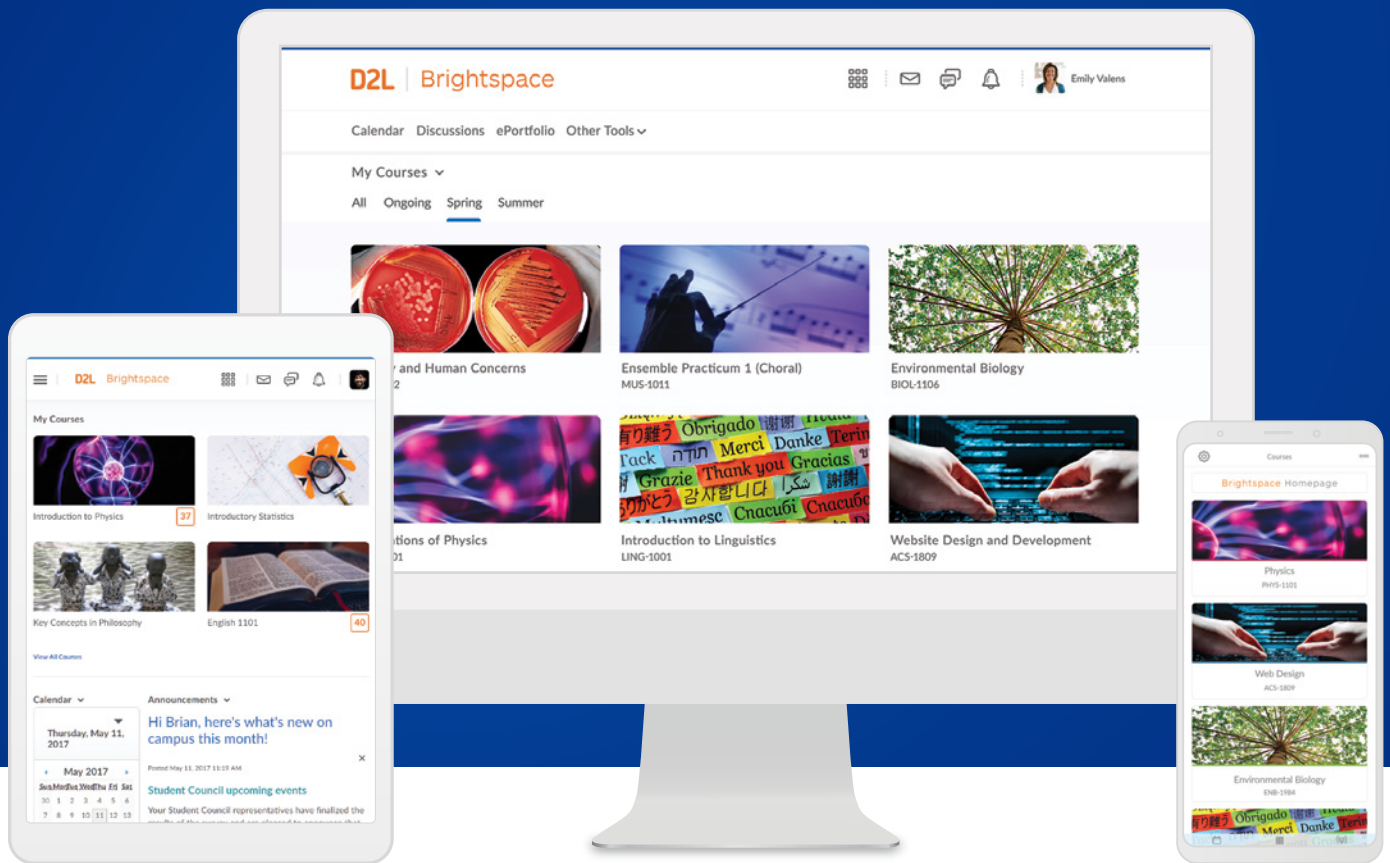
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The Impact of Faculty Attitudes About Intelligence

Students have better educational outcomes in courses taught by those who have "growth mind-sets" than those who believe intelligence is fixed. For minority students, achievement gaps are cut in half.

By Scott Jaschik // February 18, 2019

SOURCE: ISTOCK / NATALI_MIS

A new study suggests that faculty members' attitudes about intelligence can have a major impact on the success of students in science, mathematics and technology courses. Students see more achievement when their instructors believe in a "growth mind-set" about intelligence than they do learning from those who believe intelligence is fixed. The impact was found across all student groups but was most pronounced among minority students.

The study -- by brain science scholars at Indiana University at Bloomington -- was published in the journal _Science Advances_ and presented last week at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The researchers collected data on 150 faculty members in a range of STEM disciplines and 15,000 students over two years at a large public research university that is not identified. Faculty members were asked to respond to a general statement about intelligence along the lines of "To be honest, students have a certain amount of intelligence, and they really can't do much to change it."

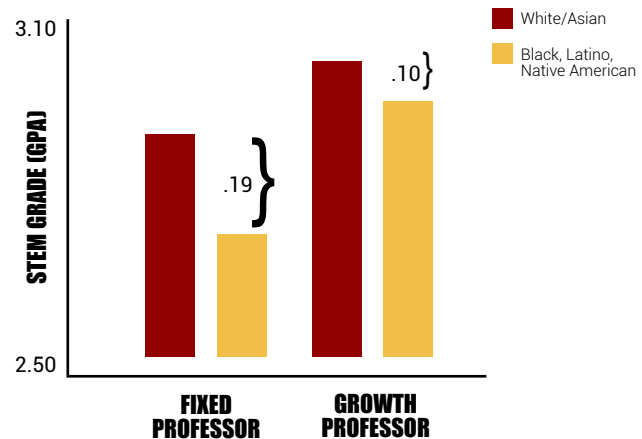The study then looked at student performance in courses taught by those who agreed with that perspective and those who did not.

Students from all groups earned higher grades with faculty members who thought it was possible for people to experience intelligence growth. But the impact was particularly notable for black, Latino and Native American students (see bar chart below).

The article argues that the facul-

The findings:

While all students perform better when STEM professors endorse a growth mindset belief, the racial achievement gap is almost halved when professors endorse a growth-mindset belief.

Legend:
- White/Asian
- Black, Latino, Native American

Y-axis: STEM GRADE (GPA), 2.50 to 3.10
X-axis: FIXED PROFESSOR (gap .19), GROWTH PROFESSOR (gap .10)

The Impact of Faculty Attitudes About Intelligence

ty attitudes about intelligence carry over into the messages faculty members send to students, with those who believe in fixed intelligence suggesting to students that only the "innately gifted" are likely to succeed. Those who believe in intelligence growth are more likely, the article says, to share techniques with students on how they can become better learners.

Students with the latter group of faculty members are more likely to report that they are motivated to do their best work, and to recommend the course to others.

The researchers wanted to find out for the study whether some types of professors were more likely than others to hold fixed views of intelligence. But here the study didn't find patterns, even after looking for them within STEM disciplines and comparing professors by gender, race, generation or years of teaching experience.

Some studies have found that underrepresented minority students do better in courses taught by "same-race role models." But this study did not find that impact, even though it found a substantial impact on minority student performance based on attitudes about intelligence.

The paper acknowledges that there could be another factor at play. "It is possible that faculty who endorse fixed mind-set beliefs create more demanding courses -- requiring students to spend more time studying and preparing for their course," the paper says. "If this is true, then differences in students' performance and psychological experiences might be explained by the demands of these courses (instead of professors' mind-set beliefs)."

But the paper said that the researchers could not measure this. But they could identify the use -- by faculty members not holding to the view of fixed intelligence -- of a range of pedagogical techniques linked to improved learning by students in all groups.

Why would this divide based on views of intelligence have more of an impact on underrepresented minority students?

"Faculty beliefs about which students 'have' ability in STEM might constitute a greater barrier for [underrepresented minority] students because fixed mind-set beliefs may make group ability stereotypes salient, creating a context of stereotype threat," the paper says. "Recent research suggests that when stigmatized students expect to be stereotyped by fixed mind-set institutions, they experience less belonging, less trust and more anxiety and become less interested, suggesting that fixed mind-set faculty might also engender these adverse outcomes among students."

Taken as a whole, the paper argues that its findings may suggest a different approach to those seeking to promote more success of all students, and especially of minority students, in STEM.

"Millions of dollars in federal funding have been earmarked for student-centered initiatives and interventions that combat inequality in higher education and expand the STEM pipeline. Rather than putting the burden on students and rigid structural factors, our work shines a spotlight on faculty and how their beliefs relate to the underperformance of stigmatized students in their STEM classes," the paper says. "Faculty-centered interventions may have the unprecedented potential to change STEM culture from a fixed mind-set culture of genius to a growth mind-set culture of development while narrowing STEM racial achievement gaps at scale."

The principal investigator on the project is Mary Murphy, a professor of psychological and brain sciences at Indiana. The other authors are Elizabeth Canning, a postdoctoral researcher in Murphy's lab; Dorainne Green, a postdoctoral researcher at IU; and Katherine Muenks, who was a postdoctoral researcher at IU at the time of the study. ∎

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Cal State Sees Major Gains in Graduation Rates

At same time, gaps between underrepresented minority students and everyone else are narrowing.

By Ashley A. Smith // November 9, 2018

San Diego State University

Administrators at the California State University System worried two years ago when the system set ambitious goals for increasing graduation rates. They were concerned that low-income students and students of color would be harmed by the new targets. One criticism, for example, was that students would be pushed into courses they were not prepared to take.

Instead, the nation's largest and most diverse public university system is seeing record levels of achievement and narrowed equity gaps among low-income and minority students.

"Everybody in our university community believes we should effectively serve students and improve graduation rates," said James Minor, the system's senior strategist for academic success and inclusive excellence. "People may have different opinions about how to do

that, but everybody agrees with the goal. It's impossible to do the same thing we've done for the last 50 years and expect gains in graduation rates and closing equity gaps."

