Access, Success, and Completion

A Primer for Community College Faculty, Administrators, Staff, and Trustees

TERRY O'BANION

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The purpose of the Access Agenda is to make it easy for students to enroll in college.

The purpose of the Student Success Agenda is to assist students in meeting their individual education and career goals.

The Completion Agenda is a part of the Student Success Agenda with a more targeted goal of doubling the number of students in the next decade who complete a certificate or associate's degree or who transfer and complete their credential at another college or university.
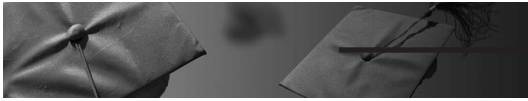
The Access Agenda

For almost 100 years, the community college has championed the Access Agenda—opening the door to higher education for students who never dreamed of going to college. And community colleges have been enormously successful in achieving the goals of the Access Agenda. The open-door philosophy encourages any student who has graduated from high school, obtained a GED, or is 18 years or older to enter college. The comprehensive curriculum is designed to offer a number of options to these diverse students so they can find a pathway that meets their needs and their abilities. Financial aid and lower costs make it possible for community college students to actually attend. In the early days of the community college, California community colleges were tuition-free; in North Carolina, full-time students paid less that $20 per quarter. And, geographically, by design, the nation's 1,167 community and technical colleges are located within commuting distance of a great majority of the population. With the growth of distance, online, and asynchronous learning, a college education is now available even to those in the most remote areas, expanding access even further. No other nation has ever attempted to make a college education so accessible to so many of its citizens; the Access Agenda is the primary hallmark of the community college and will stand as its finest achievement in its first 100 years.

The community college has also championed the Student Success Agenda throughout its history, creating a number of policies, programs, and practices designed to meet the special needs of the nontraditional students who enter through its open doors. To support the success of these students, the community college has recruited a dedicated cadre of faculty members who are willing to take on the toughest tasks in all of higher education. Their satisfaction comes not with rewards for publications and research but for the joy of seeing a first-generation, underprepared student from a lower socioeconomic background administer a pain-free injection or fully understand what William Ernest Henley's "Invictus" means for his or her own personal philosophy. Community college instructors teach large numbers of students, usually in class sizes smaller than those in universities, and meet with them many hours outside the classroom, often online, to provide extra help. The full-time instructional staff is the backbone of the community college movement, supplemented in their efforts by an even larger number of adjunct faculty who share their philosophy and their commitments.

In addition to recruiting a quality faculty to support student success, community colleges have created developmental studies programs and an array of support services, and have employed advisors and counselors as specialists in helping students become successful. No other institution of higher education is as committed to helping underprepared students to become college-ready students as is the community college. A majority of community college students need to take at least one developmental studies course (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010), and leading colleges have designed comprehensive systems of assessment, placement, and advisement to prepare these students for developmental work in reading, writing, and mathematics. Special programs in tutoring and coaching, often supported with the latest innovations in technology, undergird developmental studies programs or are offered to all students who need special attention. Financial aid programs, curricular innovations such as student success courses and first-year experience initiatives, early-alert systems, intrusive academic advising systems, and many other innovations make the community college an institution deeply committed to the success of its students.

Even with its dedicated faculty and special programs designed to improve and expand student success, the community college's record in achieving the goals of the Student Success Agenda is not as sterling as its record in meeting the goals of the Student Access Agenda. There are many reasons for that difference, including the challenge, in a time of significantly declining resources, of creating successful learning environments for students who are underprepared for college. Another key reason is that what community colleges mean by student success has not been thoroughly examined, nor is there a universally agreed upon definition. Because of its multiple missions, defining student success in the community college is complex and complicated.

In the past, many community college leaders conflated student access with student success, and increases in enrollment became the institutional metric used to demonstrate that the college was doing something right. The Texas Completes design team (2012) noted,

> …we realized that policies grounded in a commitment to access are actually hindering success. The liturgy of access is so deeply embedded in our practices that the emerging emphasis on completion can impede clarity of thought. Often as we struggled with disconfirming data, we reverted to an emphasis on access again. However, we slowly moved toward a reframing of that conversation through a realization that beginning college, getting caught in unintended barriers, and leaving without closure through a degree or certificate serves neither students nor our institutions well. (p. 4)

The North Carolina Completion by Design Team also addressed the entangled philosophies of access and success: "As a cadre, the colleges recognize one of the biggest challenges we will face is to change the focus from access to success by creating a culture of completion" (North Carolina Cadre, 2012, n.p.).

