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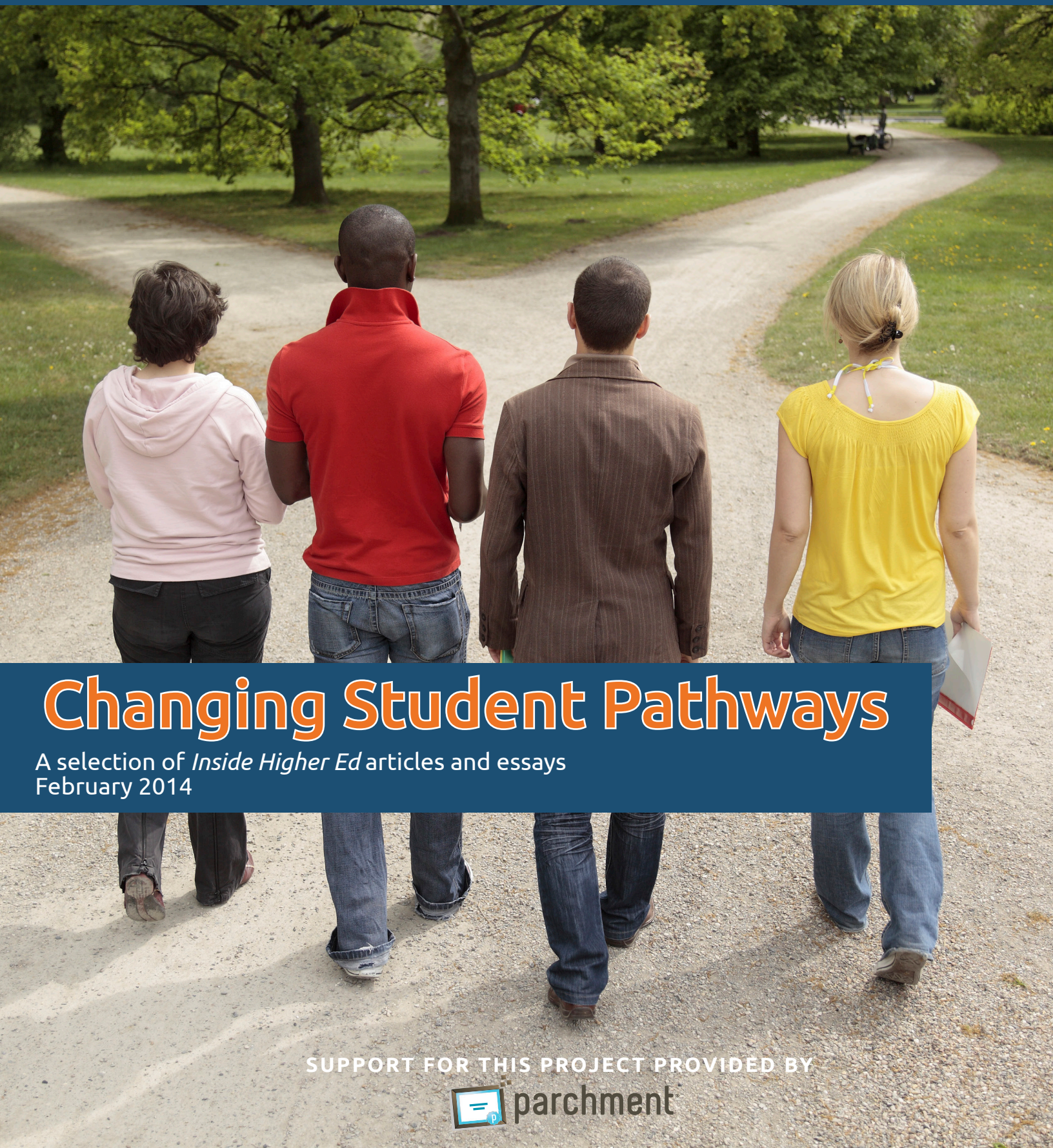

Changing Student Pathways

A selection of *Inside Higher Ed* articles and essays
February 2014

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TURN CREDENTIALS INTO OPPORTUNITIES

In 2011, more than 1.3 million high school students were dual enrolled with community college or universities for course credit.

Student pathways for higher education are rapidly changing and that change needs to be reflected in the evolution of the registrar and admissions leadership functions.

For decades, the traditional educational path was very clear cut: upon graduation, high school students would attend a four-year university, and then, if they so choose, pursue a masters or Ph.D degree. Consider this:

- 45% of students opt to start their postsecondary career at community college.
- 15% of four-year institution students transfer to two-year institutions.
- In 2011, more than 1.3 million high school students were dual enrolled with community college or universities for course credit.

It's not surprising that two- and four-year institutions sharing a pool of students flowing between them have aligned their course articulation to ease the transfer process. More recently, nationwide initiatives such as the Lumina Foundation's Reverse Transfer Initiative have attempted to help state institutions achieve even more success in issuing degrees to students.

Much has also been said about emerging trends in alternate education offerings such as online courses like Khan Academy, MOOCs, Badges and other certification options.These trends will continue to take root in the student educational pathway and likely give rise to even more options.

Whether it's in support of the transfer student, the campus-based learning experiences or emerging education options, it is our duty as an industry to allow learners to make the most of what they have acquired on their educational path. Innovations in credentials with experiential-based, co-curricular or competency based-transcripts have started to take place. But they require more widespread adoption.

Parchment exchanges millions of electronic transcripts each year. Our platform has been developed to help both sending and receiving institutions align and utilize the different information transcripts contain. For example, colleges may award different numbers of credits for essentially the same course. A-level work at one college may be B-level work elsewhere. Over time, the academy gravitated toward a basic document structure along with a strong professional code for issuing transcripts, which remain a sacred trust of our university registrars. This standardization respects academic freedom while supporting learners in their pursuit of academic and professional opportunities. For example, when learners transfer between institutions and seek course credit for prior learning.

As we move forward to support the ever-changing student pathways, we need to continue to support exchanging credential information in a way that is understandable by those who will receive and evaluate it.

We hope these essays will help further illustrate the alternate student pathways and you will keep in mind the responsibility we bear to continue to support them and help learners turn their credentials into opportunities.

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Introduction

The path to a college degree was once straightforward: Take a strong college-prep curriculum, earn a high school degree, apply to the best college you can get into and afford, enroll, complete. Many people never made it onto this path, or managed to reach its endpoint, but this was the model educators embraced and planned around.

Today educators acknowledge that there is no straight line to earning a college credential. Some students start college courses while already in high school through dual enrollment. Students start at colleges at which they don't necessarily imagine finishing. They "swirl" from institution to institution – and back again. They may earn associate degrees at community colleges they have already left, or transfer from a four-year to a two-year institution. They may start at one college and finish at another – years after dropping out of the first. Or take courses at multiple institutions – in person and online. But even amid all of these pathways, and some detours, educators and policy-makers are trying to find ways to help more students complete degrees.

This booklet is a compilation of *Inside Higher Ed* articles about the different pathways students take – intentionally or otherwise. The editors welcome your thoughts on these articles – and your suggestions on future coverage on these important topics. Please send your thoughts to editor@insidehighered.com

SIMPLIFY REVERSE TRANSFER

45%
of community college students transfer without a degree.

70 MILLION
students have enough credits to earn a degree. But they don't have one.

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15%
of university students transfer without a degree.

THE ONLY PLATFORM

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Dual Enrollment and College-High School Collaboration

Redefining College-Ready

By Paul Fain

Long Beach City College and South Texas College work with local high schools to prevent students from falling into the quagmire of remedial courses, and placement tests aren't the answer.

The growing crisis of students arriving at college unprepared to do college-level work has led to plenty of finger-pointing between high school and college educators. But two community colleges have learned that better collaboration with local high schools may be the best way to dramatically reduce the number of students who fall into the quagmire of remedial coursework.

Long Beach City College has worked closely with the Long Beach Unified School District so it can experiment with using high school grades to help determine whether incoming students have remedial needs -- a shift from instead relying heavily on standardized placement tests. And according to newly available data from the college, an initial group of 1,000 students from Long Beach high schools who were placed with this new method were far more likely to take and pass credit-bearing, transfer-level courses at the college than their peers the previous year.

For example, 53 percent of the group took transfer-level English courses in their first semester, while only 5.5 percent of students from the same high school district took the courses the previous year – meaning they were 10 times more likely to jump directly into credit-bearing English. And their passage rate of 62 percent was roughly the same as the college's typical passage rate in English.

Fully 60 percent of the students in the program, which is dubbed "Promise Pathways," placed into transfer-level English courses, compared to 11 percent of the college's overall student population.

Complete College America, which has been a vocal advocate for remedial reforms around the country, applauded Long Beach City College for its "comprehensive and thoughtful" approach to determining the readiness of new students.

"Their impressive results should add urgency to efforts to end badly broken placement practices that condemn students to college futures based on high-stakes tests for which they have little preparation," said Tom Sugar, senior vice-president for Complete College America, in an e-mail.

South Texas College has taken a different route, but with similarly impressive results. The college, which is located in the border town of McAllen and, like Long Beach

City College, serves large numbers of Hispanic students. It has among the most developed ties to local high schools of any community college in the nation. (Achieving the Dream in 2013 honored the college for those initiatives.) South Texas has dual enrollment programs in place at 68 partner high schools, with a total dual enrollment of 12,000 students in 2012. Many of those students arrive at South Texas or other colleges with credits that count toward associate degrees.

Dual enrollment, an approach that President Obama lauded in his State of the Union in 2013, is one of several ways South Texas has tried to boost the college preparedness of high school students, including pre-college counseling, academic camps, early college high schools and scholarship programs. But dual enrollment is the most extensive, and perhaps most appealing to students and their families, as the college waives tuition for participants.

Taken together, the high school partnerships have helped drive down remedial placement rates to 17 percent, an extremely low number for a college that serves a largely lower-income, first-generation college population. The remedial placement rate has dropped by 45 percent since 2004, and Shirley A. Reed, the college's president, credits dual enrollment as being a big part of that improvement.

"The high schools have accepted responsibility for college readiness," Reed said. "Now we share in the responsibility."

BUILDING TRUST

While community colleges and high schools joining forces to prevent students from falling into the remedial trap may sound like a no brainer, it's hardly the norm. But many community college leaders say failing to collaborate with K-12 is no longer an option.