Preliminary data released earlier this month show the four-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time freshmen increased six percentage points over three years, from 19.2 percent in 2015 to 25.4 percent in 2018. The six-year graduation rate also increased by four percentage points, from 57 percent in 2015 to 61.1 percent in 2018. The system is scheduled to release final data later this month.
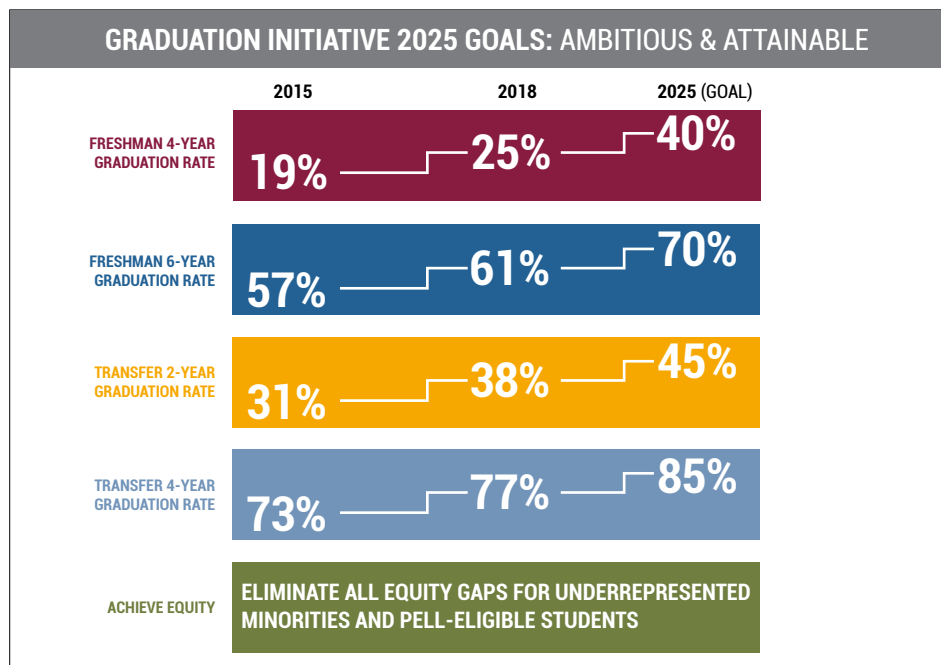
The graduation rate gap between students who receive federal financial aid, or Pell Grants, and peers who don't receive the aid decreased by one percentage point, from 10.6 percent in 2017 to 9.5 percent in 2018. Among African American, Native American and Latino/Hispanic students, the graduation rate

gap narrowed by two percentage points, from 12.2 percent in 2017 to 10.5 percent in 2018.

Graduation rates also increased for transfer students. The two-year graduation rate increased by seven percentage points, from 30.5 percent in 2015 to 37.6 percent in 2018. Four-year graduation rates for transfer students also increased four percentage points, from 72.9 percent in 2015 to 77 percent in 2018. (See chart on next page.)

Minor attributes this success to Graduation Initiative 2025, which called for increasing the four-year graduation rate from 19 percent in 2015 to 40 percent by 2025. It would also raise the six-year graduation rate for freshmen from 57 percent in 2015 to 70 percent, raise the two-year goal for transfer students from 31 percent in 2015 to 45 percent, and raise the four-year goal for transfer students from 73 percent in 2015 to 85 percent.

Cal State Sees Major Gains in Graduation Rates

GRADUATION INITIATIVE 2025 GOALS: AMBITIOUS & ATTAINABLE

	2015	2018	2025 (GOAL)
FRESHMAN 4-YEAR GRADUATION RATE	19%	25%	40%
FRESHMAN 6-YEAR GRADUATION RATE	57%	61%	70%
TRANSFER 2-YEAR GRADUATION RATE	31%	38%	45%
TRANSFER 4-YEAR GRADUATION RATE	73%	77%	85%
ACHIEVE EQUITY	ELIMINATE ALL EQUITY GAPS FOR UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITIES AND PELL-ELIGIBLE STUDENTS		

The initiative also called for eliminating achievement gaps among students of color and those from low-income households.

Meanwhile, campus administrators are seeing their own success from the initiative. At San Diego State University -- one of the 23 universities in the Cal State system -- the graduation rate for Pell Grant recipients increased to 71 percent. Nationally, a little less than half of first-time, full-time Pell recipients earn a bachelor's degree in six years from the college where they first enrolled.

"We've been focusing on enhancing guidance and academic planning and making sure our first-generation students and [Educational Opportunity Program students] are entering early with a support system," SDSU president Adela de la Torre said. "And we're working with our community partners, the K-12s and community colleges."

De la Torre said there wasn't just one program that helped push graduation rates in a positive direc-tion. The same is true for the larger Cal State system, which has implemented a few education reforms in the last couple of years, including moving away from placement exams and replacing noncredit remedial courses with credit-bearing classes that offer additional academic support.

Minor said the system received about $150 million, or $75 million a year, for the graduation initiative during the last two state budget cycles. But he said the funding alone didn't drive the graduation rate increases.

"When you take $75 million and spread it across 23 campuses, it's not game-changing money," he said. "It's enough for campuses to do things they otherwise would not. Campuses are investing percentages of their own budgets over and beyond what the appropriation is for student success."

The graduation initiative involved campuses systemwide using data to identify learning gaps down to the classroom level, Minor said. Cal State campuses also added 4,300 new course sections to open more seats in classrooms and reduce the time it takes students to graduate.

Minor said CSU administrators questioned students about why they stayed in college for an extra semester or an additional year.

"It wasn't because they wanted to hang out," he said. "They couldn't get the course they needed."

Individual universities also made changes that went beyond what the system mandated, Minor said.

San Diego State, for example, extended the requirement that freshmen live on campus to sophomores, said Sandra Cook, associate vice president for academic affairs and enrollment at SDSU.

"Data shows students who live in residence halls and have that structure do better," she said.

The university also created a center for commuter students that provides them a study and meeting space on campus and is building "learning communities" of students with similar backgrounds who attend the same classes and share academic advisers, Cook

Cal State Sees Major Gains in Graduation Rates

said. The hope is that these steps will improve students' academic outcomes.

System officials and Chancellor Timothy White say although they're pleased to see graduation rates increase and achievement gaps shrink, there is still more work to be done.

Cal State wants to improve student advising and make changes that will allow a greater percentage of students to have a degree plan before they register for their first term. The system also wants to improve coordination between various offices and departments so students aren't given conflicting information when they have ques-

tions or issues to address, Minor said.

"The opportunity to graduate from CSU should not be based on

The opportunity to graduate from CSU should not be based on ethnicity or financial background. So even an equity gap of 1 percent in our mind is too large and we would look to close it.

ethnicity or financial background," he said. "So even an equity gap of 1 percent in our mind is too large and we would look to close it." ∎

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It's All in the Data

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

By Mark Lieberman // November 8, 2017

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

PHILADELPHIA -- The University System of Maryland determined four years ago that it needed a unified strategy for improving student success through standardized data collection and analysis at its 12 campuses -- including the flagship University of Maryland campus near Washington, smaller rural locations and historically black colleges. While the main campus maintains a highly selective enrollment process, some others with large proportions of minority and low-income students struggle with lower retention and graduation rates.

"We [needed] to understand ... what does it mean when we put interventions into place?" said M.J. Bishop, director of the system's center for academic innovation, during a panel at last week's Educause conference here. "How do we know whether or not we're making a difference when we put these interventions into place?"

What followed was a process of introspection and realignment that the system's leaders believe has moved the campuses toward a level playing field: standardizing disparate definitions for student success data and identifying areas where students need more help than they're getting, particularly in the classroom and before they arrive on campus for the first time.

Evolving Priorities

The system's Board of Regents convened an academic innovation task force years earlier to address what Bishop said during the Educause conference was "low-hanging fruit" -- issues of effectiveness and efficiency including pursuing energy certification for campus buildings, fixing procurement systems and printing fewer documents on paper.

The focus then shifted to the ongoing desire to close achievement gaps for students. The system wanted to get away from what Bishop called "rearview mirror" analysis -- wondering why, for example, a student left an institution after two years -- and toward taking proactive steps to improve learners' academic experiences

It's All in the Data

and ensure retention.

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

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

"Nothing seemed to be really looking at ways that we could capitalize on the collective power of the analytics across the system and begin building upon that kind of information," Bishop said.

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

Taking Concrete Steps

For help addressing those issues, the system turned to the Predictive Analytics Reporting framework, an initiative funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that offers support for institutions looking to organize data collection. The PAR framework identified traditional sticking points for creating common data definitions, which meant the system could skip ahead to fixing those definitions.

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

Five institutions in the system --

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

Source: University System of Maryland

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

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

That process revealed a few key trends. Most interventions at the Maryland campuses were aimed at students during the entry stage, with far fewer influencing them at connection and completion. The inventory revealed that zero interventions were in place at the fac-

ulty level. Redundancies frequently popped up, with similar orientation programs offered through numerous academic departments within an institution when only one was necessary.