The practice of late registration is an example of how student access and student success have been entangled. Historically, almost every community college extended registration through the first week of classes—motivated by the desire to count more enrollments for purposes of increasing ADA or FTE formulas to secure increased funding from the state and by the desire to make enrollment accessible as long as possible for students. In recent years, community colleges have come to realize that late registration itself is a barrier to student success. A study by Patricia Goodman (2010) which polled 2,159 first-time, full-time students enrolled in the Kentucky Community and Technical College System found that "…students who registered late for their courses were less likely to persist through their first year of college" (p. iii). In a study by Smith, Street, and Olivarez in 2002, 35 percent of new students who registered late were retained to the next semester compared with 80 percent of those who registered on time. O'Banion (2012) makes a strong case for eliminating the practice of late registration:

> Colleges that redesign registration and intake procedures to eliminate late registration will: (1) improve persistence and retention rates for their students; (2) send a message to students and faculty that learning and instruction are important every day and every week of the term; (3) establish expectations for students to meet deadlines and live with the consequences of their decisions, which may translate into improved workforce habits; (4) permit faculty to begin the process of instruction the first day of class without interruption; and (5) realize increased revenues based on FTE as persistence and retention rates increase. (p. 31)

The commitment to access is still very strong in the community college; the California Community College Task Force on Student Success made a special case regarding this issue in its recent report:

> As the Task Force deliberated over strategies to improve student success rates in the community colleges, they were unanimous and resolute in their belief that improvements in college success rates should not come at the expense of access. The California Community Colleges take great pride in being the gateway to opportunity for Californians of all backgrounds, including traditionally underrepresented economic,

social, and racial/ethnic subgroups. Our system "looks like California" and we are committed to maintaining that quality. The goal of equitable access—and the commitment to help all students achieve success—is a driving force behind the recommendations contained in this report. (2012, p. 9)

Fewer leaders define success by increased enrollments anymore; but the definition of student success today is quite complex and differs for students, community leaders, faculty, administrators, support staff, trustees, federal and state agencies, research agencies, business and industry, and foundations. What is particularly interesting for community colleges is that so many groups and agencies even care about this issue. For decades, the community college struggled for identity and for a place at the table of higher education; now it is often featured in the national media and is the subject of discussion and support by groups and agencies who ten years ago did not know the community college even existed. This decade is the community college's Andy Warhol fifteen minutes of fame, and if we can create workable and useful definitions of student success and then create systems that ensure our students are successful while we are in this spotlight, we will have secured our position as a member in good standing in the higher education community. If we do not create the systems that will ensure the success of our students, the community college we know today may cease to exist, and the community college we dream of for the future may never come to be.

> If we do not create the systems that will ensure the success of our students, the community college we know today may cease to exist, and the community college we dream of for the future may never come to be.
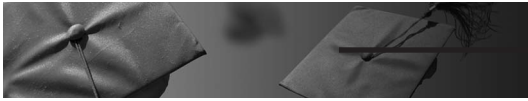
What Is Student Success?

Success as a construct in higher education, especially in the United States, has changed rather significantly over the past several decades. Students are products of their society, and so as society changes the yardstick by which success is measured will also change. (Dean, 1998, p. 16)

There is no universal definition of student success for higher education because there are too many complicating factors in contemporary society. When the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy) controlled the curriculum and what students learned in medieval universities there may have been a universal definition of student success. Even when the early colonial colleges in America produced the clergy to serve the nation, there may have been a universal definition. But as colleges became more secular and more public, and as American society moved from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy and now to a knowledge and information economy, concepts of success changed as well.

One of the complicating factors in determining a definition of student success is that every stakeholder group represents a different set of interests and values regarding what constitutes success. Students define success in many different ways, as do their parents. Faculty, administrators, and staff define success differently; transfer faculty and career and technical education faculty use different definitions of success to reflect their program outcomes and expectations of employers. Institutions differ. Community colleges define student success in terms of their multiple missions, as do four-year liberal arts colleges and research universities. There are multiple definitions of success articulated by the federal and state governments, by business and industry, by foundations, and by policy analysts and researchers.