Even so, the work isn't easy. Officials at South Texas and Long Beach said it takes years to build trust between educators on both sides, and that improving the transition to college is more involved than it looks

Take Long Beach City College's use of high school transcripts, which are a key part of the application haul admissions reps sort through every year at selective, four-year institutions. Open-access community colleges, however, rarely use transcripts. And the colleges lack the staffing to do so even if they wanted to.

Yet experts have increasingly pushed community colleges to look at high school performance in determining remedial needs. Research released in 2012 by the Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teachers College found that up to a third of students who placed into remediation because of their performance on two popular standardized tests could have passed credit-bearing courses.

So to respond to the growing call for the use of "multiple measures" in remedial placement, Long Beach City College relied on its local school district to create and transfer over easy-to-use electronic transcripts. Faculty from both sides also worked together to makes sure that high school courses incorporated Common Core standards and matched up with the college's curriculums. That collaboration took time to develop, said Eloy Ortiz Oakley, president of Long Beach City College.

"There's already a history of trust between faculty," Oakley said, adding that the "dialogue between higher education and K12 over the Common Core is a good place to start" in creating partnerships.

AS CALIFORNIA GOES

Long Beach also saw big jumps in the pilot group's performance in transfer-level math courses. While only 31 percent of those students placed into the courses, that's three times more than the 9 percent placement rate of their peers. The overall student population had a 7 percent placement rate. Students from the test group were also three times more likely than their peers to take credit-bearing math in their first semester (16 percent compared to 5.2 percent), and had a 51 percent passage rate.

The new placement method is a "comprehensive analysis of students' high school academic records," according to the college. In addition to using broader placement criteria with 1,000 students from Long Beach high schools, the college also pushed a "prescriptive" full-time course load, which emphasized early completion of foundational skills in English, reading and math. About 85 percent of the group attended full-time, compared to 50 percent of students in their peer

group the previous year.

Early returns show that these students are more likely to complete, with a finding of 63 percent showing a "behavioral intent" to get to graduation, according to college researchers, compared with 37 percent for students from the same local high schools in the previous year. They are also likely to earn credentials faster, according to the college.

Oakley said the college hopes to expand the program in coming years.

Long Beach is a good laboratory for experimentation, in part because the two-year college, school district and California State University at Long Beach exist in a more roughly contiguous, self-contained urban area than other, more sprawling and overlapping California school boundaries. The three institutions have earned plenty of praise for their close collaboration, which has resulted in a steady uptick in college-going rates for students from the K12 district, which enrolls a whopping 80,000 students.

But that doesn't mean Long Beach City College "creamed" students from the local high schools for its Promise Pathways project. Oakley said the sample had the same preparation as their peers, who are typically lower-income and among the most ethnically and racially diverse in the nation.

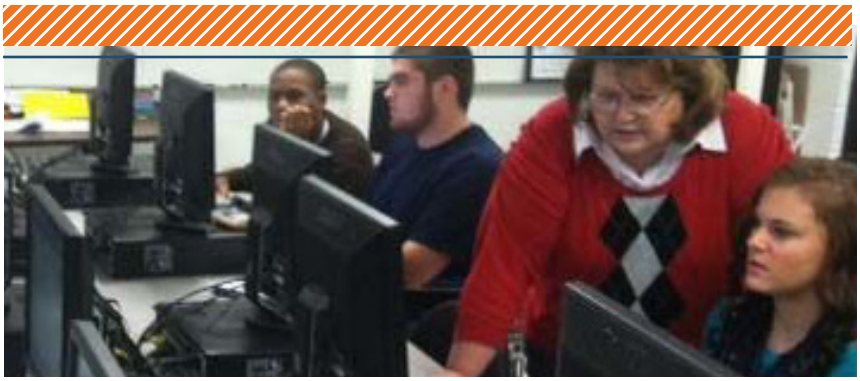
Even better, the group's improved performance on transfer-level courses extended across all demographics. White students still outpaced their peers, said Oakley, but all groups improved at similar rates.

"It's part of the puzzle in closing achievement gaps," he said.

The California community college system chancellor, Brice Harris, said his office likes what it has seen of the new approach to placement at Long Beach. System researchers are studying it for possible replication at other institutions, Oakley said.

Long Beach could serve as a good example beyond California, however, given its ability to move the needle on college preparation in the face of major challenges. And the diverse student population at Long Beach City College, who come from homes where a college-going culture is not the norm, will soon be more common at other colleges around the country.

"The rest of the nation is going to look like Southern California eventually," said Oakley.



Going to the Root of the Problem

By Paul Fain

Tennessee expands a remedial math project that reaches into high schools to boost college readiness, and governor backs the reform with real money.

A group of community colleges in Tennessee is going into local high schools to try to help more students get ready for college math. The experiment has showed impressive early results, and now the state's governor is forking over serious money to expand it.

The four community colleges have worked with teachers at local high schools to run math labs for 600 high school seniors who appeared likely to place into remedial tracks after high school.

Pass rates have been high. For example, 83 percent of a group of 200 students in the remedial, dual-enrollment group at Chattanooga State Community College completed all of the college's required math "competencies" during their senior year of high school.

Even better, 25 percent of those students completed a credit-bearing, college-level math course while still in high school (remedial math is typically

noncredit). These were also students who scored a 19 or below on the ACT Mathematics Test as high school juniors, meaning they had deficiencies in the subject.

"They were completely done with math before they even started" college, said Kimberly G. McCormick, interim associate vice president for academic affairs at Chattanooga State.

Bill Haslam, the state's Republican governor, caught wind of the project. He then spent $1.1 million on it from a state college-completion fund (dubbed "Drive to 55" after his goal for 55 percent of Tennesseans to hold a college degree or certificate by 2025).

That money has allowed 114 high schools and all 13 of the state's community colleges to participate. More than 6,500 high school students are taking remedial math as part of the project.

Officials in Tennessee aren't stopping there.

"This could be at every high school in the state," said Richard G. Rhoda, executive director of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

'NOT JUST TALK'

Remediation is perhaps the biggest barrier to improving the nation's college graduation rates. Only one-quarter of students who place into remedial math, writing or English courses will earn a credential within eight years.

Lawmakers in several states have grown frustrated with colleges' inability to make progress on the problem.

In Connecticut a new law essentially eliminated remediation by requiring colleges to place students with remedial needs into regular credit-bearing courses. (One remedial course is still allowed.) The idea in this approach, which advocates call the co-requisite model, is for remedial students to get extra help as they work alongside their college-ready peers.

Changes are also afoot in Florida. Legislation in the state gives community college the choice of skipping remediation, even if college advisers or placement tests say they have remedial needs. Also, all recent high school graduates in Florida are deemed college-ready and do not need to take placement tests when they enroll.

Both reforms are controversial. Some critics say lawmakers, even if well-meaning, are pushing ham-handed ideas that might actually make the problem worse. And neither state has funneled new money to remedial fixes.

Tennessee is a different story. Community college leaders said Haslam has worked with them to identify promising solutions and then encouraged them with meaningful financial support.

"It's a real commitment," McCormick said. "This is not just talk."

The state has gotten plenty of attention for its approach to performance-based funding in higher education. President Obama's plan for a federal version of performance funding appears to lift a few pages from Tennessee's playbook.

The feds also might want to take a look at how the state is tackling remediation, said higher education leaders there.

Stan Jones agrees. Jones, the president of Complete College America, a nonprofit group that has been a driving force of state-level policies on remediation, said the state's pilot program has "great promise." He said it could boost completion rates by ensuring that more high school students are ready for college.

FLIPPED CLASSROOMS

The project began with just one high school class.

Chattanooga State has had success with dual enrollment programs, officials there said. Fully 20 percent of its students are still in high school.

Building on that experience, the college three years ago started collaborating with the nearby Red Bank High School on remedial math. With Chattanooga State's help, a math teacher there, Deborah Weiss, began a remedial math lab with a single class section.

Weiss used Pearson's MyMathLab courseware for a flipped, or hybrid online, style of teaching. Many colleges tap MyMathLab for "modular" remedial courses that don't resemble a traditional math class. There are no lectures. Students work at their own speed to master competencies. Instructors help them on a one-on-one basis.

The class was "wildly successful," McCormick said. So the college applied for a grant to create a broader pilot project. The college got $100,000 from the state to teach remedial math to 600 dual-enrolled students at high

schools near four two-year institutions, including Northeast State, Cleveland State and Jackson State Community Colleges as well as Chattanooga State.

The community colleges helped high school teachers use the Pearson courseware. That can be an adjustment, college leaders said, and required some training.

The help didn't stop after a training program, however. The four colleges provided 14 roving "field coordinators" to pop by participating high schools whenever help was needed.

The field coordinators, who are college employees, helped with everything from running the software to class scheduling and teaching approaches. They were also able to oversee the academic progress of cohorts and individual students, which allowed them to suggest targeted interventions.

"They're like a second layer of support for the students," said Robert M. Denn, dean of school relations and university articulation at Chattanooga State. Denn is director of the project, which is called the Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support (SAILS) program.

The state has set a standard of five core competencies in remedial math. That uniformity has helped as colleges work with their high schools on remediation, said Mike Krause, assistant executive director for academic affairs at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, in part by sending clear messages to students about which concepts they need to master.

The 6,500 high school students currently enrolled in the program represent about 10 percent of Tennessee's senior class. Another 1,000 or so will join in the spring.

McCormick said they have received rave reviews so far. "It's working beautifully," she said. "The students really enjoy it."

Students can log onto the courseware from home, said Denn, as can their parents. And the modular approach means less paperwork for teachers, who can focus instead on working with students.

"They get to be teachers," he said.

The state, like most, has plenty of ground to cover on remediation. Roughly 70 percent of community college students in Tennessee arrive with remedial math needs. But community college leaders think the dual-enrollment approach can make a big dent in the problem. And the governor appears to agree.

There are no guarantees, observers said, but more money may be coming. Haslam signaled support for a three-year remedial math project. The goal is to reach 15,000 high school students next year.

"This is just the beginning," said McCormick. ▪

The Decision to Go to College

Gender Gap Traced Back

By Allie Grasgreen

Differences in the types of high schools boys and girls attend may contribute to the college gender gap, study suggests.

Recent research has suggested various ways in which girls outperform boys in high school, making them more likely to go to college: stronger desire to get good grades, better social skills, greater validation from academic performance. But a new study suggests gender sorting -- a boy's or girl's decision to attend one school or another – could have its own effect on the college enrollment gap.

In a study of public school systems in Florida, researchers found that what high school a student attends is "strongly associated" with college enrollment; girls are attending high schools that have higher rates of college-going than one would expect based on the students' test scores – and boys, vice versa.