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

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

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

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

■ Adding more connection interventions

■ Developing a more system-

atic approach for data sharing going forward

■ Establishing a central repository for data collection

■ Creating and designing templates for future interventions

More Work to Be Done

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

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

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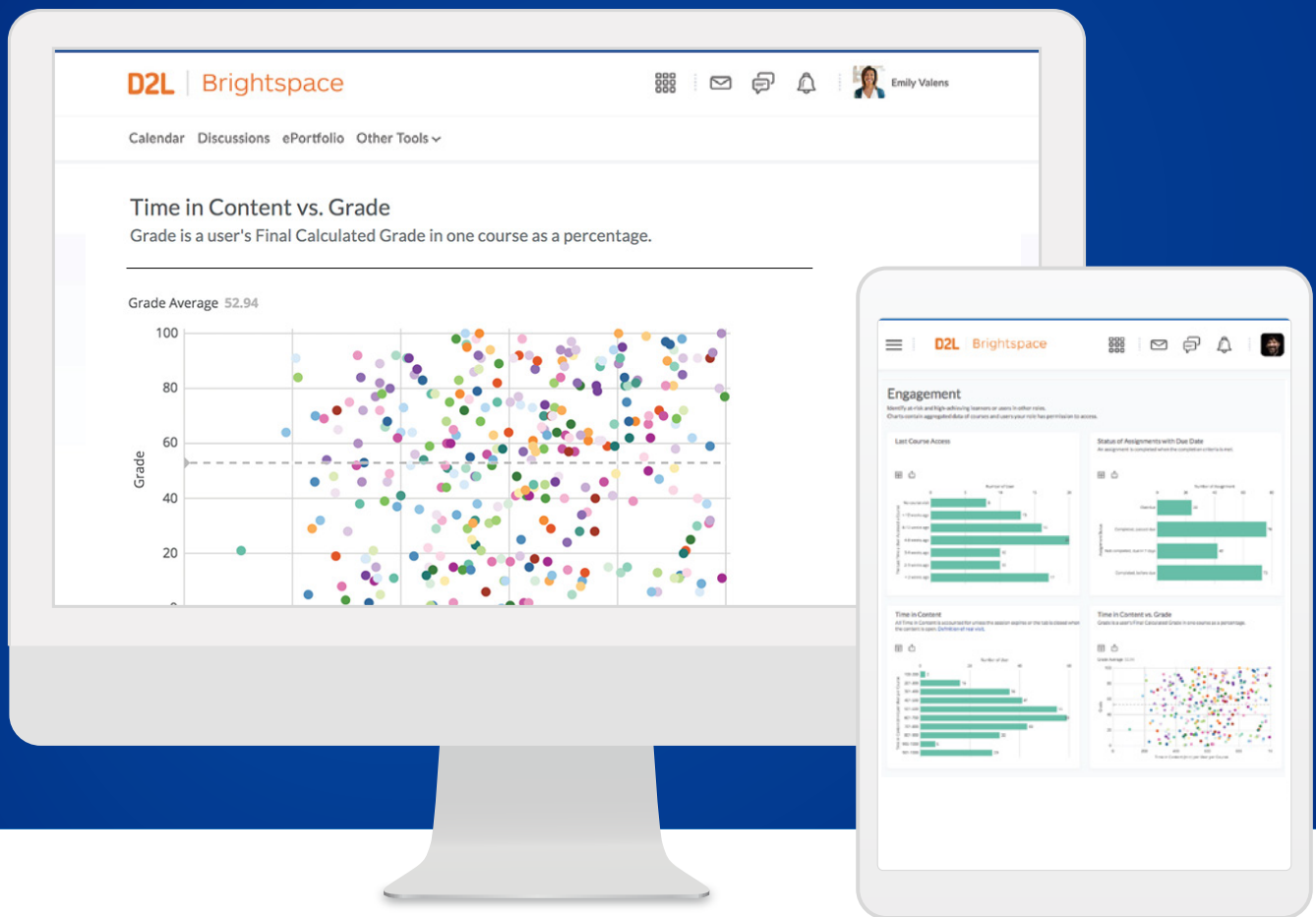
cise," Bishop said.

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

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

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Consolidation and Completion Gains

Merger between a low-performing community college and a nearby university has increased graduation and transfer rates -- and could be a model for other colleges.

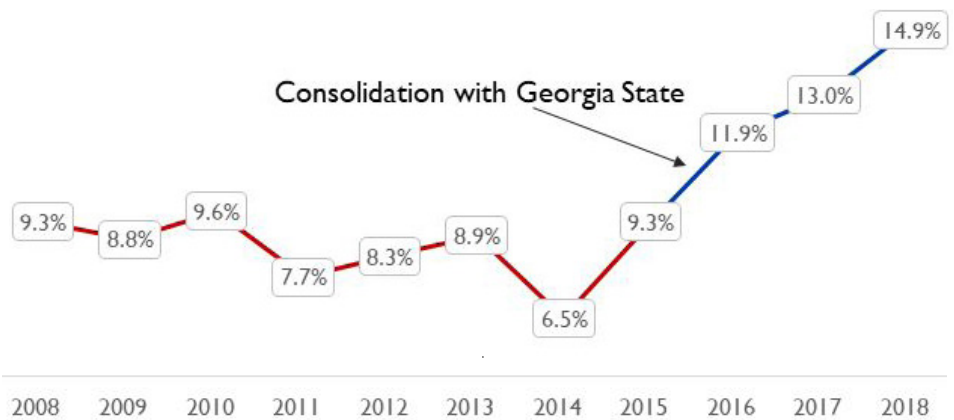**By Ashley A. Smith February 20, 2019**

Orientation at Fredonia

Perimeter College Three Year Graduation Rates

Three years ago the University System of Georgia Board of Regents tried to improve single-digit graduation rates at Georgia Perimeter College by merging the two-year college with its Atlanta-area neighbor, Georgia State University.

Georgia State had been praised widely for improving its completion rates and closing equity gaps, and state leaders hoped that success would translate to the community college.

The merger decision appears to have paid off. Georgia Perimeter, which had a 6.5 percent graduation rate in 2014, increased that three-year rate to nearly 15 percent last year. Its completion rates, which measure graduation and transfers to four-year institutions, increased from 41 percent to 58 percent during that same time period.

Gaps in academic achievement between students of color and low-income students and their white and wealthier peers also have closed at the college, which is now called Perimeter College at Georgia State University. As of last year, graduation rates for white, Hispanic and low-income students are roughly the same. The 12-percent graduation rate for black students still trails the 15 percent rate for white students. But both rates have increased since 2014, when they stood at 10 percent for white students and 4 percent for black students.

Consolidation and Completion Gains

"We've seen rapid progress in retention and graduation rates," said Timothy Renick, Georgia State's senior vice president for student success. "It has been better than we thought it would be in a relatively short period of time."

The college has made other gains in student achievement. For example, more students are staying at Perimeter beyond one year. Year-to-year retention rates increased from 58 percent in 2014 to 70 percent last year, according to data from the institution.

Georgia State officials cite the introduction of predictive analytics for helping to increase academic achievement at the two-year institution. The university has become a national leader in using predictive analytics to review hundreds of risk factors for students and to alert advisers when students get poor grades or are on the verge of dropping out. Officials at the four-year institution replicated that system for the Perimeter campuses.

Consolidating Perimeter, which enrolls roughly 20,000 students, and Georgia State, with approximately 50,000 students, saved about $8 million in administrative expenses for the two-year college. The merged colleges no longer needed two presidents, two vice provosts or two English department chairs, for example, Renick said. Georgia State took $3 million of that savings and used it to boost student services and to hire additional financial aid counselors and advisers.

By hiring 30 advisers, Perimeter went from 1,000 students per adviser to 400 per adviser. And students are using the service more often.

"When we took over Perimeter College back in 2015-16, there were about 3,000 students sitting down and meeting with academic advisers over the course of a year," Renick said. "This past year over 50,000 one-on-one meetings have occurred between Perimeter students and academic advisers."

Before the merger, students typically would meet with an adviser when they felt there was a problem. Now, with predictive analytics, the college is more proactive and prompts students to talk with an adviser if, for example, they register for a class that doesn't match their degree program or if they're failing assignments in a math course.

Another intriguing aspect of the merger is the more seamless transfer process between the university and the two-year institution, said Josh Wyner, executive director of the College Excellence Program at the Aspen Institute.

"It's something we all should be paying attention to, because the majority of community college students want to transfer and get a bachelor's degree," Wyner said. "The four-year transfer rate is hugely important. They've gone from below the national average to about the national average. Those are impressive data."

About 80 percent of entering community college students say they want to earn at least bachelor's degree, but only 33 percent transfer to a four-year institution within six years, according to the Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teachers College.

For Perimeter graduates and transfer students, the merger also has had a positive effect on the public's perception of the two-year college.

"Seeing 'Georgia State' on a transcript will get more attention than just seeing 'Georgia Perimeter,' " said Lee Brewer Jones, an English and humanities professor at Perimeter, who has taught at the community college since 1992. "Just by being affiliated with a [research] institution, even though we're not an R-1 college, it has an impact on how people view our students."

Similar Demographics

Georgia State and Perimeter enroll students with some similarities. More than 70 percent of students at both institutions are nonwhite, and 60 percent are low income. But students at the two institutions also tend to have different needs.

For example, about a third of students at Perimeter, an open-admissions college, need remedial math, reading or English. Georgia State converted all remedial classes at Perimeter to the corequisite model, which allows students to take college-level course work but also receive additional support such as tutoring.

Similarities in student demographics have helped Georgia State better understand how to help Perimeter students.

For example, the university expanded its microgrants to Perimeter students in 2016. The program helps cover unmet tuition and fees

Perimeter College Graduation Rates by Population: Associate

Pre- and Post-Consolidation

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
3-Year Graduation Rate	7%	9%	12%	13%	15%
3-Year: African American	4%	7%	10%	10%	12%
3-Year: White	10%	11%	13%	16%	15%
3-Year: Hispanic	6%	11%	13%	13%	15%
3-Year: Pell	5%	8%	10%	11%	15%

for students who would otherwise be dropped because of nonpayment. The university gives about 300 microgrants per semester to Perimeter students, averaging $900 each.

The university also introduced learning communities to Perimeter, requiring all incoming freshmen to participate last year. The communities allow groups of about 25 students in the same degree program to take a few courses together. The expectation is that the communities help students establish friendships, form study groups and build peer networks.

Academic outcomes have improved for students who participate in the communities. They earn more credits and are retained at a slightly higher rate. And first-year students in learning communities earned on average a 3.18 grade point average compared to 3.09 GPA for those students not in a community.

Jones said many of the concerns Perimeter faculty had about the merger when it was first announced never occurred, such as a mandate for professors to have terminal or doctoral degrees.

And he and his peers have become more focused on encouraging students to earn their two-year degrees, even if they plan to transfer.

"I tell students, 'I hope you take time to get an associate degree before you transfer,'" Jones said. "I don't know if I always thought to say that before, but I make a point of saying, 'Get your associate.' That's an emphasis that comes from the highest levels of the university."

Merging Community Colleges

Georgia isn't the only state to merge community colleges in recent years. Significant enrollment declines and budget pressures have

> We've seen rapid progress in retention and graduation rates. It has been better than we thought it would be in a relatively short period of time.

forced other institutions to consider consolidating. For example, the University of Wisconsin System started merging the state's 13 public two-year campuses with seven of its four-year universities last year. And the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system had considered merging the state's 12 community colleges, but that plan was killed last year by the system's accrediting agency.

Ricardo Azziz, the chief officer of academic health and hospital affairs at the State University of New York System, was president of Georgia Health Sciences University when it merged with Augusta State University to create Georgia Regents University. That institution is now known as Augusta University. Azziz said more colleges and states will consider these types of mergers in the future.

"There are a number of trends driving this, and one is a need for continuing education or lifelong education," he said. "The second driver is pure demographics. The number of students in community colleges is decreasing. The number of high school graduates is decreasing, and the economy is improving."

Even if the economy declines, he said it wouldn't dramatically increase enrollment at community colleges.

Some researchers have been warning community colleges that enrollment is expected to plummet by 2025. Enrollment in the two-year sector has already been on a decline since around 2010. And last fall, community college enrollment was down 3.2 percent from the previous year, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Mergers between community colleges and four-year institutions tend to be more successful when they are in the same geographic region but don't physically combine, experts say. They also are more successful when the community college retains its open-admissions policy, continues to offer noncredit programs and serves the community's work-force needs.

"Part of the reason why Perimeter and Georgia State have done better is that they're still at separate locations," Azziz said. "The community college structure is still physically different."