Further complicating the definition of success is the confusion between success as process and success as outcome. Some educators favor viewing success as progress toward a goal—as long as students are enrolled and not failing, they are deemed successful. Many educators today favor the view of success as outcome-based and create outcome measures and indicators as achievement points by which to signal success.

Accrediting agencies now require all institutions to identify and measure the achievement of learning outcomes as the primary indicators of an institution's success.

Outcome measures and indicators also complicate the task of creating a definition of student success. Grades and GPA have long been the standards by which student success is measured, but they are giving way or being incorporated into more complex measures that are sometimes quantitative and sometimes qualitative. Some of the quantitative indicators include credits earned, certificates or degrees, scores on tests, transfer rates, graduation rates, retention rates, and job placement rates. Retention might be more appropriate as a success measure for prisons rather than higher education institutions, as it reflects merely the ability to hold someone in a place. Interestingly, it is almost universally accepted as a key measure of success in higher education. Qualitative measures include student satisfaction, comfort in the college environment, attainment of student-defined goals, happiness, appreciation and respect for others, a global perspective, and service. The recent introduction of gainful employment as a measure of success for those who complete credentials has added another challenging dimension to defining what success means.

> Retention might be more appropriate as a success measure for prisons rather than higher education institutions, as it reflects merely the ability to hold someone in a place.

Creating a definition of student success is also difficult because of the historical tensions between educators who favor a liberal arts/general education perspective and educators who favor a workforce training perspective. "Man does not live by bread alone!" versus "Yes, but, when he gets hungry he will need the wages that come from a job to purchase the bread," frames the dilemma that separates, in the community college at least, the transfer faculty from the career and technical education faculty. This is not a new dichotomy:

> The ancient Greeks separated the arts into the practical arts, which prepared one for craftsmanship and trade, and the liberal arts,

which were focused on the intellectual and moral development of individuals. *Liber* comes from the Latin word for 'free.' Hence, an education in the liberal arts was designed to prepare people to be free thinkers in contrast with a vocational education which prepares individuals to be skilled workers in a particular, specialized trade. (Courtney, 2012, para. 1)

This dilemma frames many discussions going on in education today—in institutions, in state governments, in foundations, in policy reports, and in the minds of students. After thousands of years, it is still a dilemma that creates an almost insurmountable abyss between many factions—even with numerous attempts to construct workable bridges across the abyss. The two views do not have to be mutually exclusive, but they are often cast as opposite ends of a continuum.

The members of the American Federation of Teachers "approach student success in broader terms than quick degree attainment or high standardized scores—they usually define student success as the achievement of the student's own, often developing, education goals" (American Federation of Teachers, 2011, p. 3). But the complicating factor in this definition is the extent to which the student's own goals reflect his or her own deep, personal, thought-through values and needs or whether the goals reflect the influence of the media, peers, parents, and other social pressures. Where does one begin and the other leave off? What is the interplay between how individuals influence society and how society influences individuals? In the end, whose values are truly expressed in a definition of student success?

Because of these and many other complicating factors, there is no universal definition of student success. There are, however, many definitions of student success, and here are a few examples:

> "The definition of student success is that students finish what they start" (Law, 2012, p. 1).

In 1993, Chickering and Reisser, identified seven different vectors that undergraduates should achieve as an indication of success in college: "developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward independence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity" (p. 14).

"Many consider degree attainment to be the definitive measure of student success" (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006, p. 3).

George Kuh and his colleagues (2006), in a commissioned report on student success for the U. S. Department of Education conducted an extensive review of the literature and created their own definition of student success: "For the purposes of this report, student success is defined as *academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance*" (Kuh et al., p. 7).

Vincent Tinto (2011) makes a point about success in the classroom for community college students: "Their success in college is built upon classroom success, one class and one course at a time. If our efforts do not reach into the classroom and enhance student classroom success, they are unlikely to substantially impact college success" (para. 2).