Over all, the high school that boys and girls attended accounts for 10.9 percent of the gender gap in college

enrollment – in other words, 11 percent of the approximately 7-percentage-point nationwide gender gap in colleges is attributable to the high school attended -- but the figure is significantly higher for black (15.8 percent) and Hispanic students (12.2 percent) than it is for white students (5.2 percent).

While the paper does not make a causal link – it's not clear whether the high schools themselves are causing the gaps – if it is the high schools having this effect on the students, one would conclude that equal gender distribution across high schools would close the college gender gap by 11 percent.

"Either girls are choosing to attend high schools that are going to advantage them by making them more likely to go to college, or girls are simply attracted to high schools whose students have higher college-going rates -- even if the school does not cause this outcome -- while boys are attracted to other features of high schools," such as facilities or the characteristics of the school's students, said Mark C. Long, co-author of the paper published in *Educational Researcher* and associate professor of public affairs at the University of Washington.

The sample includes nearly 537,000 students who enrolled in a Florida public high school between 2002-6 and graduated within four years. While not every student has the ability to choose which high school to attend -- say, private, traditional public, or charter -- there is often some element of choice involved, either by the student selecting from a group of residential schools or a parent opting to live in a certain neighborhood.


Mark Long

Over all, students sort into schools based on gender at a level that's "well beyond" what would be expected if they enrolled randomly, the paper says.

"Boys, and particularly boys of color, appear to attend high schools that disadvantage them when it comes to college enrollment," said Dylan Conger, a co-author of the paper and associate professor of public policy and public administration at George Washington University. "The high school that they're attending seems to be playing a nontrivial role in the gender gap that occurs later on in college enrollment."

While girls are apparently opting for high schools with stronger college-going climates (measured by factors like instructor ability, student ambition, and knowledge and organization of guidance counselors), research has also suggested that girls are often motivated by individual characteristics -- a stronger understanding that they'll need a college degree, for instance, and intrinsic validation from performing well academically. (The study controls for test scores, special needs and eligibility for price-reduced lunches, among other things, but you can't measure ambition.)

"The implication of this paper, in our view, is that we need to pay attention a bit to gender sorting across schools," Conger said, "as it may play a role in the growing female advantage in college enrollment."

Gender sorting has other potential implications as well, she added: "Monitoring these trends may be particularly important for understanding the causes of the relatively low rates of college-going among boys from traditionally underrepresented minority groups."

Since school choices are largely

residential, one would think the gender breakdown would be fairly similar, the authors note. But in accounting for factors such as student achievement, teacher quality, school safety and extracurricular opportunities, many parents reported considering other options (like homeschooling) or moving to another neighborhood for school.

And previous research, the authors note, has shown differences in how parents evaluate schools based on the gender of their child: parents of girls tend to prefer same-sex schools and pay more attention to student performance, while parents of boys consider other resources such as facilities. Thus, white females are more likely than their white male peers to enroll in academically focused schools.

The sorting increases as students progress through the public school system. And however unbalanced the gender ratio is when students enter high school, it's likely worse by their senior year because dropouts tend to skew male.

The researchers found that sorting is more prevalent in areas where students prefer private, magnet, charter and other irregular public schools.

"Thus, increasing opportunities for choice may facilitate higher amounts of gender sorting (just as they might increase sorting by race and class) in future years," the paper says. "If continued monitoring suggests an increase in gender sorting, and further research suggests harmful consequences to such sorting, then school systems may want to consider gender balance in their school assignment policies." ▪

Bridging the Gap

By Carl Straumsheim

College readiness initiative -- focused on leveraging programs and resources to drive college-going for all students -- was particularly successful with African-American and Latino students.

Five years after a corporate foundation and an education and health advocacy group launched a program designed to smooth the path from high school to college, data suggest that the initiative can succeed in raising college enrollment -- especially among African-American and Latino students -- largely by reorganizing existing services and coordinating the work of other college access programs.

"It was about identifying a common idea of college readiness," said Rochelle Nichols-Solomon, director of postsecondary success at the development nonprofit FHI 360. In the three regions that participated in the program -- Philadelphia, San Francisco and Miami-Dade County -- Nichols-Solomon said education funds invited local stakeholders to answer an overarching question: "What does academic preparation of higher education look like?"

Few school districts would turn down a $5.1 million grant to spend on college preparation, but the Citi Foundation-backed funding came with a twist: It did not promise to build the ultimate college readiness program. FHI 360's broad guidelines asked participants to coordinate academic programs, align K-12 curriculums with postsecondary and workforce requirements, and engage community groups, but each region was free to tailor its program based on the needs of local high school students. The project is known as the Postsecondary Success Collaborative.

"It's a different way of thinking," said Rick Moses, director of the Philadelphia Postsecondary Success Program. "We tried to bring in new resources where we could, but we tried to look at existing resources and where we could leverage those. One challenge was getting people to understand that."

An independent analysis by the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning found the initiative bucked national enrollment trends. From 2009 to 2012, 12 percent more students from the initiative's target high schools enrolled in college. Among black and Latino

students at high schools that were deemed to have strongly implemented the initiative's recommendations, that number rose to 39 percent, boosted by a 69 percent increase among black students in Miami-Dade County. Among students who enrolled in college, the analysis also found a 16 percent increase in students who continued as sophomores.

Americans flocked to higher education after the economy crashed in the fall of 2008 to postpone entering a hemorrhaging job market, but the enrollment growth leveled out by 2011. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center estimated enrollment shrank by 2.3 percent in 2013 from the previous year, a number that included a 8.7 percent drop among four-year for-profit institutions. Only private four-year institutions posted a positive enrollment growth -- a marginal half-percent.

Common to all three sites involved in the collaborative, which included 10 pilot high schools, was an overall goal to create a college-going culture. In some cases, that meant introducing high school students to the idea of pursuing a college degree as early as ninth-grade orientation.

"They've moved from the mindset that it's not 'Am I going to college?' but 'Where am I going to college?' " Moses said.

Daria Sheehan, a senior program officer with the Citi Foundation, said another goal of the pilot project was to help high schools measure if their initiatives led to student progress. FHI 360 therefore created an asset mapping tool where schools rated their existing resources on a scale from zero to three. Some schools used it at the beginning of each new school year to set new priorities, then tracked their progress over the initiative's five-year lifespan. The tool will be made available online for free in the future.

"What they found was that 50 to 75 percent of their strategies were zeroes and ones," said Linda Lecht, president of The Education Fund, based in Miami. To brainstorm which resources to improve, the education fund brought together local school administrators, university officials and representatives from community-based groups in an advisory board.


Rochelle Nichols-Solomon

The advisory board chose to address "low-hanging fruit -- activities they could get started at right away that would make a splash in the schools and get them excited," Lecht said. That included "marathon" FAFSA sessions hosted by college financial aid officers, funding for college club field trips to universities across the state, and math courses organized to bridge the gap between high school and college curriculums.

In Philadelphia, two similar advisory boards found that the high school English curriculum was out of alignment with the kind of writing skills expected from college freshmen.

"There was a clear desire on behalf of the teachers, particularly, that they wanted to interface with their counterparts in higher education, so what we did was we brought them together, and they decided they wanted to focus on literacy," Moses said. Similar to how medical doctors meet in groups to evaluate treatments, the advisory boards created "instructional rounds," where high school teachers and college professors visited each another's classrooms to better understand what was being taught in them. The instructional rounds showed that students in college were more responsible for their own learning, which clashed with the rigid structure of the high school curriculum.

The education fund in San Francisco chose a more data-driven approach, connecting students from certain demographics with community-based organizations shown to be effective at helping them.

Moses described the efforts

to organize different schools, organizations and universities as "an ongoing process" where the education fund worked as "a convener and ... a facilitator," but the results from the three sites suggest the advisory boards were able to pinpoint solutions. In Miami-Dade County, Lecht said the board "realized that it's not that the high school teachers were not teaching the [math] curriculum or that college professors didn't have good pedagogy," but that "the high school curriculum was a mile wide and two centimeters deep."

"Our strategy was really to evolve the district and the schools," Lecht said. "FHI did provide technical assistance, but we were the ones on the ground every day doing the work, and that was sort of the beauty of it. They let us create our model."

Much of the growth in college enrollment benefited the collaborative's partner universities, as many students ended up enrolling at Temple University, Miami Dade College and the City College of San Francisco.

With the pilot program ending, the education funds said they pledged to continue the trends of the last five years. Moses said the Philadelphia site intends to double the number of high schools in the program from four to eight, and Lecht noted that the new math class has been introduced in more than a dozen high schools.

"What we've tried to do, at least in Philadelphia, is build something that can be sustainable," Moses said. "If all of us move to another position tomorrow, how can we set this up so it becomes part of the fabric of the school?" ▪

Community College Options

Is Free Better?

By Paul Fain

Politicians in three states want two years of tuition-free community college. Higher education experts welcome the attention, but worry about unintended consequences.

Making community college free has become a hot idea. In early 2014 politicians in Tennessee, Oregon and Mississippi proposed a tuition-free first two years of community college for their states' high school graduates.

Higher education leaders have welcomed the attention, as well as possible new pots of money aimed at lower-income students.

Terry W. Hartle, senior vice president of the American Council on Education, said the proposal from Tennessee's governor, Bill Haslam, was "extraordinarily important." He said it could be as "potentially far-reaching" as any state-based student access push since the creation of Georgia's HOPE scholarship in the early '90s.

However, Hartle and several other experts said the funding proposals raise significant questions. They urged a cautious, thoughtful approach and warned about a range of possible unintended consequences – such as driving students away from public, four-year institutions.

"This is not a minor proposition," Hartle said. "This will cost a lot of money."

More strategic ways of using state support could actually do a better job of helping students who need it the most, some said.

Kay McClenney, director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement, said state scholarship funds for lower-income students are often short of money.

For example, Oregon's Opportunity Grant, a need-based scholarship program, is "terribly underfunded," said Elizabeth Cox Brand, director of communications and research for the state's Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development. That story is repeated around much of the country.

Some lawmakers may be feeling relatively flush as their states emerge

Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam at "State of the State" address

from the recession. But McClenney said they must be careful about how they spend their "limited public funds" for higher education. By making tuition free for all, she said states run the risk of "subsidizing large numbers of people who don't need the support."

Hartle said the resulting expansion of student access could create challenges, particularly if the plans do not factor in students' likelihood of success. Without well-designed conditions, the tuition-free proposals "might be setting the institutions up to fail," he said.

Even so, Hartle and McClenney praised lawmakers in the three states for trying to help the most vulnerable of college students.