But mergers between two different types of institutions can be tricky. The missions and cultures of two-year or technical colleges are different from those of four-year

Consolidation and Completion Gains

colleges or research universities, Azziz said.

Faculty and staff initially were concerned about merging the two Atlanta-area institutions. Jones said Perimeter faculty worried that the smaller college would be taken over by the university and become a low priority to the larger institution.

"We have retained the autonomy and academic freedom that we had before the merger," Jones said.

Mergers can bring a lot of good to the institutions involved, Azziz said. But they are still complicated and difficult.

"We need to recognize that while a lot of good things can come out

> **We need to recognize that while a lot of good things can come out of them and some mergers have been quite successful, the reality is they are difficult things to do.**

of them and some mergers have been quite successful, the reality is they are difficult things to do," he said. "They have to be thought out, managed well and have strong government support." ∎
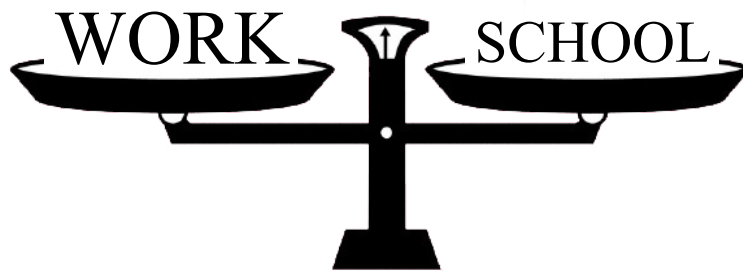
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Why Part-Time Success Matters

| If community colleges are going to close achievement gaps, report says, they need to better accommodate part-time students.

By Ashley A. Smith // April 30, 2018

DALLAS -- A new report from EAB shows that part-time student success in community colleges is key to closing achievement gaps for minority students.

The report, "Reframing the Question of Equity," was released today during the American Association of Community Colleges' national convention. The report highlights that, at community colleges, black and Hispanic students are more likely than white students to attend part-time, and by doing so, they are more likely to negatively affect their ability to graduate.

EAB is a Washington-based research and technology services company.

The analysis, along with interviews with more than 100 community college leaders, showed that 84 percent of Hispanic students and 81 percent of black students enrolled part-time for at least one term, compared to 72 percent of white students. However, attending part-time for only one semester meant a 39 percent decrease in completion rates for Hispanic students and a 31 percent decrease for black students compared to white students, who see a 29 percent decline in completion when they switch from full-time to part-time.

But the research does not mean encouraging full-time status is the answer for all students, even though going full-time increases a student's likelihood of completing, said Christina Hubbard, director of strategic research at EAB. Policy makers like New York governor Andrew Cuomo and nonprofit organizations like Complete College America have been advocating for scholarships and other programs that incentivize full-time status.

Most community college students are part-time, she said.

"We can't ignore that fact, because that [community college] population is made up of underrepresented minorities, low-income and first-generation students, and they are disproportionally like-ly to attend part-time," Hubbard said. "Full-time is not going to work for every community college student. The data says it won't work for most students because of barriers. Underrepresented minorities and low-income students, they're more likely to be working. So, to expect them to go 15 credits at a time is setting them up to fail."

City Colleges of Chicago, for instance, recently changed its tuition structure to make it fairer to part-time students and not penalize them for their status.

Instead, colleges should focus their work on accommodating part-time students and their needs, Hubbard said.

"It's about making sure we're bringing the campus to the palms of students' hands," she said. "If they're attending part-time, it most likely isn't because they want to be part-time, but because they don't have time to spend on campus."

Hubbard points out that many colleges have done a great job

Why Part-Time Success Matters

with getting more underrepresented populations, like minorities and low-income students, enrolled, but that hasn't led to improved graduation rates.

Officials at Trident Technical College in South Carolina saw pass rates increase when the college made changes to its course scheduling and orientation that accommodated the needs of part-time students.

"Our success rates were so miserable," said Brian Almquist, dean of student engagement at the college. "Enrollment was going up, but the success rate was going down."

So, the college changed its programming schedules by dividing semesters into seven-week periods.

"They looked at their own data and saw that students who enrolled in shorter terms had better success rates," Hubbard said. "If something catastrophic happens midway through a term … then you withdraw, and you've essentially lost the credits you've put in."

But under a divided semester, if students choose to withdraw after seven weeks, they don't lose the credits or the work they put into the first chunk of time.

In 2011, under a 14-week semester, the average course pass rate stood at 61 percent. By 2016, when Trident Tech had implemented a seven-week term, the average course pass rate increased to 74 percent. The college also saw in-

> **Full-time is not going to work for every community college student. The data says it won't work for most students because of barriers. Underrepresented minorities and low-income students, they're more likely to be working.**

creased pass rates among minority and Pell-eligible students. From 2011 to 2016, the average pass rates for black students increased from 44 percent to 61 percent. Among Pell-eligible students, the pass rates increased from 57 percent in 2011 to 71 percent in 2016. And today, pass rates for Trident's Pell population is 1 percent better than for the general population.

Laurie Fladd, the associate dean of science and math and director of academic advising at Trident Tech, said many times those students will come back to the college the next semester to pick back up where they left off, and it's better to tell them they didn't completely lose all their work because they needed to pause their education in the middle of a semester.

The college also changed the orientation and advising it provided part-time students.

For instance, when students apply to the college, they get access to software that takes them through an orientation process. That process doesn't happen in one hour or one day, or even over a weekend, like many college orientation sessions. Instead, it doles out information piecemeal to the student, depending on where they are in the semester or specific events. So, the student receives information about registering for classes or financial aid as they're at that stage of the process, Fladd said, adding that the technology has also improved and made more time for advisers to talk to students.

"We're advising part-time students the say way we would full-time, but we're trying to find out their particular life situation and what it is that makes them be part-time," she said, adding that the information helps the college accommodate their needs and provide more flexibility for them. ∎

Underrepresented Students, Unintended Consequences

Two prominent researchers say some selective colleges have responded to pressure to hit national benchmarks for enrolling low-income students -- in ways that hurt other academically worthy needy students.

By Doug Lederman // January 28, 2019

SOURCE: GETTY IMAGES

For the last five years, efforts to assess and "shame" selective colleges based on their enrollment of low-income students have worked -- perhaps too well, two top economists of higher education assert in a new paper.

The study, a version of which was published late last week in *Education Next*, was conducted by Caroline Hoxby and Sarah Turner, economists at Stanford University and the University of Virginia, respectively. (Another version of the paper was released today by the National Bureau of Economic Research.) The studies assert that recent efforts by researchers and think tanks to rank colleges and universities on enrollment of low-income students, while well intentioned, have both unfairly judged some colleges' performance and led institutions to alter who they enroll in ways that disadvantage some low-income students, even as they help others.

"By engaging in what I would call public shaming around what I would call bad measures, the well-intentioned research leads to defensive and reactionary responses by institutions," Turner said in an interview.

The two researchers propose a different way of measuring colleges' success in enrolling low-income students that takes into account both their missions and their demographic pools.

Pressuring Selective Colleges to Enroll Low-Income Students

Hoxby and Turner themselves played key roles in starting the campaign they now assert has produced unintended consequences.

Then a professor of economics at Harvard University, Hoxby was a co-author (with Christopher Avery, a Harvard professor of public policy) of an influential 2012 paper (commonly referred to as the "undermatching study") showing that many low-income, high-achieving students apply to no selective colleges, and that many such colleges were searching for such students at too narrow a number of high schools.

Hoxby and Turner then teamed up on a series of studies showing that adopting a set of relatively simple and inexpensive methods could get many more of those talented, low-income students to apply, enroll and succeed at highly competitive colleges.

Numerous other researchers have picked up this line of research in the last five years, perhaps none more visibly than the scholars associated with the Equality of Opportunity Project (now Opportunity Insights at Harvard University), whose work -- assessing colleges on how successfully they enroll and graduate

students from the lowest economic quintile and propel them up the economic ladder -- captured the public imagination as few scholarly studies of higher education do. The study tends to be associated most clearly with the lead researcher, Raj Chetty of Stanford University.

Collectively, this line of research (embraced by policy analysts) has put significant pressure on highly selective colleges to enroll and graduate more low-income students. Institutions are now regularly rated and ranked by how many students they enroll who are eligible for federal Pell Grants for needy students, a ready demarcation of low-income status, and the Equality of Opportunity Project's data on intergenerational mobility (brought to a large public audience by *The New York Times*) has effectively shamed some institutions into changing their admissions practices and policies.

The problem, Turner and Hoxby argue, is not that the research has prompted colleges to change their behavior; the researchers wanted to prod institutions to enroll more students from low-income backgrounds. The problem has arisen, they say, because the use of what Hoxby calls "bad measures" has led colleges to adopt policies that "move the numbers up rather" than "thoughtful, proactive efforts to ... increase the representation of low-income students broadly."

They raise two main issues.

First, they lay out (using what they call "proof by contradiction") how applying a national measure (like the bottom-quintile rankings used in the Equality of Opportunity data) makes some universities look better or worse than they actually are doing because their circumstances differ.

The University of Connecticut fares much worse than the University of Maine does in rankings of the share of their students who are from low-income families, Hoxby and Turner note. But the scholars instead construct what they call the "relevant pool" for each university, which includes all students from the state whose scores on either the SAT or ACT put them in their flagship's "core" preparation range, from the 25th to 75th percentiles of their students' scores.

Using that measure, students from the lowest percentiles of Connecticut's income distribution are overrepresented at the University of Connecticut (the red line in the chart below shows equal representation for each income level), while low-income students are underrepresented compared to the state population at the University of Maine. Students from higher income levels are more underrepresented at UConn than at Maine.