The Borough of Manhattan Community College, for the purposes of its CUNY Campaign for Success, defines student success as "graduation, transfer, and satisfactory completion of coursework, depending on student goals." Bronx Community College's Campaign for Success defines it as "improved performance, progress, and attainment, achieved through increased engagement and capacity" (Defining Student Success, 2007, p. 4).

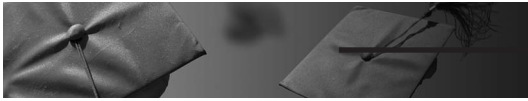This brief review of the complexity involved in creating a definition of student success and the examples of a few definitions of student success illustrate the challenge involved for colleges that want to better meet the needs of students and of society. The definition of student success is clearly in the eye of the beholder. In this review, we are addressing the community college as the beholder with the strong recommendation that if a college plans to champion the Student Success Agenda and establish policies, programs, and practices to create the conditions that can enhance student success, the place to begin is to identify what student success means. Definitions for individual colleges will reflect their culture, mission, and resources and the role they play in meeting the needs of the society that created and supports them. While such definitions will rightly reflect the idiosyncratic culture of an individual college, most colleges are likely to include in their definitions indicators of success identified with the Completion Agenda.

The Completion Agenda

Regardless of how student success is defined, the Student Success Agenda in the last five years has morphed into the Completion Agenda championed by legislators, foundations, policy analysts, business leaders, and educators. The purpose of the Completion Agenda, which has become the overarching mission of the community college, is to double, in the next decade, the number of students who complete one-year certificates or associate degrees, or who transfer and complete their credential at another college or university. Most community colleges will also add student completion of noncredit certificates and certificates of less than a year to this list. The Completion Agenda is a more focused, some would say too narrowly focused, version of the Student Success Agenda. Various champions state the purpose in slightly different ways.

In his February 24, 2009, Address to a Joint Session of Congress, President Barack Obama issued the following challenge:

> …half of the students who begin college never finish. This is a prescription for economic decline, because we know the countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow. That is why it will be the goal of this administration to

ensure that every child has access to a complete and competitive education from the day they are born to the day they begin a career…whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma. And dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It's not just quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country—and this country needs and values the talents of every American. That is why we will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. (paras. 62-63)

Several leading foundations have identified the Completion Agenda as a primary goal and have supported new programs with millions of dollars in funding. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supports a "…goal of doubling the number of low-income young adults who earn a postsecondary credential that has labor market value by the age of 26" (Pennington & Milliron, 2010, p. 3). Later the Foundation modified the goal to "most students to complete a degree or certificate with labor market value" (Milliron, 2012). And, the Gates Foundation has committed almost half a billion dollars to support its Postsecondary Education Agenda (Pennington & Milliron, 2010, p. 1). Jamie Merisotis, President and CEO of the Lumina Foundation, states a similar purpose with a slight variation, "Our Big Goal is this: By the year 2025, we want 60 percent of Americans to hold high-quality degrees and credentials beyond high school" (2012, para. 8). The Lumina Foundation and its partners have already spent over $100 million on Achieving the Dream, the Foundation's major initiative to reach its big goal.
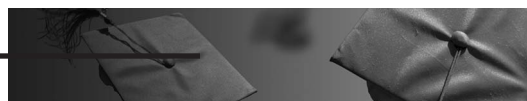
Leading groups and organizations have also stepped up to champion the Completion Agenda. Established in 2009, Complete College America is a national nonprofit created with a single mission: "to work with states to

> Except for the Access Agenda, never in the history of the community college have so many stakeholders signed on to such an agenda as doubling the number of completers in the coming decade.

significantly increase the number of Americans with quality career certificates or college degrees and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations" (2012). In April 2010, six of the leading national community college organizations signed a joint statement, "Democracy's Colleges: Call to Action," committing these organizations to supporting and advancing the Completion Agenda (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010). Many states and individual community colleges have also made public commitments to this agenda. Except for the Access Agenda, never in the history of the community college have so many stakeholders signed on to such an agenda as doubling the number of completers in the coming decade. And, never in the history of the community college have such large amounts of funding been provided by foundations to support such a focused initiative.