"The interest and the sentiment are powerfully welcome," said McClenney.

Major new funding proposals aimed at community college students are rare. And badly needed state support could draw more lower-income students into college and help them get to graduation.

"We know that many potential students, especially underrepresented and first-generation ones, see college as unaffordable," Dewayne Matthews, Lumina's vice president of strategy and policy, said in an email. "The Tennessee proposal addresses that concern very powerfully."

Matthews said he likes Haslam's strategy of linking the free tuition plan to the state's aggressive goals for increasing its number of college graduates.

David Baime, senior vice president for government relations and research for the American Association of Community Colleges, agreed with Matthews that the proposal sends a "loud and clear" message to lower-income students that college is for them.

"A lot of our students are so marginal when it comes to their ability to pay for college," he said.

But Baime said policy makers must think carefully about the consequences before moving forward with two years of free tuition. He worried whether the tuition subsidies would be sustainable, because healthy budgets don't last long.

Raising tuition once it has been eliminated is never easy, as California's community colleges have learned. (Tuition was free at the state's two-year colleges until 1984. And current tuition levels remain far below the national average, at $46 per credit.)

Matthews also said states must continue to serve more students. That takes funding.

"If states forgo tuition revenue,

they will need to find that money elsewhere," he said.

LEGITIMATE GOALS, AND WORRIES

Tennessee has drawn the most attention for its community college tuition plan. Haslam, a Republican, has won fans by prodding colleges to do better, and then finding ways to fund those initiatives.

In February 2014, the governor proposed making the first two years of community and technical college free to all Tennessee high school graduates. He suggested funneling $300 million from the state's lottery fund to create an endowment that would cover the cost of the tuition and fees.

The so-called Tennessee Promise would cost the state an estimated $34 million per year, according to a fact sheet the governor's office circulated. But Haslam said the proposed endowment should be able to handle that expense.

To be eligible students must enroll in community college the fall after their high school graduation. They must also take at least 12 credit hours per semester, maintain a 2.0 GPA and complete eight hours of community service per semester, according to the fact sheet.

The fund will be a "last-dollar scholarship," meaning it will cover only the fees left over after all other sources of aid have been applied. That includes federal funding, like Pell Grants.

The state expects 25,000 students to apply to the program. And the governor's office said it hopes to bring in at least 5,000 volunteer mentors to work with applicants.

"It is a promise that we have an ability to make," Haslam said of the plan, in a written statement. "Net cost to the state, zero. Net impact on our future, priceless."

A similar plan is moving forward in Mississippi, albeit more quietly. In January 2014, a committee of the state's Legislature passed a bill that would make tuition free at all 15 Mississippi community colleges for students who graduated from high school within 12 months of enrolling in college. An appropriations committee and the full Legislature have yet to consider the plan.

To qualify under the language in the proposed bill, students would also need to be first-time, full-time students. Once admitted students would need to maintain a 2.5 GPA while taking a minimum of 15 credit hours each semester to continue to have their tuition covered by the state.

Mississippi would only pick up the tuition costs after all other federal, state and institutional aid sources have been tapped. As a result, lawmakers estimated the annual cost to be less than $4.5 million per year for the 75,000-student system, reported *The Sun Herald* of Biloxi.

The impetus for the legislation is concern over the "cost of higher education," according to the text of the bill, and the "growing financial burden of both out-of-pocket expenses and loans to be repaid, that are being placed on current and future students."

Those concerns are legitimate, said Sara Goldrick-Rab, an associate professor of educational policy studies and sociology at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

Many people mistakenly believe community college is affordable, said Goldrick-Rab, who studies community college access issues. It is not, she said, at least for low-income students, who face an average net price of more than $8,000 a year even after all grants are considered.

"Many students are quite reasonably worried about borrowing $16,000 to $24,000 for a two-year degree, which often takes three years to complete," she said via email, adding that "it is increasingly hard for students to find flexible part-time employment that aligns with their school schedules."

Yet while Goldrick-Rab said the free-tuition plans are welcome developments, some are better than others.

She is concerned about whether the plans would harm access to four-year institutions. That's because academically prepared, low-income students experience a "smoother path" to a bachelor's degree if they start at a four-year institution.

Goldrick-Rab also said the benefits of free tuition are reduced if policy makers set "unreasonable criteria" such as high G.P.A. or credit thresholds.

"I'd recommend a closer look to see if additional sources of funding, including federal work-study and benefits access programs, could be

aligned to bring even more resources to the table," she said.

IT'S IN THE DETAILS

Oregon's free tuition plan remains solidly in the conceptual phase. But as with the proposals in the two other states, momentum is building rapidly for the idea – thanks in part to all the attention President Obama and others have directed at community college students.

A committee of the state's Senate in Feburary 2014 voted for a bill that requires Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Committee to study the idea of free community college tuition for two years for the state's high school graduates.

Lawmakers estimate a cost between $100 million and $200 million per year, reported The Oregonian, a Portland newspaper. Roughly 32,000 students earn high school diplomas in the state each year.

Gov. John Kitzhaber, a Democrat, supports the proposal. But he included several caveats during his testimony before the state Senate this week.

"I'd suggest it's an excellent idea but not without its complexities or potential pitfalls," Kitzhaber said, according to *The Oregonian*. He suggested adding G.P.A. requirements and other incentives.

Cox Brand is among many state officials who will study the proposal as it emerges. She likes the overall concept. "It's a grand idea. We all want to have more affordable college, for everyone," said Cox-Brand. "It's the shiny, bright object."

But she said plenty of challenges and tricky details will need to be resolved to make the plan work.

"What is it really going to look like?" she asked. "How much does it even cost? Is it sustainable?" ▪

A National Transfer Network

By Doug Lederman

American Honors, a venture capital-funded effort to help students transfer from two-year-college honors programs to selective universities, grows to four community colleges and 27 four-year institutions.

More than one person told Chris Romer that his vision of creating a national network of high-quality community college programs and selective four-year colleges committed to enrolling their graduates was folly. It's hard enough to get community colleges and elite public and private colleges in a given area to articulate transfer agreements, let alone create something on a national scale, he was told.

But the American Honors program that Romer and colleagues unveiled in 2013 has indeed created such a network, and it is beginning to bear fruit. Twenty-seven colleges, including highly selective private colleges such as Amherst and Swarthmore Colleges and selective publics like Purdue University and the University of California at Los Angeles, have joined the American Honors Network, in which they have agreed (with varying degrees of commitment) to recruit and enroll students transferring from the honors colleges established by the network's two-year partners.

That group of two-year colleges is growing, too, with New Jersey's Mercer County Community College and Union County College joining the original institutions, Community Colleges of Spokane and Ivy Tech Community College, in starting honors programs with administrative support from American Honors.

"We're pleased with the progress we've made in 18 months," said Romer, president of American Honors, part of the venture capital-funded Quad Learning. "This network of excellent four-year colleges and universities is going to increase opportunities for some of the super bright students at our community college partners."

FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY

The idea behind American Honors is a seemingly simple and noncontroversial one: help to create better avenues for the nearly half of all American students who start off at a community college to eventually make their way to some of the best four-year colleges.

Few things in higher education

are simple, though. Community college and four-year systems within states sometimes struggle to work out seamless transfer articulation agreements, and many selective private and flagship public universities continue to enroll disproportionately small numbers of community college and low-income students, despite significant rhetoric promising otherwise.

And while there is lots of talk about seeding innovative new ideas in higher education -- and lots of monied interests stepping up to try to bring those ideas to fruition -- some of them struggle to run the gauntlet of the accreditation and regulatory system. One recent example of an experiment that ran into regulatory trouble -- Ivy Bridge College, a partnership between the private Altius Education and the nonprofit Tiffin University to create an online associate degree program -- has more than a little in common with American Honors.

The American Honors vision is to wrap a rigorous academic honors program developed and delivered by the host community colleges themselves within a bundle of American Honors-provided advising and other services that exceed what financially strapped two-year institutions usually manage themselves. (For instance, the programs have one academic adviser for every 100 or so students, compared to a ratio of about 1,000-to-1 normally.)

American Honors plays no role in curriculum development or delivery, and has no plans to become an accredited institution itself, Romer emphasized repeatedly in a 20-minute interview.

The curriculum is delivered in a blended format, with both on-ground and synchronously delivered online courses; academic and other advising is delivered both online and in person, and mandatory "transfer coaching" is done face-to-face. Students pay tuition that's 40 to 50 percent higher than the norm for their institutions, but still well below the price points of most four-year public institutions.

Community Colleges of Spokane and Ivy Tech are both ramping up their programs (and both received word from their regional accreditors in recent days that the programs had been approved, a not-insignificant hurdle given the brouhaha over Ivy Bridge).

Spokane enrolled about 50 students in a pilot program last winter, and graduates were accepted at institutions such as Cornell, Stanford and Vanderbilt Universities and the University of Washington. The system's two campuses enrolled 147 students this fall, drawn from 767 applicants, says Lisa Avery, vice provost for strategic partnerships at Spokane. About a third of those applicants probably would have considered coming to the community college even if the honors program did

The American Honors Network

AMHERST COLLEGE • AUBURN UNIVERSITY • BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY • CONNECTICUT COLLEGE • DENISON UNIVERSITY • DEPAUW UNIVERSITY • GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, SCHOOL OF CONTINUING STUDIES • GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY • GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY • GONZAGA UNIVERSITY • ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY • LAFAYETTE COLLEGE • MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE • MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE • OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE • OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY • PURDUE UNIVERSITY • ROYAL ROADS UNIVERSITY • SMITH COLLEGE • SWARTHMORE COLLEGE • UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA • UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LOS ANGELES • UNIVERSITY OF PUGET SOUND • UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER • WABASH COLLEGE • WHITTIER COLLEGE • WHITWORTH UNIVERSITY

not exist, Avery says, but she's quite confident that the student who moved to the area from California to enroll would not have.

Ivy Tech has expanded its American Honors program from 50 students at its Indianapolis campus last winter to 130 students at three of its regions (adding Fort Wayne and Lafayette) this fall, says Beth Borst, founding director of the honors program there. Ivy Tech hopes to add two more regional campuses to the mix next fall, and to go statewide a year later.

Borst says Ivy Tech officials are gratified by the additional student support that they are able to offer students because of the partnership with American Honors. "Any time you can add an extra layer of services, an extra support net, that's always good," she says.