Though it gets less attention in their paper, the widely embraced tactic of judging colleges by how

Relevant-Pool Measures Reveal Student Representation at All Incomes (Figure 2)

While the universe of potential enrollees in Connecticut is more affluent than its counterpart in Maine, low-income students in Connecticut are overrepresented at their flagship state university.
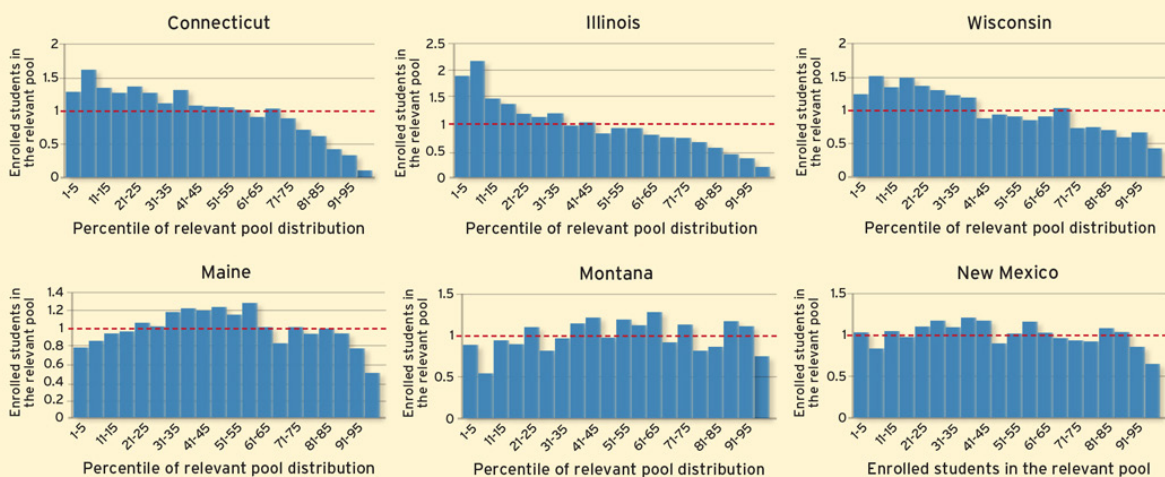
NOTE: Each chart shows the distribution of family income of the students at a state's flagship university fit into the distribution of family income of the students in the university's relevant pool. The bars are based on 5-percentile ranges of the relevant pool's income distribution. The horizontal line set at 1 is an equal representation marker.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations

Underrepresented Students, Unintended Consequences

many Pell Grant-eligible students they enroll also comes in for criticism from Turner and Hoxby.

The Pell Grant is in many ways a logical way of judging whether students hail from a low-income background, because it is a national standard that is easily tracked.

But like any clear standard, using it also creates the possibility that institutions seeking to make themselves look better will take aim at it in ways that create problems.
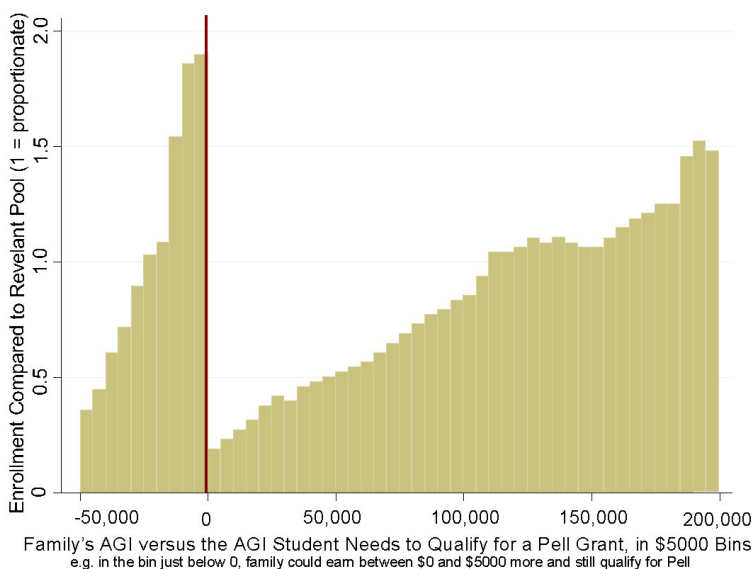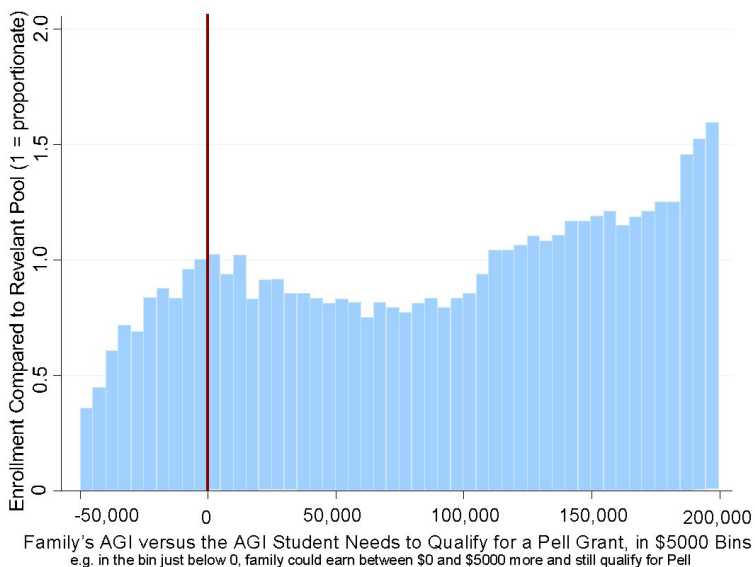
That's what has happened in this case, Hoxby and Turner argue.

They examined data for two institutions (that they chose not to name) that have been credited with significantly increasing the number of Pell-eligible students they enroll.

The two charts below show how the adjusted gross family incomes of the two colleges' enrolled students changed from 2008 (when pressure was just beginning to build on selective colleges to enroll low-income students) and 2016. In 2008 (the chart with the blue bars), the colleges' enrollment of students just below and above the Pell Grant threshold (the red line) was roughly in proportion to what one would have expected based on what the researchers describe as the colleges' "relevant pool" based on their geography and mission.

By 2016, in contrast, the colleges were admitting almost twice as many students with incomes just below the Pell threshold as their relevant pools would have predicted, while they were admitting far fewer (still needy) students with incomes above the Pell threshold.

These data showing a "large discontinuity" between students just under and just over the Pell Grant threshold pretty clearly suggest, Turner said, that these institutions are "actively targeting Pell Grant re-

Family's AGI versus the AGI Student Needs to Qualify for a Pell Grant, in $5000 Bins
e.g. in the bin just below 0, family could earn between $0 and $5000 more and still qualify for Pell

Family's AGI versus the AGI Student Needs to Qualify for a Pell Grant, in $5000 Bins
e.g. in the bin just below 0, family could earn between $0 and $5000 more and still qualify for Pell

cipients." Colleges like these are almost certainly giving significant financial support to those students to ensure they enroll, and because their financial aid dollars are limited, they are in all likelihood giving less financial aid to those low- and middle-income students who the graphs show to be enrolling at those colleges in smaller numbers than they were before.

But "if you're a student who's just above [the Pell threshold], you still need just as much financial aid as somebody who is just below,"

Turner said. "We know that there's distortion going on there" in the colleges' aid policies.

Hoxby and Turner say they're not trying to cast aspersions on the work done by the researchers who have focused on Pell eligibility or the bottom income quartile as benchmarks -- especially since many of them are former students of Hoxby's, she notes.

But by embracing flawed measures and deciding to "do something that's a little bit sexy or prurient by putting people in rankings,"

Underrepresented Students, Unintended Consequences

Hoxby said, these analyses "may not actually be helping the situation, but making the situation somewhat worse. These measures are not measuring what they're supposed to be measuring."

Staying Out of the Fray

A spokeswoman for Opportunity Insights -- whose work is most directly called out by Hoxby and Turner -- said the organization's policy was not to comment on studies by other researchers. She also said the organization will be publishing new research on this topic in the coming months.

Several other researchers who specialize in higher education access issues said they preferred not to comment about the dispute between two well-regarded groups of researchers.

One, however, said the Hoxby and Turner papers give short shrift to the "heightened sense of awareness of issues of inequality in access, with positive policy implications," that has been created by the researchers Hoxby and Turner criticize.

One prominent effort that has flowed from the data produced by Opportunity Insights and other researchers is the American Talent Initiative (ATI), which aims, by 2025, to increase by 50,000 the number of low- and moderate-income stu-dents enrolled at colleges and universities with high graduation rates (70 percent or greater six-year rates).
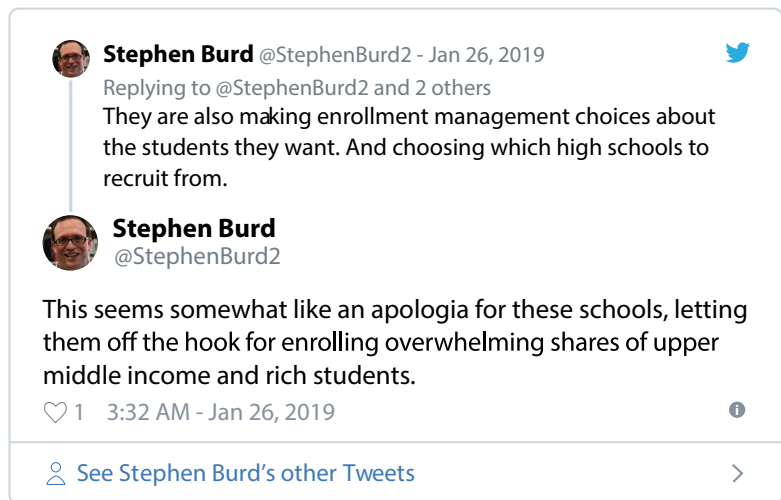
Joshua Wyner, who heads the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program, which jointly administers ATI with Ithaka S+R, said in a prepared statement that "the issues Hoxby and Turner raise are important."