The California Community College Task Force on Student Success is a case study in how a state once noted for its multiple missions and national leadership in general education, community education, and transfer programs now reflects the goals of the Completion Agenda as its primary mission:

> Because students come to California Community Colleges with a wide variety of goals, measuring their success requires multiple measures. *Despite this diversity of objectives, most students come to community colleges with the intention of earning a degree or certificate and then getting a job* [emphasis added]. For some, entering the workforce is a longer term goal, with success defined as transferring to, and subsequently graduating from, a four-year college. For others, the academic goal is earning an associate degree. Still other community college students are looking to acquire a discrete set of job skills to help them enter or advance in the workforce in a shorter time frame. (2012, p. 8)

Over the past several decades, students have become increasingly vocational in their objectives, and today success in college is almost always defined in terms of success in securing a job. The most ubiquitous indicator of success—cited by federal and state agencies, policy institutes, foundations, and college counselors—is the amount of income a student can earn with a high school diploma compared to an associate's degree and to a bachelor's degree. *More college means more income* has become the underlying rationale for attending college.

While students now define success primarily in terms of job opportunities, so do the institutions that are charged with preparing students for multiple roles in society. Community colleges are especially committed to workforce training to meet the needs of local business and industry and to keep the U. S. globally competitive. Every U. S. president in the past few decades has seen the community college as the engine for preparing citizens as workers in order to reenergize the middle class and to make sure the U. S. will remain economically viable in the world marketplace.

And community colleges have delivered by creating some of the most advanced workforce programs in the nation. The California Community College Task Force on Student Success notes how productive community colleges have been and the payoff for students:
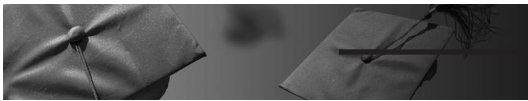
> Most of our students are seeking enhanced skills, certificates, or college degrees that will prepare them for well-paying jobs…

- The California Community Colleges are the state's largest workforce provider, offering associate degrees and short-term job training certificates in more than 175 different fields.
- The California Community Colleges train 70 percent of California nurses.
- The California Community Colleges train 80 percent of firefighters, law enforcement personnel, and emergency medical technicians.
- Students who earn a California Community College degree or certificate nearly double their earnings within three years. (2012, p. 5)

The community college deserves high marks for its success in career and technical education. However, the community college was created to address more needs and purposes than preparing students for jobs. As an experiment in American democracy, the community college is at least five colleges cobbled together under one umbrella: transfer education, developmental studies, general education, community service, and career and technical education aimed primarily at workforce training. In any case, the community college has become the major institution in all of education to champion the Completion Agenda with its targeted goal to ensure that students complete certificates and degrees with marketplace value.

While most of the language of the Completion Agenda, and even much of the language of the community college mission, focuses on workforce training, leaders in community colleges, business, and industry recognize that students in today's workforce require a much broader education than specialized skill training. Successful workers must be critical thinkers, problem solvers, decision-makers, and analysts—skills and knowledge that come generally from the liberal arts. They must know how to collaborate and to work with others in teams. And, they must have the personal life skills to make judgments about their future since today's worker is likely to change jobs and careers a number of times. Mark Milliron (2012), in an open letter to students, strongly urges them to

> claim your right to an educational process and credential that leads to value in the world of work and that promotes your deeper learning. Value in the world of work is an easy enough concept: your credential should help you obtain…a good job in the promised career field…. You also have the right to expect deeper learning. You need to push for a core set of critical, creative, social, and courageous learning experiences…which will offer you learning opportunities that stretch and strengthen your critical and creative learning muscles. (p. 30)

So, while some colleges may begin their work on the Completion Agenda by focusing on workforce training, most will soon come to see that a sound education is a broad education that draws on the traditional liberal arts and on the soft skills embedded in personal development and experiential courses. Fortunately, in the comprehensive curriculum of the contemporary community college, the courses and programs are available to create sound educational plans that will ensure success in work and in life for those who complete.