Spokane's Avery says she has seen initial skepticism among some faculty members about teaming up with a private company melt away as they see the quality of the students' work. "There was this initial 'Why are we doing this and spending time on it?'"she says. "But for all the great stuff we do around coaching here, the real magic happens in the classroom, and our faculty are really impressed by the students."

MOTIVATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Ultimately, though, she and others acknowledge, American Honors will rise or fall based on the outcomes of its graduates, which is why the creation of the newly announced transfer network is so important. The roster of institutions includes some, like Middlebury and Swarthmore Colleges, that have historically had few transfer students but have been striving to inject more socioeconomic and other diversity into their student bodies.

"Any time you can add an extra layer of services, an extra support net, that's always good."

Whittier College was much like those places five years ago, when President Sharon Herzberger -- concerned about the growing price of college -- set out to double the proportion of community college transfers at the California institution. Whittier worked closely with local two-year institutions, and community college transfers now make up 15 percent of its new students each year (and perform comparably to those who start at the institution, Herzberger says).

The arrangement with American Honors largely replicates the arrangements it has with its local two-year institutions, but Herzberger says she was particularly impressed by the honors curriculum at the American Honors institutions.

Whittier is among the institutions that has committed to enrolling any graduates of the American Honors programs that meet certain admissions criteria; other colleges in the network, says Romer of American Honors, have just agreed at first to take a close look at the programs' graduates.

"They have different motivations for being in this program," Romer says, "but all of them see an opportunity to connect to top students who they might not otherwise find."

And for officials at the community colleges, it's all about opportunity for their students.

"If this helps our students transfer to a school they may have not gone to before," says Borst of Ivy Tech, "that opens up some doors for them." ■

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Reverse Transfer

Common Sense on Completion

By Paul Fain

Statewide reverse transfer agreements, in which four-year colleges grant associate degrees to students who transfer from community colleges, are spreading. The process isn't easy, but could help students and graduation rates.

One way to boost graduation rates is to issue degrees to students who've already earned them, which often doesn't happen with associate degrees.

Roughly half of students who earn a bachelor's degree after transferring to a four-year institution from a community college fail to receive an associate degree, said Janet Marling, director of the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students at the University of North Texas, citing data from the College Board. And 80 percent fail to in California.

This isn't necessarily a problem for students who get a diploma from a four-year college. But transfer students are often left holding no credential if they drop out, even after earning more than 60 credits, sometimes many more.

In addition, many students transfer away from community colleges before earning an associate degree, and count as failures toward institutional graduation rates. Indeed, a student who leaves after two semesters to drop out looks the same as one who transferred to a top university.

The growing acceptance of "reverse transfer" may change this pattern, thanks in part to the national completion push. The term applies to several approaches, including the granting of associate degrees by four-year institutions, sometimes retroactively, for previously earned credits, or as part of "pathways" where transfer students finish their associate degree at a four-year college. Also, a growing number of students go back to earn an associate degree, often in nursing, after getting their bachelor's degree in another field.

Reverse transfer is a student-centric approach, Marling said, which seeks to help students understand the importance of the often-overlooked associate degree milestone.

Policymakers have taken notice, as have Complete College America and the Lumina Foundation, which recently announced a grant program to encourage reverse transfer at a larger scale. In the past, most successful reverse transfer agreements were between individual institutions. The University of Texas at El Paso and El Paso Community College, for example, are considered trailblazers. But broader cooperation is cropping up in some states.

Hawaii may be the furthest ahead in statewide coordination, said Holly Zanville, a program director at Lumina, and Maryland is also moving that way. The basic idea behind reverse transfer is to give "credit when it's due," Zanville said, which is the name Lumina gave to its new grant program.

Tennessee's private colleges recently developed a pathways approach for its community colleges, through which students can transfer before receiving associate degrees and still earn them at private colleges, under jointly-designed curriculum plans. And New Hampshire's community college and public university systems are now working together to make sure transfer students in STEM fields get their associate degrees.

Colleges in some states have beaten lawmakers to the punch on reverse transfer, while others are responding to legislative pressure.

"When your state legislature starts to mandate it, you take notice," Marling said.

BIG JOB, BIG PAY-OFF

While there are few, if any downsides to reverse transfer, it's not as easy as it sounds. In some states four-year colleges lack statutory approval to

The payoff, several observers said, could include a powerful impact on student motivation, by rewarding students with an achievement on their way to a bachelor's degree, which can often take six to eight years, or more.

grant associate degrees. And not all four-year institutions are eager to get into the game.

"The faculty don't see that as their role" at some universities, Zanville said.

When they do, reverse transfer is still a big job. Meaningful associate degrees should be tracked to a curriculum, which requires coordination between community colleges and four-year institutions. That means working together on everything from course-numbering to degree requirements, said Ross Gittell, chancellor of the Community College System of New Hampshire.

"There are lots of details," he said, and they typically require compromise and adjustments on both sides. New Hampshire began with STEM, because it is most deeply tied to the state's economic development. But Gittell said the plan is to expand reverse transfer to other disciplines. "We have to start someplace."

Tennessee's Legislature passed a bill that seeks to ease the transfer of credits between community colleges and four-year institutions. The bill also authorized reverse transfer agreements between all regionally accredited colleges, including private institutions.

"Regional accreditation creates a zone of academic trust," said Claude O. Pressnell, Jr., president of the Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association.

Some of Tennessee's private colleges have academic offerings that the state's public institutions do not, like the sign language program at Maryville College. Under the new agreements, Maryville can now grant an associate degree in sign language to transfer students.

A typical example of how this works, Pressnell said, is for faculty members on both sides of the transfer divide to develop a 41-credit core for students to complete at a community college before they transfer and finish the rest of the associate degree requirements at a private college.

These arrangements aren't just good for students, said Pressnell. "The benefit to us is that it creates an enrollment stream."

To get there, however, required plenty of work. Pressnell said more than 600 faculty members collaborated on designing the degree pathways. And reverse transfer requires an ongoing, high level of communication between colleges.

"It's not about counting mindless seat hours and face time," Zanville said.

The payoff, several observers said, could include a powerful impact on student motivation, by rewarding students with an achievement on their way to a bachelor's degree, which can often take six to eight years, or more. "That's a long time with no recognition," said Zanville.

And for students who drop out of a four-year college, Pressnell said a previously-earned associate degree "may actually encourage them to come on back and finish that bachelor's degree." ▪

Comprehensive on Completion

By Paul Fain

Maryland goes big with a college completion law, and some community college leaders say they like its comprehensiveness.

Maryland's public colleges are six months into complying with one of the nation's most ambitious college completion bills. The state-mandated push puts Maryland in a class with Tennessee, Indiana and Georgia.

"It represents a defining moment for public higher education in the state of Maryland," said Charlene M. Dukes, president of Prince George's Community College. "It sets a whole new tone."

A few educators said they were uneasy about the state's Legislature getting so deep in the weeds with legislation that touches on everything from dual enrollment to remediation and completion plans for each student. (See below for more details about the measure.)

Making the many required changes has been a heavy lift at times. But several college leaders said the comprehensive nature of the legislation was a virtue.

That's because Maryland's completion law, which was enacted in July 2013, deals simultaneously with K-12, community colleges and four-year institutions. Experts say attempted completion fixes, such as improving remedial course success rates, can benefit from reaching across the various stages of public education.

"If we really want to deal with developmental education," said Bernie Sadusky, executive director of the Maryland Association of Community Colleges, "we have to go to the source

NEW APPROACH TO COMPLETION
DETAILS ON MARYLAND'S COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS AND COLLEGE COMPLETION ACT OF 2013

New Goals

The legislation sets a goal for at least 55 percent of Marylanders between the ages of 25 and 64 to hold at least an associate degree by 2025. It also seeks for all degree-seeking students who are enrolled at a community college in the state to earn an associate degree before leaving the college or transferring to a public four-year institution.

Standard number of credit hours

The law sets the standard number of credits for a bachelor's degree at 120. And beginning in 2015, the standard number of credits for an associate degree will be 60. However, there are exceptions to these standards, which colleges can also add to in consultation with the commission.

Completion incentives

The commission and each public institution must create incentives for students to obtain an associate degree before enrolling in a public, four-year institution. They must also create a statewide communications campaign to identify near completers – students who have earned at least 45 credits at a community college or at least 90 credits at a four-year institution – and offer incentives for them to re-enroll and earn a degree.

Degree plan

Each undergraduate student enrolled in a public, four-year institution must file a degree plan charting a pathway to completion with the institution before earning 45 credits. Students who transfer in with at least 45 credits must submit the plan during their first semester. The plans must be developed in consultation with an academic adviser in the student's degree program, if such an adviser is available.

Statewide transfer agreements

By July 2016 the Maryland Higher Education Commission, in collaboration with public institutions, must develop a statewide transfer agreement through which at least 60 credits of general education, elective and major courses that a student earns toward a degree at any Maryland community college must be transferrable for credit toward a bachelor degree at any public, four-year institution in the state.

Reverse transfer agreement

The commission must also by July 2016 create a statewide reverse transfer agreement through which at least 30 credits that a student earns toward a bachelor's degree at any public, four-year institution in the state are transferrable to a community college in the state for credit toward an associate degree.

High school curriculum and graduation requirements

By 2015 the state Board of Education will require that students at all public schools must be assessed for college readiness in English and mathematics before their senior year. Beginning with the following year, community colleges and local school systems must create "transition courses" for high school seniors who are not deemed college ready.

Pathways to a degree

Each public institution must develop a pathway system that includes graduation progress benchmarks. The benchmarks must specify the credit and course criteria that indicate satisfactory progress to a degree. They must also require each first-time, degree-seeking student to include credit-bearing mathematics and English courses during their first 24 earned credits. Students who are danger of falling behind will be required to consult with an academic adviser.

College and career counseling plan

The Maryland State Department of Education must work with public colleges and universities to develop a plan to improve college and career counseling for students in middle and high schools.

Dual enrollment

A public institution may not charge tuition to a student who is dually-enrolled in a public, K12 school. Local school districts must pick up large portions of the price for up to four college courses in which the student is enrolled.

of the problem. That is K-12."

The measure requires high schools to test students on their college readiness -- in both math and English -- before they finish their junior years. By 2015 high schools will need to create "transition" courses for students that are deemed unprepared for college-level courses in those subjects.

On the higher education side, public institutions in the state must require students to complete at least one credit-bearing, non-remedial math and English course as part of the first 24 credits they earn.

That approach manages to not be punitive, said John Grabowski, dean of enrollment services at Anne Arundel Community College. It is also less aggressive than legislative attempts to reform remediation in other states, such as Florida and Connecticut.