ATI members generally measure their progress to expanding access by counting increases in Pell enrollment, he acknowledged. But "most are also paying attention to moderate-income student enrollment just above the Pell threshold. In fact, when ATI was created two years ago, several members noted that they wanted to protect against a barbell effect -- meaning the enrollment of high-income and low-income students with little in between.
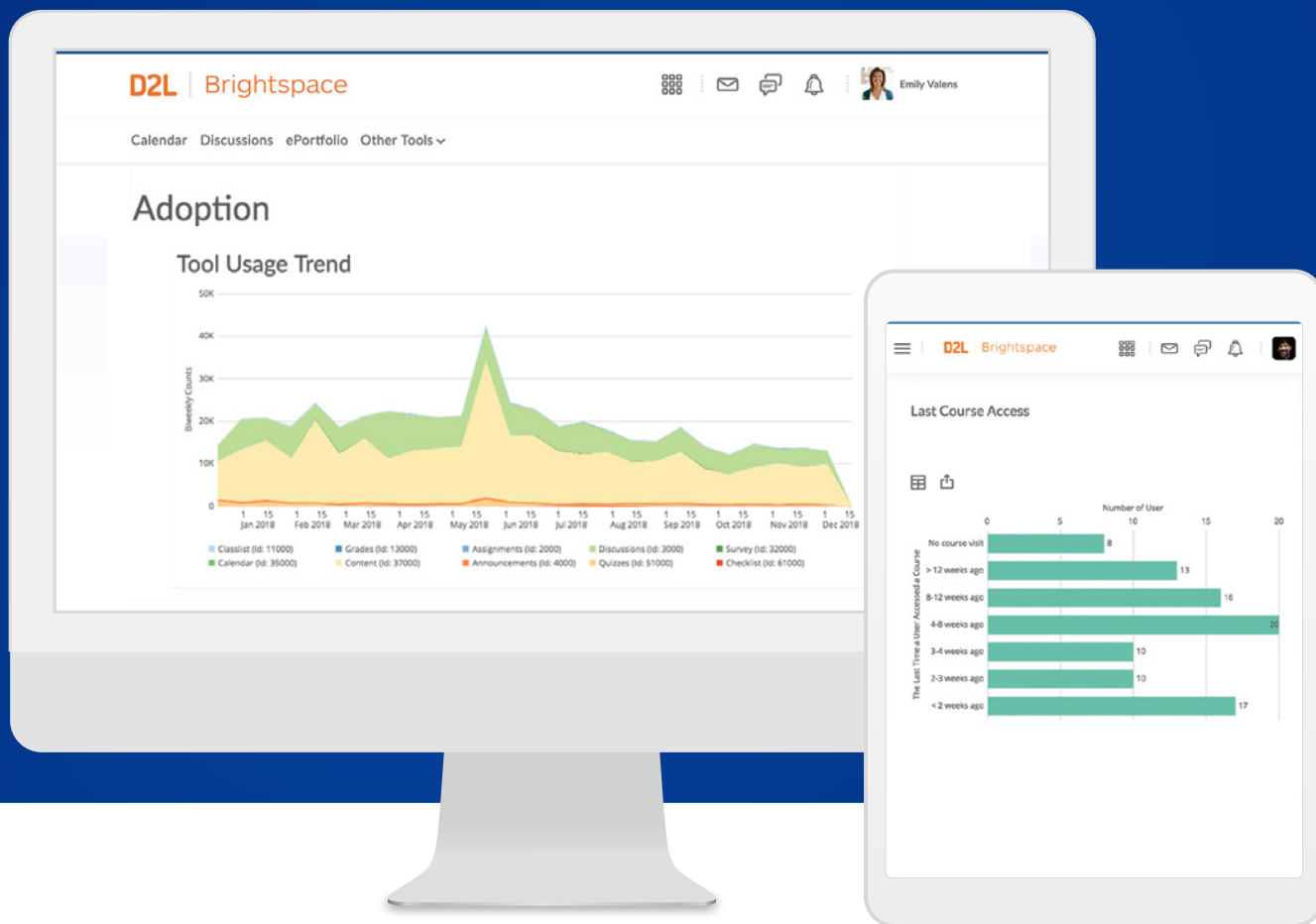
"As a result, most ATI schools now voluntarily submit to Aspen and Ithaka data on enrollments not just by Pell but also by income quintile."

Stephen Burd, a policy analyst at New America whose own work has built on the studies of Opportunity Insights scholars and other researchers, said in a series of tweets that Turner and Hoxby appeared to be protecting colleges from criticism that they are overenrolling wealthier students. ∎

Stephen Burd @StephenBurd2 - Jan 26, 2019

Replying to @StephenBurd2 and 2 others

They are also making enrollment management choices about the students they want. And choosing which high schools to recruit from.

Stephen Burd
@StephenBurd2

This seems somewhat like an apologia for these schools, letting them off the hook for enrolling overwhelming shares of upper middle income and rich students.

♡ 1   3:32 AM - Jan 26, 2019   ⓘ

⚲ See Stephen Burd's other Tweets   ＞

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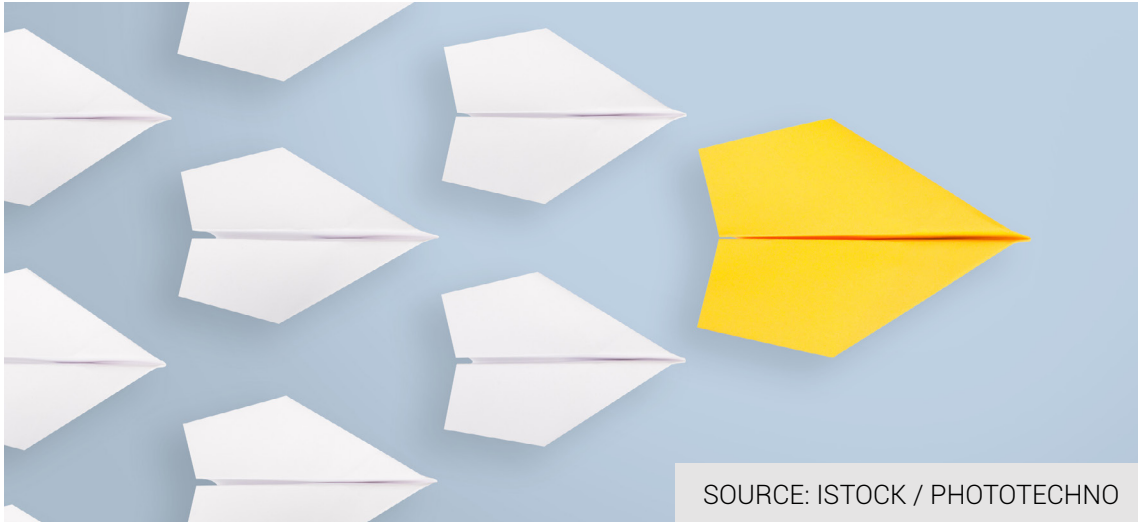
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Maybe Not So 'High Impact'?

| Researchers challenge conventional wisdom and past studies linking widely promoted educational experiences to timely college completion.

By Marjorie Valbrun // April 25, 2018

SOURCE: ISTOCK / PHOTOTECHNO

"High-impact" educational practices widely promoted and adopted to improve learning by college and university students and increase graduation rates have not led to those expected outcomes, according to new research in *The Journal of Higher Education*.

The study (abstract available here) found the effectiveness of 10 such practices -- first-year seminars, writing-intensive courses and collaborative assignments, among others -- recommended by the Association of American Colleges and Universities questionable and worthy of re-examination, at least as a tool to promote completion.

The research is based on data from 101 institutions that participated in the study by Sarah Randall Johnson, associate director of institutional research at Harvard Business School, and Frances King Stage, professor of higher education at New York University. Some of the institutions make extensive use of the practices, others minimal use and others no use at all.

Their study examined whether four-year public colleges that adopted the high-impact practices had higher four- and six-year graduation rates than institutions that did not adopt them. The study found that the graduation rates at colleges that incorporated all the practices were not higher than those that used few if any of the practices.

Over all, they concluded, "While some research has linked individual practices to engagement and learning outcomes, findings from this study question whether those benefits can be directly linked to timely college completion. Results also indicated that the current consensus about benefits of institutional adoption of high-impact practices may be misinformed."

The researchers said examining the connection between the recommended practices and institutional outcomes was important because

of the widespread use of the practices "at the expense of other possible offerings."

Officials of AAC&U pointed to their own research on the effectiveness of the practices in question. The association, which represents 1,400 member institutions, did not take issue with the findings of the study or address its specific points.

A spokeswoman for the association said Wednesday that it needs more time to review the study and "address its theoretical basis and conclusions."

"As the study notes, the intentionality with which institutions plan and add HIPs to their curricula is critically important. AAC&U promotes the use of HIPs as defined by their positive effect on student achievement and outcomes," the organization said in an emailed statement. "AAC&U strongly advises that institutional efforts to implement and/or increase HIPs should always be tied to clearly defined student learn-

Maybe Not So 'High Impact'?

ing outcomes set by the institution. These outcomes measurements may include (but are not limited to) higher learning gains, higher GPAs, higher persistence, retention and/or graduation rates, and higher levels of student engagement. We encourage institutions to analyze data on educational practices before calling them high impact, and we support ongoing research that examines their quality and effectiveness in helping students develop proficiency in defined learning outcomes."

George Kuh, an emeritus professor of higher education at Indiana University, whose research on high-impact practices served as the basis for the AAC&U's promotion of the measures, said he had not yet read the study and declined to comment on it until he has reviewed it.

Kuh founded Indiana's Center for Postsecondary Research and the National Survey of Student Engagement, or NSSE, which collects information annually at hundreds of four-year colleges about participation by first-year students and seniors in learning and personal development programs, and provides a measurement of how they benefit from college.

College completion rates became a subject of public interest in the past decade as concerns grew about skyrocketing tuition and a lack of accountability by the institutions. State and federal lawmakers, guided by budget constraints and taxpayer demands, began calling for colleges to increase their graduation rates. Further, many educators have said that the quality of a college education isn't just about courses completed, but about the kinds of experiences in which students participate.

The high-impact practices were originally defined by the AAC&U in 2008 as being "particularly effective in cultivating student learning and preparing students for future careers," the study's authors wrote.

"One important finding from this study is that the quantity of practices offered on campus, measured by our composite score, was not related to graduation rates," they wrote. "Institutions planning to add high-impact practices to their curricula should make intentional decisions about which practices fit well on their campus and would be most beneficial to their students instead of focusing on quantity of offerings."

The researchers state that few studies have examined all 10 practices together, their relationships to one another and their relationships with college outcomes. They say continued research, with larger sample sizes, should be done "to sufficiently inform the higher education community of their benefits."

They wrote, "This study revealed a missing link between academically engaging activities and college completion at large public institutions. Research is needed on college completion and administrative practices, such as advising models, campus resources, and required activities that are outside the curriculum, which could provide evidence of intermediary variables between academic engagement and timely graduation."

The researchers readily acknowledge the limitations of the study.

"The quantitative analyses performed have not determined causation between variables that were examined by this research, nor can they be used to make inferences about practices and outcomes at all colleges and universities," they wrote.

Still, they contend that "Our findings are important for both researchers and practitioners in the higher education community because advocacy for these practices is widespread, they can be costly to implement, and our knowledge about their relationships to institutional and student outcomes is limited."

A Call for More 'Unpacking'

Bridget Burns is executive director of the University Innovation Alliance, a group of research universities seeking to improve their student completion rates. She said via email that the researchers' findings do not negate the intangible benefits of high-impact educational practices. "High-impact practices aren't pitched as a silver bullet to increase graduation rates, instead, they are recommended as a means to cultivate deeper learning experiences," she said.