A National Imperative

It is nothing new to couch the language of reports on reform in such terms as imperative, risk, and survival. In the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, the National Commission on Excellence in Education warned "…the foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and as a people" (1983, p. 5). In the 1993 report, *An American Imperative: Higher Expectations for Higher Education*, the Wingspread Group on Higher Education echoed the alarms of the 1983 report:

> A disturbing and dangerous mismatch exists between what American society needs of higher education and what it is receiving. Nowhere is the mismatch more dangerous than in the quality of undergraduate preparation on many campuses. The American imperative for the twenty-first century is that society must hold higher education to much higher expectations or risk national decline. (p. 1)

There is also a great deal of reform hyperbole attached to the Completion Agenda, and it may crest in this decade to channel the way for the next great reform movement. There are, however, some differences this time around. The U. S. is caught in a financial downturn that is among the worst in our history with little hope of a quick turnaround. Improved education, and specifically improved education that leads to more students who complete, is increasingly pitched by the nation's leaders as the best, and perhaps only, solution to this crisis.
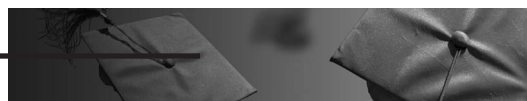
Once first in the world, America now ranks 16th in the percentage of young adults with a college degree. The World Economic Forum ranks the U.S.'s educational system 26th in the world. These two facts are often cited to illustrate the challenge ahead and to support the imperative that the educational system must change if the U. S. is going to continue to be competitive around the world. The rationale for supporting the Completion Agenda as a major reform effort is based on the pocketbooks of individuals, business, and the state and federal government. College degrees equate to increased tax revenues, a decline in poverty, and increases in the middle class. The national imperative for the Completion Agenda is primarily economic; in this current financial crisis, many leaders champion the idea that degrees with marketplace value will save the day—and, realistically, they may do just that.

The case is well made by the U. S. Department of Education:

> The days of being able to rely on high school graduates to provide economic stability and vitality are over. More than half of all new jobs in the next decade will require a postsecondary certificate or degree. Accordingly, boosting the number of college graduates should be a central goal in every state's workforce and economic development plan. Raising college completion rates should be a central part of the strategy for reaching that goal. The best jobs and fastest growing firms, whether in biosciences, technology, manufacturing, trade, or entertainment, will gravitate to communities, regions, and states with a highly qualified workforce. In the coming decade, individuals with professional certificates and postsecondary education degrees at the associate, bachelor's, and graduate levels are projected to continue to experience higher levels of employment and wage growth than those without.

> Benefits will accrue not only to individuals but also to businesses in the form of higher earnings and to state, federal, and local governments in the form of increased tax revenue. Each four-year college graduate generates, on average, $5,900 more per year in state, federal, and local tax revenue than each high school graduate. Over a lifetime, each

generates, on average, $177,000 more in tax revenue than those with only a high school degree. For a state like Mississippi, increasing its bachelor's degree attainment level by 10 percent would mean over $200 million dollars in additional tax revenue each year. *In short, there is an economic imperative for states to increase the number of high school and college graduates over the next 10 years* [emphasis added]. (2011, p. 11)

While some educators may recoil from this overt economic rationale for increasing the number of students who complete certificates and degrees, in these economic times it is a pragmatic rationale for legislators and business executives and for the great numbers of local public employees who run city, county, and state governments. Employees of school districts, community colleges, and state universities who depend on tax revenues for their livelihood can also make the connections between the Completion Agenda, the economic health of the country, and the economic health of their institutions: faculty salaries ultimately depend on increasing the number of completers. In any case, the leaders who will be making the laws and policies that govern education make the connections and are poised to ensure that educational systems at every level are designed to meet the goals of the Completion Agenda. To date, 39 states have signed on to Complete College America to place priority on the Completion Agenda, which is a national imperative.

A Community College Imperative

In addition to the national economic imperative, community college educators are also motivated to meet the goals of the Completion Agenda because they are driven by personal and system needs to improve on their record. Community colleges have been enormously successful in meeting the goals of the Student Access Agenda, but much less successful in meeting the goals of the Student Success Agenda. The following statements of our failures no longer have much shock value because they have been cited so often in numerous state and national reports:

- Fourteen percent of community college students do not complete a single credit in their first term.

- Almost 50 percent drop out by the second year.
- Thirty-three percent recommended for developmental studies never enroll in those courses.