That's not too surprising, as lawmakers in Annapolis are generally friendly to public higher education. State support for public colleges there has long been better than in most other states.

Several community college leaders said genial relations with the State House helped during negotiations over the completion legislation. They said the Legislature's approach was pragmatic.

"They were willing to compromise," said Bradley Gottfried, president of the College of Southern Maryland.

For example, the legislation's sponsors eased off on a few initially aggressive timelines for colleges.

Almost all of the community college sector's suggested amendments were adopted in the final version.

While there are many pieces to the legislation, Grabowski said colleges either have been working on them already, or should have been.

Whether the measure will help improve student retention and completion, rather than just creating an unfunded bureaucracy, is an open question. But community college leaders said they are optimistic about seeing solid results in a few years.

Officials with the University System of Maryland agreed. They said much of what the legislation seeks to accomplish is already in the works.

"It's doable," said P.J. Hogan, the system's vice chancellor for government relations. He called the legislation "realistically ambitious."

'A PACKAGE SUITE'

Maryland's completion law doesn't set target numbers for colleges' graduation or retention rates. But it does seek for at least 55 percent of the state's residents between the ages of 25 and 64 to hold at least an associate degree by 2025. That would be a more than 10 percentage point increase from the 44.4 percent rate in 2009.

To get there the measure requires a host of tangible changes. Some are designed to encourage completion among the 20 percent of Marylanders who have some college credits but no degree, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

For example, public institutions and state agencies are teaming up to create a mandated statewide campaign to identify "near completers" and to try to entice them back to finish their degrees. The law defines near completers as former community college students who hold 45 credits or more and four-year students with at least 90 credits.

The legislation requires public, four-year institutions to accept more credits that students earn at Maryland community colleges. And it will make both community colleges and four-year institutions be more thrifty with their programmatic degree requirements. Under the law, four-year institutions must set a limit of 120 credits for bachelor's degrees, with some exceptions. Likewise, most associate degree programs will be 60 credits.

In Maryland, community college graduates were accumulating an average of 75 credits to earn a degree in 3.8 years.

That won't cut it any more. But to get down to the 60-credit standard, colleges will be forced to eliminate degree requirements and some course offerings.

One aspect that might come with some costs for colleges is the requirement that all students attending four-year institutions create a plan for earning a degree before they accumulate 45 credits. Students must draft their plans with the help of an academic adviser, who will also be called in if students fail to hit defined benchmarks on their way toward graduation.

If colleges don't have enough advisers to get that work done, they will have to hire more.

However, those and other mandates

in the legislation are more palatable to many educators in the state than a performance-funding formula would be. But several sources said lawmakers are contemplating performance funding as a possible next step.

Maryland in 2012 received $1 million from Complete College America, a nonprofit group that is funded in part by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and has been a visible champion of the college completion "agenda." The state is submitting data on several metrics to the group as part of the grant.

Dominique Raymond, vice president of state relations for Complete College America's Alliance of the States, said the Maryland bill addresses all of her group's priority issues. She also praised the state for trying to bridge the gap between high school and college.

"This is a package suite," Raymond said. "It ensures alignment in a big way."

Several community college leaders said the measure's approach to dual enrollment might help boost college readiness.

It requires K-12 systems to pick up most of the tab for up to four college courses a dually enrolled student takes. In the fall semester, more than 5,000 Maryland high school students gave dual enrollment a whirl. And those numbers are expected to grow.

Not everything made it into the final legislation, however. Community college leaders had pushed for a common course number system. They argued that having English 101 refer to the same course across all institutions would have made the transfer process smoother. But that idea didn't get enough traction.

However, community college officials will have plenty of chances to push for additions (and deletions) to the legislation. The three lawmakers who sponsored the measure recently met with the presidents of all the state's two-year colleges, and said they wanted to hear what changes need to be made as the various pieces go into effect.

"The people who crafted the legislation are very thoughtful," said Gottfried. ■

The Transfer Option

New Approach to Transfer

By Paul Fain

A multistate transfer agreement is based on proficiency rather than course credits, which might open the door further for models that do not rely on seat time.

A group of 16 public institutions in four Western states have agreed to a transfer agreement based on what students know rather than on the courses they have taken or the credits they have earned.

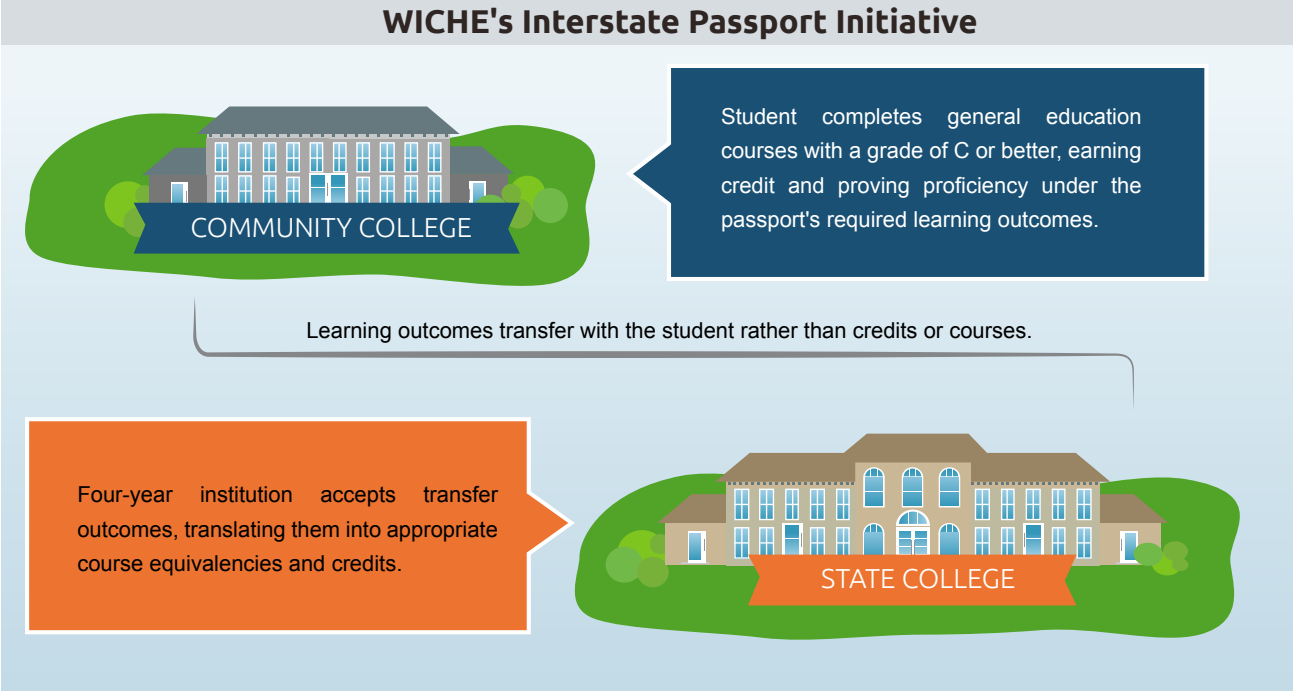
The Interstate Passport Initiative, which the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) unveiled in January 2014, is a set of mutually agreed-upon learning outcomes for lower division courses in the general education core.

Students can now transfer from one participating institution to another – even across state lines – and bring their outcomes, or competencies, with them.

Colleges on either side of the process determine which courses and credits equate with proficiency in the learning objectives. And the receiving institution gets to decide which credits a transfer student should earn for his or her proven proficiency.

"Some institutions may require two or more courses to meet a single outcome while another institution may only require one course," according to WICHE's website description of the project, "but each institution will understand the composition of the block at every other institution."

Beyond its potential impact at participating colleges, the project is important for what it signals about



transfer and the credit hour.

Higher education's central currency for more than a century has been credits earned for specific courses. But the passport, which was created by dozens of academics with plenty of input from registrars and other technical experts, goes beyond the credit hour with a framework of required learning concepts.

As a result, the passport could contribute to the "unbundling" of higher education, where assessed learning typically trumps time spent in the traditional classroom.

"If this works, it could open the door to prior-learning assessment," said Susan Albertine, vice president of diversity, equity and student success at the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Related approaches, such as competency-based education or digital badges, could also get a boost.

The main impetus for the passport is to create a more efficient transfer process. Many transfer students – particularly those who move from community colleges to four-year institutions – spend time and money retaking courses after transferring.

For example, the average transfer student takes more than a year longer than non-transfer students to earn a bachelor's degree, spending an extra $9,000 in the process, according to federal data. While some states have worked on this issue within their own borders, WICHE's regional approach could help the 27 percent of transfer students who cross state lines.

"We simply must streamline the transfer process for students. And we must do so in a way that ensures the quality and integrity of the degrees we ultimately provide," said David Longanecker, WICHE's president, in a written statement. "The passport achieves this by guaranteeing both the value of the credits received and the competencies developed by students."

'REVOLUTIONARY' EFFORT?

The pilot project is fairly limited. The three learning areas it focuses on are oral communication, written communication and quantitative literacy. The agreed-upon outcomes in each area can translate into course equivalencies in mathematics, English, writing and communications.

As a result, the passport's competencies cover a relatively small slice of a typical undergraduate degree's general education requirement. But the project's leaders want to add outcomes for other disciplines.

"The hope is that we will be able to build it out," said Albertine. She said the ultimate goal is a complete, transferable general education core based solely on learning outcomes.

A $550,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York has paid for the project so far. WICHE is currently looking for a funder to continue supporting the work.

"In the second phase we'll tackle the sciences, critical thinking and the humanities," said Patricia Shea, the project's director, who also directs WICHE's alliance of community college leaders.

Academics and administrators from California have been heavily involved in the project, but have not yet signed on to the passport.

Ken O'Donnell, associate dean for academic programs and policy for the California State University System, said the system plans to ramp up its participation in the effort. Given the massive scope of Cal State and California's community colleges, a focus on competencies for transfer in the state would be a major development.

The project's leaders hope many more colleges and state higher education systems will participate.

"We want to do it and we're confident that we can," said Albertine, who has been involved in the work, which draws heavily from her association's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) project. The passport's three main learning outcomes came from the LEAP project. It also has similarities with the Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile and the Tuning project.

By creating the passport, Albertine said, "We thought we were doing something revolutionary."

DEMONSTRATED PROFICIENCY

The project began quietly more than three years ago. A group of college provosts first hatched the idea to create transfer pathways based on students' competencies.