Still, she said she appreciates the researchers' focus on the topic. "We need far more literature contributing to greater understanding of student success in higher ed," she said. "As a sector, we need help unpacking and explaining the various potential solutions implemented at campuses across the country." ∎

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/04/25/study-questions-whether-high-impact-practices-yield-higher-graduation-rates

The 'U.S. News' Rankings' (Faux?) Embrace of Social Mobility

Methodology is adjusted, but you wouldn't know from those at the top of the lists. Critics say institutions that serve low-income students continue to be devalued.

By Scott Jaschik // September 10, 2018

SOURCE: GETTY IMAGES

For years, critics of the college rankings of *U.S. News & World Report* have said that they reward prestige and wealth. The institutions that are always on the top of the rankings -- places like Harvard, Princeton and Stanford Universities -- enroll students who are destined to succeed, the critics say. It should be no surprise (and not worthy of praise) that the students then do well.

What about the institutions that enroll students not destined to do well -- those who grew up poor, who in many cases went to poorly resourced high schools and who lacked family members with the social capital to help find a good college or launch a career? It is the colleges that succeed with such students that really deserve praise, these critics say. And as a result, a number of efforts have started to look at colleges that promote "social mobility" -- in other words, that help boost those from disadvantaged families into the middle class.

The 2019 *U.S. News* rankings are out today, and the rankings powerhouse is boasting that it has changed its methodology to take social mobility into account. And indeed -- if you leave the top of the heap -- one can see colleges going up in the rankings, some jumping more than is the norm in any single year. But if you think this is the year that *U.S. News* will finally credit the California State University or City University of New York campuses for perhaps working harder and doing more than the elites do to help less wealthy, well, don't hold your breath.

Who is No. 1 in the new social mobility-influenced *U.S. News* rankings? Princeton University. Who is No. 2? Harvard University. That would be the same top two as last year, before the changes. And you'll find Ivies and similarly prestigious institutions continue to do quite well -- despite having a fraction of the disadvantaged students enrolled elsewhere.

To understand why it may be odd to see *U.S. News* boast about being influenced by the value of social mobility while ranking Princeton on top, consider the following statistics. Princeton has exceptionally generous policies for the low-income students it enrolls, and 15 percent of its students are eligible for Pell Grants, a common proxy for being low income.

But if you examine the data on

The 'U.S. News' Rankings' (Faux?) Embrace of Social Mobility

Princeton that Raj Chetty of Harvard University prepared for *The New York Times*, you'll find that 72 percent of Princeton students come from the top 20 percent of family incomes in the United States. That includes 17 percent from the top 1 percent and 3.1 percent from the top 0.1 percent. Only 2.2 percent come from the bottom 20 percent of family income.

So how is it that the addition of social mobility factors hasn't dislodged the institutions on top of the rankings? The answer is in what *U.S. News* changed and what it didn't change.

The magazine took its "outcomes" measure and increased its weight from 30 to 35 percent of its formula. Part of that is graduation rates, and part of the formula credits colleges that "outperform" expected graduation rates based on their student demographics.

New this year in the outcomes section are two social mobility factors that together make up 5 percent of the total ranking. One looks at the graduation rates of Pell Grant recipients, and the other compares Pell-recipient graduation rates to those of all students. Both of those figures are then adjusted for the share of all students who are Pell recipients. So if two colleges have the same Pell graduation rates, but one has a larger share of Pell recipients, the second college would earn more points in the formula. *U.S. News* counts the graduation rate formula as also indicating social mobility and so says that 13 percent of its formula is now based on social mobility.

The magazine killed one part of its methodology -- the acceptance rate -- that has long been seen as rewarding colleges for the number of applicants they reject. But

> The *U.S. News* rankings are not rankings of higher education. They are rankings of the perpetuation of economic privilege.

this was worth only 1.25 percent of the formula. *U.S. News* reduced the weight on, but kept in, standardized test scores at 7.75 percent, down from 8.125 percent. This factor has long been criticized by those who have noted that students from wealthier families earn, on average, higher scores on the SAT and ACT than do those who aren't wealthy.

U.S. News also decreased modestly (from 22.5 to 20 percent) "expert opinion," which is based on surveys of college administrators and high school counselors -- and has long been derided for rewarding colleges for having good reputations over time, largely a result of prestige and history.

Some factors that favor wealthy colleges over others are unchanged: 20 percent of the formula is based on "faculty resources" and 10 percent on spending on students.

For some institutions, the changes in the formula have resulted in large gains. The University of California, Riverside, is up 39 spots, to a three-way tie for 85th. Riverside is known for having high graduation rates (73 percent, well above the national median of 42 percent), while also having a student body that is diverse in all kinds of ways -- Riverside is a "majority minority" campus where 12 percent of students are white. Fifty-six percent of its students receive Pell Grants (five times the share at Harvard University).

Kim A. Wilcox, chancellor at Riverside, said he was pleased to see that *U.S. News* and others "are beginning to recognize diversity, social mobility and student success as hallmarks of what make a great university." Wilcox noted that Riverside graduates more Pell recipients each year than any other research university. He said he was proud of that distinction "regardless of the rankings."

But Wilcox added that he would like to see more shifts in the way colleges are evaluated. "It will take time to reverse decades of deference to traditional assumptions of institutional quality," he said.

Other college leaders say that the measures *U.S. News* is using -- even with low-income students -- distort more than they illuminate.

Consider Trinity Washington University, which *U.S. News* considers to be somewhere below 142nd among regional Northern universities, and so not an institu-

The 'U.S. News' Rankings' (Faux?) Embrace of Social Mobility

tion that receives an ordinal rank. More than 80 percent of students at Trinity are Pell eligible, and most are first-generation students.

Patricia McGuire, the president, says colleges should be judged by the share of Pell-eligible students they enroll, but that using traditional graduation rates makes no sense for any number of reasons. First, graduation rates are a lagging indicator, she noted. Institutions that are not among the elites with 90-plus percent rates may go up and down, and the most recent rate may have little to do with the experience prospective students might have.

More important, she said, institutions with large shares of disadvantaged students know that many students don't graduate within six years (the federal rate, and the one used in the rankings). A measure that works for the Ivies may not reflect the experience of those at Trinity or elsewhere, she said. At Trinity, the federal rate has fluctuated in recent years from 35 to 47 percent. But 60 percent of students are completing, she said, just on a longer time frame. Colleges like Trinity enroll more students with significant financial challenges, she said, and more students who still need help to prepare for college. That means some students will drop out, and others will come back.

Measures that may work to look at elite colleges for small shares of Pell students don't work at other institutions, she said. And the vast majority of low-income students will not enroll at elite colleges, she noted.

"*U.S. News* just does not understand the population of low-income students at all," McGuire said.

Even before this year's rank-ings were released, the chancellor of [Winston-Salem State University published a letter](#) saying that his institution no longer participates in the survey of presidents, and that it will not seek to boast about any improvements. Chancellor Elwood L. Robinson noted that he has no problem with metrics, and noted that Winston-Salem State does well on measures of improving social mobility of students. Further, he said that his university has the highest share of graduates in the University of North Carolina system who end up working in the state.

But he said that Winston-Salem State and other historically black institutions are punished by *U.S. News* for their mission. Access and affordability are top priorities, he said. But the *U.S. News* rankings "require focus in areas that are antithetical to our historical mission," he wrote.

Some of those who have pushed the idea of measures of social mobility include Harvard's Chetty, [whose research](#) has found that the University of Texas System, the State University of New York at Stony Brook and [California State University at Los Angeles](#) are par-ticularly likely to propel their students into success. He has also noted [the success of several CUNY colleges](#), all of which have much higher shares of Pell-eligible students than do those on the top of *U.S. News* rankings. [The Washington Monthly](#) also includes measures on the success of Pell students (although its top national universities have a lot of overlap with those of *U.S. News*).

[CollegeNET has a different approach](#), publishing social mobility data that look at family income of students, tuition rates and early-career salaries, while ignoring factors such as institution reputation. CollegeNET also rejects using Pell eligibility as a factor, since a minority of families who are decidedly not poor qualify for them.

Jim Wolfston, president of CollegeNET, said via email that *U.S. News* was trying to use its methodology changes as "a fig leaf" to hide that its rankings still favor wealthy institutions and wealthy students. He noted the parts of the methodology that favor the elite institutions.

"The *U.S. News* rankings are not rankings of higher education," Wolfston said. "They are rankings

> **We've wanted to measure whether schools are successful at serving all of their students for a long time.**

of the perpetuation of economic privilege. We all know the research. The tightest direct correlation to higher SAT scores is family income. Schools with the highest incoming SAT scores are therefore 'better,' not because they deliver a powerful education delta to their students, but because they enroll more scions of the rich?"

He said *U.S. News* appears to have noted the interest of the public in social mobility while not making meaningful changes in the rankings to truly promote social mobility. He said it was like a soda company "announcing a slight reduction in sugar content" while still selling unhealthy beverages.

Robert Morse, who leads the college rankings program at *U.S. News*, said that doing more on social mobility has long been a goal of *U.S. News*. "We've wanted to measure whether schools are successful at serving all of their students for a long time, and this was

> It will take time to reverse decades of deference to traditional assumptions of institutional quality.

the first year that it was possible to incorporate this information into our methodology because of the federal government," he said. "They mandated that schools report the Pell and non-Pell graduation rate data, which meant that the data can now be used to accurately compare schools."

Asked about how the traditional top-ranked institutions kept their positions (or very similar ones) even with the new emphasis on social mobility, Morse said that a number of universities are in fact doing better in the rankings this year because of the additional measures on social mobility. He cited the University of California, Los Angeles, tied for No. 19, as one such institution. It was tied for 21st last year. ∎

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2018/09/10/us-news-says-it-has-shifted-rankings-focus-social-mobility-has-it

Push for Student-Level Data the Feds Don't Collect

> Major education foundations aren't waiting for Congress to provide data needed to better analyze and serve students. They've partnered to get the data themselves and are encouraging more colleges to join them.

By Ashley A. Smith // December 21, 2018

The gaps in data about the academic progress, needs and outcomes of part-time, first-generation, older and low-income college students has long frustrated higher education advocates, policy makers, charitable foundations and college administrators who want to see all students succeed.

Over the last three years the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Lumina Foundation and the National Student Clearinghouse have partnered to build a system, using a new "metrics framework" developed by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, that will fill those data gaps and help institutions, states and researchers analyze the academic performance of all college students.

The partnership sidesteps the debate over, and wait for, Congress to move forward with plans to build a national student-level data system. The groups building their own system are encouraging more colleges and universities to join their partnership.