With national initiatives such as Achieving the Dream and Completion by Design leading the way, community colleges have had to examine the evidence on student success nationally and in their own institutions. College administrators and faculty are still struggling to gather and analyze information on student and institutional success and failure, but the tide has turned. Anecdotal data about the success of an individual student are no longer enough. Accrediting agencies now require evidence of institutional impact on learning outcomes. Through the Voluntary Framework of Accountability, measures of accountability have been expanded to reflect the nuances of community college culture. Technological and other tools have been created to predict, analyze, and document practices and programs. The foundations to support a culture of evidence are beginning to be put in place—just in time to provide a framework for the Completion Agenda.

The imperative to transform the community college is reflected in every major state and national report and is heard loud and clear in the 2012 report from the 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges:

> …community colleges need to be redesigned for new times. What we find today are student success rates that are unacceptably low, employment preparation that is inadequately connected to job market needs, and disconnects in transitions between high schools, community colleges, and baccalaureate institutions. (p. viii)

The Commission has framed the challenge for community colleges:

> The premise of this Commission can be summarized in three sentences: The American Dream is at risk. Because a highly educated population is fundamental to economic growth and a vibrant democracy, community colleges can help reclaim that dream. But stepping

up to this challenge will require dramatic redesign of these institutions, their mission, and, most critically, their students' educational experiences. (p. 1)

As community colleges continue and expand their efforts to make good on the promise of the Student Success Agenda and its more focused Completion Agenda, the concept of the Student Success Pathway provides an ideal infrastructure for colleges and students to plan and track their progress.

The Student Success Pathway: A Model for Institutional and Student Planning

The core business of education, from kindergarten through graduate school, is to help students successfully navigate the curriculum, assisted by instructional processes and support services, to completion of their goals. One of the most visible and useful frameworks for mapping this journey through the institution is the Student Success Pathway (SSP). The SSP is a flexible model that can be applied to every sector and level of education. In the community college, the most traditional model maps a student's journey beginning in high school and includes a series of components reflecting the steps the student takes to goal completion: college admission/intake, developmental education, first-term college level courses, continuing progress, and completion. The Student Success Pathway model can also be tailored for diverse groups of students: Latinos, African-American males, adult students who enter through ABE and GED, at-risk students, ESL students, international students, honors students, and even reverse transfer students.

The model of the Student Success Pathway is deeply embedded in the culture and history of the community college. Tech Prep was a forerunner of the current emphasis on career pathways, which are championed by career and technical educators across the country. Most of these career pathway models focus on integrating academic and career and technical education, and aligning curriculum between high schools and postsecondary educat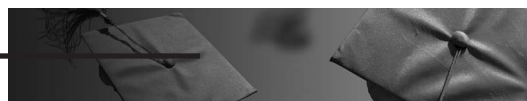ion. The career pathway is defined as "a coherent, articulated sequence of rigorous academic and career courses that embed the knowledge and skills necessary to prepare learners to pursue a wide range of career opportunities" (*Significant Discussions*, 2010, p. 52). The career pathway focuses on pathways to specific careers while the Student Success Pathway reflects all the policies, programs, practices, and activities—including courses—that impact the student from application through completion. Career pathways should be viewed as an important subset of specific course pathways that can be incorporated in the more comprehensive Student Success Pathway.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other foundations and agencies have extended these career pathway models to create the concept of the Student Success Pathway that applies to all students and to all programs. In its signature initiative to double the number of completers, Completion by Design, the Gates Foundation charged funded colleges to

> empower a campus-based and cross-campus interdisciplinary delegation of faculty and administrators to work together as a team to analyze their systems and develop a student-centric shared model pathway to completion that employs proven and promising practices and leverages the use of technology in ways that reduce costs and improve results. (Pennington & Milliron, 2010, p. 5)

The Community College Research Center also supports the concept of Student Success Pathways and how they should be created:

> Colleges should create a cross-functional committee or task force of faculty, student services staff, and administrators to map out the experience of students from the time they first make contact with the college, examine the interactions between students and college programs and services at each point along these "pathways," and assess the extent to which college policies and practices help or hinder students from making progress toward successful completion. (Jenkins, 2011, p. 34)

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) also weighs in on the value of the SSP concept:

> After many years of research on enhancing student engagement and success, higher education now has explicit articulations of what is needed to support student success as well as a roadmap for getting there. Just as the LEAP Principles of Excellence in higher education argue that students need a 'compass' or a clearly delineated pathway to support their success, the academy itself has needed such a thoughtful and documented pathway for supporting students. (2011, para. 18)

The Association makes a special point about the need for a pathway not only for students but also for institutions as a roadmap to success. As Sandy Shugart, President of Valencia College notes, "The student success agenda isn't just about giving students tools to navigate our complex systems, it is also the right framework for redesigning the institution around core principles of student learning and success" (2012).