While trendy, academic programs based on competencies are not new. Neither is the concept of "block" transfers. Colleges have long matched up groupings of courses – checking boxes for general education requirements – as part of their transfer articulation agreements.

This approach is different, however, because the common currency is learning outcomes, not courses.

"If you're all working on the same outcomes," said Albertine, "you can go in all sorts of different directions and still get there."

Trust is important for this novel form of transfer to work, according to the project's leaders. It also requires a tremendous amount of technical know-how, experts said, which is why the tech-savvy WICHE made sense as a host for the work.

O'Donnell said colleges have developed myriad administrative systems that rely on the credit hour, including registrars' offices and IT platforms. So shifting transfer criteria to learning outcomes isn't easy.

"That whole machine needs to turn," he said.

The passport is backed by detailed information describing what, exactly, are the agreed-upon transfer-level proficiency criteria for the outcomes. That can be trickier than just matching up two similar courses at different colleges. Faculty members at participating institutions worked together to develop the criteria.

The passport agreement does not require specific forms of assessment. Institutions make the call on how best to determine whether a student is proficient. But a student must be deemed proficient in each outcome to earn successful transfer status in one of the three overarching learning areas -- oral communication, written communication and quantitative literacy.

For example, there are six learning outcome features under the passport's definition of quantitative literacy: computational skills, communication of quantitative arguments, analysis of quantitative arguments, formulation of quantitative arguments, mathematical process and quantitative models.

The definition of mathematical process (to choose one) is for a student to be able to "design and follow a multi-step mathematical process through to a logical conclusion and critically evaluate the reasonableness of the result."

That outcome is also undergirded by a description of the various ways a student can demonstrate transfer-level proficiency. For example, she can successfully use "synthetic division, factoring, graphing and other related techniques to find all the (real) zeroes

of a suitable cubic/quartic polynomial."

Sounds simple, right?

However, students don't need to master every specific proficiency criterion. The passport's criteria are examples of the "behaviors that a student will display when she has attained adequate proficiency to succeed in her academic endeavors after transferring to another passport institution," according to WICHE's website.

The next step is transfer. Say the student earned her proficiency at Utah's Salt Lake Community College by receiving a grade of "C" or better in math 1040, which is statistics. She could then use the passport to transfer to the University of Utah and earn credit from the university for math 1030, which is quantitative literacy.

Participating institutions plan to do plenty of heavy lifting to track how the passport shakes out. They will collect data about transfer students in the pilot project and plan to send that information to the National Student Clearinghouse. (Utah State University is serving as the passport's central data repository for now.) This will allow colleges to test how the students who received credit under the passport performed in subsequent courses, and to compare their performance to other students.

Several experts involved in the work think the approach to transfer has the potential for much wider adoption.

College transcripts are woefully inadequate at depicting student learning, said O'Connell, citing a widely held belief. He said the passport, however, is a "way of organizing what students know instead of what we told them."

Many forces are pushing higher education to a more outcomes-based approach. As a result, O'Connell said the broader use of proficiencies for transfer credit is not only feasible, but "in a sense inevitable." ▪

For-Profit Wage Gap

By Paul Fain

Community college students who transfer to for-profit institutions earn less than do peers who transfer to public or private colleges, study finds.

Community college students who transfer to for-profit institutions tend to earn less over the next decade than do their peers who transfer to public or private colleges.

Those are the findings from a study released in January 2014 by the Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment, a research center that was created with a federal grant and is housed at the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Columbia University's Teachers College.

In recent years several researchers have attempted to look at the relative labor market returns of attending for-profits, which is also a hot topic among policy makers.

There are many variables at play – such as the relatively low academic preparation of incoming for-profit students versus their peers at traditional colleges. And the results from those research efforts have ranged from largely unflattering to a mixed view of for-profits.

This new study, however, may be the first to analyze earnings gaps at various points before and after students attend college, as well as while they're still enrolled.

It also controlled for the effects of student "swirl" in the complex higher education system by looking at transfer among a large sample of 80,000 full-time community college students who first enrolled in the early to mid-2000s.

Over all, the research found that students who transferred to for-profits earned roughly 7 percent less over the next decade than students who transferred to private or public nonprofit institutions, according to income data culled from unemployment insurance data dated from up to 2012.

"We identify a statistically significant wage penalty from enrolling in a for-profit institution," wrote the study's coauthors, Vivian Yuen Ting Liu, a senior research assistant at the CCRC, and Clive Belfield, an

associate professor of economics at Queens College, which is part of the City University of New York System.

"This penalty appears consistent across subgroups of students, although it is greatest for for-profit students who did not complete an award," they wrote. "For-profit students gain least over the longer term. Extended over a working life, the differences become much greater."

WORK AND STUDY

The research was based on cohorts of students who attended community colleges in two statewide systems.

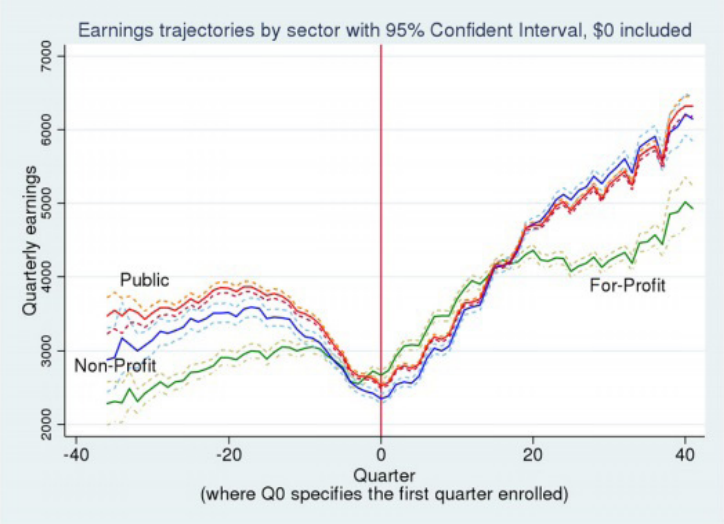
Among students from the first group, which included data from a longer time range, there were stark differences in the earnings gains one decade after transfer. Students who attended for-profits had a net wage bump of $5,400 over that decade. But public college students saw a $12,300 gain and private college students earned $26,700 more (in 2010 dollars).

The results were more mixed for the second cohort of students, who attended community colleges in a different state.

In that group, students who transferred to a for-profit sometimes earned more than their peers who transferred to other institutions. For example, both men and women who transferred to for-profits earned an average of 18 percent more than students who transferred to public colleges.

One reason for the discrepancy was that the second group was tracked over a shorter period of time. Those students first enrolled in community college a few years earlier than the other, larger group, and therefore had less time in the labor market.

Figure 1: Earnings by Sector of Transfer College Before, During, and After College—CCS-A Sample



Note: Sample includes all award-seeking, first-time-in-college students who enrolled in CCS-A from 2001–02 to 2004–05. Students with zero earnings are included after age 18.

Additionally, students fared better while they were enrolled in for-profits, according to the study.

"The for-profit students can work more intensively while they are studying," Belfield said. And the associated impact on earnings persists for up to five years.

But the smaller "opportunity costs" of attending a for-profit were erased over time. And the second group of transfer students likely had not yet had enough time in their jobs to see their earnings losses offset from enrolling in nonprofit colleges.

A spokesman for the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities said the study exposes differences between the for-profit sector and nonprofit institutions.

"Our students are more likely to work during school and can have more difficulty in the classroom," Noah Black said in a written statement. "But the path to success for these new traditional students is still through higher education, and our goal is to give them that opportunity they would not have otherwise."

Belfield said he hoped the findings would help students focus more on their long-term earnings.

"Most of these students are still pretty young," he said, and should be asking, "What's college going to do for my career?"

'BETTER THAN NOTHING'?

The study sheds light on the characteristics of community college students who tend to transfer to for-profits. On average, this group fares worse academically before transferring.

"Students in the for-profit sector

accumulated far fewer credits before they transferred, were more likely to transfer without an associate degree and had much lower GPAs at their college of first enrollment," the study found.

In addition, black and Hispanic students in the larger cohort were more likely to transfer to a for-profit -- by a substantial margin.

That difference between students who transferred to for-profits or nonprofits offers a caveat to the research, Belfield said, because they suggest that there may be various reasons why many of the for-profit students did not thrive at public, two-year colleges.

Belfield also cautioned against judging all for-profits alike. The industry is large and "pretty heterogeneous," he said. And the study did not break out its findings along institutional lines.

However, while the research found that all students earned more if they continued their studies after community college, transferring to a for-profit appears to not pay off as well, at least on average.

"Something is better than nothing," Belfield said, but "you're taking a bigger risk if you go into the for-profit system." ■

Completion, Non-Completion and Measuring Results

Badging From Within

By Paul Fain

A digital badging project at UC Davis is drawing notice, but the innovation looks more like competency-based education than a form of alternative credentials.

The University of California at Davis is creating what may be higher education's most promising digital badge system. But the badges are no threat to the university's degrees. They're add-ons – perhaps valuable ones for students.

"Badges can tell a different story," says Joanna Normoyle, the experiential and digital media learning coordinator at the university's Agricultural Sustainability Institute. She says they allow students to "differentiate themselves and tell a narrative."

Normoyle has helped lead the effort by faculty and staff members at UC-Davis to create a badging system for a new undergraduate major in sustainable agriculture and food systems. The final product, which went live with a small pilot group in the fall of 2013, is more about competency-based education than alternative credentials.

The idea was hatched as the university worked toward the 2011 launch of the sustainable ag major. It's an ambitious interdisciplinary program, featuring collaboration among eight departments in the university's College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences as well as the Agricultural Sustainability Institute.