"We, as a field, have identified these general metrics that help us to understand how students are accessing, progressing and completing in higher education," said Amanda Janice Roberson, IHEP's assistant director of research and policy. "But between state collection and federal collection and a variety of data collection methods, we're measuring students in different ways."

The Postsecondary Data Partnership, which recently ended a year-long pilot that involved three state college and university systems and 27 individual institutions, would alleviate the problem of having different and often inefficient ways of measuring students. Institutions and state higher education systems would submit data about their students to the National Student Clearinghouse. The clearinghouse, which already receives enrollment and degree completion data from more than 3,600 colleges in the country, would also receive data relevant to the partnership.

As part of the partnership, the clearinghouse validates the data and creates analytical and interactive dashboards. Those dashboards reflect the metrics that are often missing or inadequate for measuring such outcomes as students' credit accumulation, employment rates and costs for not completing credits. The Institute for College Access and Success, a progressive group that focuses on affordability and access in higher education, recently released a new report calling for the federal government, states and accreditors to standardize how they calculate job placement numbers for higher education programs.

"The core innovation is making sure the experiences of low-income students and students of color are counted," said Jennifer Engle, deputy director of postsecondary success in the United States program at

the Gates Foundation. The foundation also helped develop the framework with IHEP.

The clearinghouse sends reports on the data collected to organizations and agencies, including those already in the partnership such as Complete College America, Achieving the Dream and Jobs for the Future. These nonprofit organizations have been the leaders in promoting popular initiatives such as remediation reform and reverse transfer to increase and improve students' employment and education outcomes. Reverse transfer allows students who've already transferred from a community college to a four-year institution to earn an associate degree from the community college. Remediation reform involves getting students into credited English and math courses at a faster pace than noncredit, traditional remedial classes do, thus helping students to complete college in less time and earn degrees faster.

Groups such as Complete College America and Achieving the Dream are now also asking their member institutions to join the partnership. The clearinghouse is hoping to expand the partnership to up to 500 institutions by the end of 2019, said Doug Shapiro, executive research director of the clearinghouse.

Laurie Heacock, vice president for data, technology and analytics at Achieving the Dream, said the organization will host information sessions about the partnership during its national convention in February.

"When you have disparate data collection systems that have different cohort definitions, with some only looking at entering fall student cohort and some only looking at entering full-time students, for community colleges that is problematic," Heacock said.

A FIELD-DRIVEN METRICS FRAMEWORK

	ACCESS	PROGRESSION	COMPLETION	COST	POST-COLLEGE OUTCOMES
PERFORMANCE	Enrollment	Credit Accumulation Credit Completion Ratio Gateway Course Completion Program of Study Selection Retention rate Persistence Rate	Transfer Rate Graduation Rate Success Rate Completers	Net Price Unmet Need Cumulative Debt	Employment Rate Median Earnings Loan Repayment and Default Rates Graduate Education Rate Learning Outcomes
EFFICIENCY	Expenditures per Student	Cost for Credits Not Completed Cost for Completing Gateway Courses Change in Revenue from Change in Retention	Time/ Credits to Credential Cost of Excess Credits to Credential Completions per Student	Student Share of Cost Expenditures per Completion	Earnings Threshold
EQUITY	Enrollment by [at least] Preparation, Economic Status, Age, Race/ Ethnicity	Progression Performance by [at least] Preparation, Economic Status, Age, Race/ Ethnicity	Completion Performance by [at least] Preparation, Economic Status, Age, Race/ Ethnicity	Net Price and Unmet Need by [at least] Economic Status, Preparation, Age, Race/Ethnicity Debt by [at least] Economic Status Preparation, Age, Race/Ethnicity, Completion Status	Outcomes Performance and Efficiency by [at least] Preparation, Economic Status, Age, Race/Ethnicity Completion Status

Key Student Characteristics

Enrollment Status	Economic Status
Attendance Intensity	Race/
Credential-seeking Status	Ethnicity
	Age
Program of Study	Gender
Academic Preparation	First-generation Status

Key Institutional Characteristics

Sector	Selectivity
Level	Diversity
Credential/Program Mix	Minority-serving Institution (MSI) Status
Size	
Resources	Post-traditional Populations
	Modality

Institute for Higher Education Policy metrics
for Postsecondary Data Partnership

Federal data collection systems such as the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System have only recently expanded from only using first-time, full-time status to measure graduation rates. The department made changes last year that allowed completion data for part-time and non-first-time students to be collected and published.

Federal data collections do a poor job of measuring student metrics such as retention, academic momentum and credit accumulation, said Travis Reindl, a senior communications officer with the Gates Foundation. Those metrics have become commonplace in measuring student performance and their likelihood of graduating.

The data partnership hopes to ad-

dress such shortcomings.

The changes can't come soon enough for John Armstrong, a senior policy analyst with the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. During a presentation to colleges about the partnership at CCA's national convention earlier this month, he complained about the slow pace at which federal and state agencies collect and disaggregate information across race, ethnicity, gender and other student identifiers.

Angela Bell, the associate vice chancellor of research and policy analysis for the University System of Georgia, which was part of the pilot conducted by the partnership, said being part of the partnership meant that system administrators could now get very specific data that was once unavailable and do more sophisticated data analysis that they could then measure against or compare to the data of other institutions. For example, she said, the university system could examine the progress of first-generation Pell Grant recipients who are Asian women.

The institutions are submitting student unit record data to the clearinghouse, which means "there's nowhere to hide," Bell said, referring to the increased level of transparency the partnership will now provide. For example, by submitting such highly specific data, university systems or colleges can create alerts when a single student accumulates more credits than they need to graduate, she said.

A bipartisan bill that would overturn the ban on a federal postsecondary student-level data system was introduced in the Senate a year ago but has not moved through Congress.

Shapiro, the clearinghouse research director, said the partnership helps colleges and universities that aren't waiting for Congress to act and want to know their students' performance now so they can change or adjust programs and policies to improve student outcomes in a timely manner.

"What we're building is specifically for institutions that want to opt in to create a system that better informs them of their student success," Shapiro said. "These are institutions who can't wait." ∎

Read Original Article ▸▸   https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/12/21/student-data-system-advocates-want-more-colleges-and-universities-join-them

Next on College Completion Agenda: Equity

Community colleges are realizing that addressing racial and income equity are the missing pieces to improving completion rates.
And Achieving the Dream wants to help them eliminate that inequity.

By Ashley A. Smith // February 25, 2019

SOURCE: ISTOCK / MichaelDeLeon

LONG BEACH, Calif. -- Colleges have been focused for more than a decade on accelerating the completion movement to increase graduation rates and improve student outcomes. Community colleges especially have worked on improving career opportunities for their students, reforming remedial education, encouraging students to attend full-time and offering tuition-free programs.

But achievement gaps between black, Hispanic and low-income students and their white and wealthier peers persist even as each group continues to graduate at better rates. Achieving the Dream, the national organization focused on student success, is encouraging colleges to put racial and wealth equity at the center of their efforts to help more students graduate. The group held its first Equity Institute last week during its 15th annual national conference and announced a new partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to eliminate equity gaps using adaptive learning technology in courses.

"We will never make progress in moving the needle on student success for students of color if we don't get real and understand the totality of factors that undermine their success on our campuses," said Shaun Harper, executive director of the University of Southern California's Race and Equity Center, who gave the opening speech at ATD's Equity Institute. "I'm delighted that Achieving the Dream is intentionally focusing on racial equity. It would seem to me that any attempt to improve student success and outcomes and experiences at community colleges -- especially given the racial diversity of community colleges -- will always be incomplete if it's not done through the prism of equity."

About 40 percent of all community college students who started their education in 2012 graduated within six years, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. But only 35.7 percent of Hispanic students and 27.5 percent of black students graduated from a two-year institution within that same time period. Furthermore, nearly 55 percent of black students who started at a community college in 2012 did not complete their studies and were no longer enrolled at any institution.

ATD's new partnership with Gates, known as Every Learner Everywhere, is introducing adaptive courseware to two-year colleges so they can stop students, especially minority and low-income students, from dropping out.

Gates is expanding the adaptive courseware to more colleges by providing $13.3 million to the initiative. The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) is overseeing the Every Learner Everywhere network, which includes experts from groups such

Next on College Completion Agenda: Equity

as Educause and the Association of Chief Academic Officers. Even as ATD prepares to begin connecting community colleges to the program, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities has already been working with Gates to expand the technology to four-year institutions.

Adaptive courseware uses technology to personalize classroom instruction based on how students respond. The expectation is that racial and income-based equity gaps will decrease, especially in gateway math and English courses, and retention and graduation rates will increase, said Stacey Vanderheiden Guney, the director of Every Learner Everywhere for WICHE. The program is expected to launch this fall in Texas, Florida and Ohio and will eventually reach more than 200 colleges nationwide.

"We cannot support retention and student success and increasing graduation rates for people if we don't look at those first courses, which are traditionally seen as 'weed-out' courses," Vanderheiden Guney said. "When you are trying to serve a bunch of people from a variety of backgrounds, the use of the adaptive courseware, when ef-

fectively implemented, can allow for people to come up to the same speed and be supported in unique ways in the classroom."

Karen Stout, ATD's president, said the organization wants to make equity "actionable" for colleges. And that work begins with college leaders being honest about the racial and income disparities on college campuses.

Eduardo Padrón, the retiring president of Miami-Dade College in Florida, said racial inequality in education worries him tremendously because too many talented students of color are not earning a college credential when most well-paying jobs require one.

"Ethnic minorities are the work force of tomorrow," he said. "It's a national security imperative that the achievement gap is reduced every year until it no longer exists."

But there hasn't been enough recognition by national and state leaders of how racial disparities affect graduation rates among colleges, Padrón said.

At times, Harper said, it seems as if college leaders think closing the racial achievement gap will be easy and can be fixed with a single program or by spending a weekend

participating in a diversity program. Some college presidents, provosts and faculty casually use the word "equity" without taking the time to develop a strategy for how they'll achieve equity on their campuses, he said.

"People understand the value of having equitable campuses, but they don't know how to do it, and that work requires very serious study," Harper said. "It requires a cultural change, collaboration, deep study, incentives, accountability and assessment."

The next, and difficult, stage for many colleges and faculty will be taking what they learned at the Equity Institute to their campuses and having honest conversations that address the achievement gaps for students of color and low-income students, Stout said.

Harper said there aren't many national education organizations that are attempting to combat racial inequity.

"This moment affords ATD an extraordinary opportunity to lead and to leverage its network to show other networks and associations and other higher education groups how to really institutionalize equity," he said. ∎

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/02/25/community-colleges-focus-equity-next-piece-completion-agenda