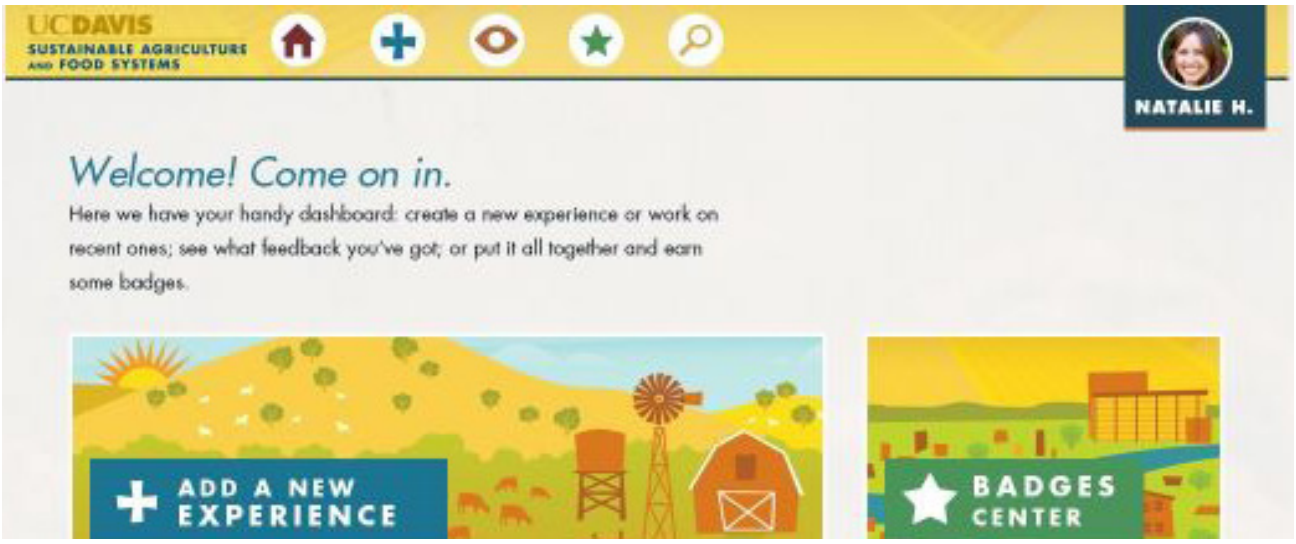
The new curriculum is particularly hands-on, with lots of experiential learning that occurs outside the classroom, such as through internships and fieldwork. Much of that learning isn't captured by conventional grading.

The university wanted to help students find ways to describe their experiences, in ways that make sense to faculty, students, employers and themselves. It was a vexing challenge, because any solution had to stretch across the entire curriculum – not just individual classes.

Normoyle and her colleagues settled on badges, with an undergirding of competencies that describe the learning outcomes and skills students need to successfully complete the major.

There are seven core competencies in the program. Employers contributed to the identification of those competencies, which include systems thinking, experimentation and inquiry, understanding values, interpersonal communications, strategic management, civic engagement and personal development.

For example, competency in systems thinking requires students



to integrate societal, environmental and economic perspectives into their analysis of complex systems.

Each competency connects to digital badges students can earn for their experiences, skills and knowledge. The badges themselves are graphical representations of an accomplishment – basically the digital version of a felt patch a Boy or Girl Scout might earn.

This fall 20 students experimented with the badging system as part of a senior "capstone" course. Badges are not formally awarded at this point, as the system is still in its testing phase. But Normoyle says the sustainable agriculture programs plans to expand their use next semester. At some point assessments from faculty members and peers, as well as self-assessments, will be part of a final review process for the awarding of badges.

Students create an online profile where they can display the badges. Each one might be accompanied by detailed information, including a description of the student's experience, what they learned, photos, diagrams or even assessment scores.

Normoyle describes the profiles as learner dashboards or "media-rich, tiled portfolios."

For example, students might earn a badge for collecting soil samples from the student farm to test effects of different mulch treatments. They would write up that learning experience to be eligible for the badge. And the students get to decide which knowledge demonstrates their competency.

Faculty members and other students will be able to see the badges. They can also comment on them. But the students will be in charge of how they display their portfolio of badges.

"This is all about a self-reporting system," Normoyle says. "What do I think about what I know?"

The goal is for students to communicate their skills to others, and to learn about what they know in the process.

"Tools like this can complement what happens in in-person learning," she says.

MODEL COULD SPREAD

Digital badges are a trendy idea. Many predict the nascent form of credentialing could pose a challenge to higher education. Ideally, badges could give people new ways beyond college credentials to prove what they know and can do.

The Mozilla Foundation, an open-source technology pioneer, has helped lead the way with its open badges project. The foundation created a "backpack" that earners can use to display badges on a résumé or social networks.

Along the way, badging has earned plenty of powerful supporters, including Bill Clinton and Education Secretary Arne Duncan.

"Badges can help engage students in learning, and broaden the avenues for learners of all ages to acquire and demonstrate – as well as document and display – their skills," Duncan said

in 2011.

Duncan also linked badging to competency-based education, saying it "can help speed the shift from credentials that simply measure seat time, to ones that more accurately measure competency."

Not everybody is sold on badges, however. One reason is that anyone can award one, raising questions about quality control.

Peter Stokes is executive director of postsecondary innovation in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University. He's supportive of the concept behind badges, and thinks there are no real technical obstacles to making them work. But Stokes remains skeptical of badges having a major impact on higher education, at least for now.

"The big challenge with the badge is to create currency in the market," Stokes says.

UC Davis is one of the first traditional institutions to give badging a whirl. Purdue University has also been a pioneer.

Sheryl Grant, an expert on badges who is director of social networking for the Humanities, Arts, Science and Technology Advanced Collaboratory (HASTAC), said the badging work done by Normoyle and others at UC-Davis is the most interesting she's seen in higher education. Grant has helped administer 30 badging projects that won a contest and received support from the Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

"They really are solving for something that the current credential system is not doing," says Grant, adding that Normoyle and company are doing so without "upsetting the apple cart" by tossing out the degree.

"The transcript is pretty limited in what it does. Students want a broader representation of their experiences."

Grant predicts that UC-Davis's approach is one other colleges will copy. That's because, she says, they used a rigorous process to create a badging system grounded in the values of the institution, faculty, students and employers.

The end result, Grant says, is a "data visualization and recommendation system" that is "going to scale really well."

The university is drawing plenty of attention for the new badges. Normoyle is fielding invitations to speak around the country. Interest is also high on campus and among employers.

Several experts on experiential learning said they are taking badges seriously. So is Michael V. Reilly, executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.

Reilly said he is in favor of efforts to capture students' experiences outside the classroom, whether through e-portfolios, badging or other ideas.

"The transcript is pretty limited in what it does," he says. "Students want a broader representation of their experiences."

Reilly likes what he has heard about the badging system at UC-Davis, particularly because Normoyle isn't talking about replacing college credentials.

"It's very much the right way to go," he says, "and much less confrontational." ▪

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Third Try Isn't the Charm

By Paul Fain

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The study found some variation among racial and ethnic groups. Interestingly, a second departure appears to be less of a problem for Hispanic students in the study, who nonetheless had relatively low graduation rates.

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

The study did not factor in associate-degree completion, Park said. As a result, some students who graduated from community college are listed as dropouts. And "graduation" in the study refers only to successfully earned bachelor's degrees.

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

'WORK LESS, STUDY MORE'

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

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

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

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

"While many factors influence overall success, it appears that those students who are working while continuously enrolled experience lower rates of

academic success," the study said. "Put differently, these students are working hard for the degree, yet not succeeding in attaining it."

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

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

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

"Perhaps those students successful in transfer are able to 'see the light at the end of the tunnel' in terms of degree completion," the study said. "The successful transition between the two and four-year sectors, it appears, is important not only in graduating students, but also in keeping students in the pipeline toward eventual graduation." ■

Looks Matter

By Scott Jaschik

High schoolers who are physically attractive are more likely than others to complete college, study finds.

It's what inside that really counts. Well, maybe not.

A national study released in late 2013 in book form found that those who are attractive in high school are more likely than those with just average or below average looks to go on to earn a four-year college degree. The results are statistically significant, and hold for males and females, and across ethnic and racial groups. The book is *Physical Attractiveness and the Accumulation of Social and Human Capital in Adolescence and Young Adulthood: Assets and Distractions* (Wiley), by Rachel A. Gordon, professor of sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago; Robert Crosnoe, the Elsie and Stanley E. (Skinny) Adams Sr. Centennial Professor in Liberal Arts at the University of Texas at Austin; and Xue Wang, who completed her Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Pre-publication publicity about the book has focused on its findings that, in comparing similarly bright students, attractive high school students earn higher grades than do other students. But the book also covers college completion -- and the results there cannot be attributed only to the high school grades, the researchers say.

The study involved tracking 8,918 students -- from randomly selected high schools in a national longitudinal data set -- from high school through the post-college years. The group was a representative sample and various socioeconomic factors were used to control the results. For example, controls included parent's educational background (a key predictor of academic success) and level of difficulty of high school courses taken (so that students were compared to their academic peers).

Researchers rated the students as high schoolers on physical appearance using a five-point scale. Gordon explained in an interview that guidelines specified that characteristics generally found by surveys to correlate with societal expectations about attractiveness (such as a symmetrical face) were stressed so that the survey wouldn't be based on the particular views of the researchers on what constitutes physical attractiveness.

About 15 percent of the students were rated as "very attractive," 35 percent as "attractive," 44 percent

as "average" and 6 percent as "unattractive" or "very unattractive." The gains in college completion rates were the same for those deemed somewhat and very attractive -- so what mattered was having above average attractiveness, not being at the very top of the scale, Gordon said.

Of the entire pool, about one-third finished a four-year degree, but those rated attractive were three percentage points higher than others to have finished a baccalaureate.

Gordon said that only about one-third of that difference can be attributed to the impact of the higher grades in high school. So attractiveness seems to be a factor in college success.

Further, she said that the overall academic performance of the attractive students would be better but for other factors that the researchers tracked in interviews with the students. Attractive students drink more and have more sex than other students, and these activities are associated with decreased academic performance -- and so brought the attractive and other students closer together. The most successful students (academically) were those who were attractive (bringing, the study finds, friends and connections and support and confidence) but didn't engage in much drinking or sex.

Academics like to think that their classrooms are meritocratic. But Gordon said that the new book builds on past research that has primarily focused on elementary schools, and found that many teachers do seem to favor more attractive pupils. Studies going back many years examined what happens when elementary school teachers are given portfolios and asked to evaluate the potential of students -- with the portfolios identical in describing past educational achievement levels, but differing in whether an accompanying photograph is of a more attractive or less attractive student. The teachers predict higher levels of intelligence and have higher expectations for the more attractive students. Gordon said that a major goal for the new book was to find out whether this appearance-based advantage extends to high school and college -- and that it apparently does.

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Gordon said that she hoped the research would prompt teachers at all levels to think about whether they have "some kind of bias" based on appearance -- even though she acknowledged that the research doesn't show definitively that bias is the key issue. She stressed that the study found no correlation between attractiveness and intelligence -- so in theory there should not be gaps in academic performance. When teachers have high expectations for students, the students are motivated, she said, and those who aren't above average in looks shouldn't be assumed to be less capable. "It's important that we think about ways to change that," she said. ▪

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