This monograph on access, success, and completion is based on two key assumptions about the Student Success Pathway:

1. The Student Success Pathway provides a visible and integrated roadmap for the core business of the community college and should be used as the institutional framework for creating strategic and long-range plans.
2. The Student Success Pathway also provides a visible and integrated roadmap for students and should be used as the framework for their individual educational plans.

A Framework for Institutional Planning

The Student Success Pathway provides a visible and integrated roadmap for the core business of the community college and should be used as the institutional framework for creating strategic and long-range goals.

This assumption is strongly supported by Byron McClenney and Margaretta Mathis (2011), who have urged colleges to create strategic plans focused on student success:

> The strategic plan, in essence, serves as an instrument that supports college-/system-/district-wide efforts to improve student equity, progression, and completion. (p. 38)

> During this time of increased enrollment and deep budget cuts, it is essential that a focus on closing achievement gaps and improving student outcomes be at the heart of the strategic plan. (p. 37)

> And McClenney (2010), in an earlier report, suggested "Create a simple format for planning…." (p. 39)

Table 1. Common Elements Most Colleges Will Address in the Student Success Pathway

Connecting to High Schools	Providing College-Level Instruction
• Aligned Courses • Dual Enrollment • Practice for Assessment • Advanced Placement • College Assessment in 11th Grade • Early College High School • Summer Bridge Programs	• Early-Alert Systems • Student Success Courses • First-Year College Experience • Learning-Centered Teaching Strategies (e.g., project-based learning, active learning, learning communities, service learning, collaborative learning, contextual learning, classroom assessment techniques) • Learning Outcomes
Preparing to Begin Courses • Mandatory Orientation, Assessment, Advising, and Placement • Career Counseling • Individual Learning Plan • Financial Aid Counseling • Elimination of Late Registration	**Preparing for Completion and Next Steps** • Credit Audits • Capstone Courses and Projects • Transfer Articulation Agreements • Transfer Readiness Course • Internships and Job Shadowing • Résumés and Job Application • Celebrating Completion • Planning for Lifelong Learning
Providing Developmental Education • Multiple Assessments • Supplemental Instruction • Peer Mentoring • Accelerated Learning • Contextual Instruction • Redesigned Programs (e.g., Math Emporium)	

The Student Success Pathway provides a simple and practical format for planning. It reflects what colleges actually do to help students navigate the curriculum to successful completion, and what colleges actually do is the essence of the college's strategic and long-range plans. While each college must define the components—e.g., connecting to high schools, preparing to begin courses—of the SSP based on college resources and priorities, the common elements that most colleges will address are listed in Table 1 on page 11.

By incorporating these components, programs, and practices in the Student Success Pathway, colleges can see the larger picture of what is involved in their efforts to help students become successful. The framework of the SSP provides a visible illustration that allows colleges to determine the points in the pathway where students drop out or begin to fail 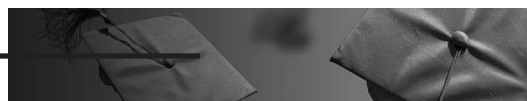as well as a framework for introducing interventions and high-impact practices to support successful progress. Some colleges will want to create a component that parallels connecting to high schools to note the importance of connecting to returning adults and other students who do not enter the community college through the high school. Still others will want to extend a component at the end to recognize the important connections to job placement, follow-up, and alumni relations.

Milestones and *Momentum* are key concepts of the Student Success Pathway. Milestones are benchmarks or performance points colleges can use to gauge institutional progress and individual student progress. Milestones are determined by each college but often include high school graduation, filing a plan to graduate, completion of a developmental sequence, passing gateway courses with a C or better, accumulating 15 or 30 college-level credits, securing a certificate or degree, or transferring to a four-year college or university. Milestones can be celebrated. As students move to one milestone after another, they begin to achieve momentum, which in turn spurs them onward to other milestones and eventually to completion.

As a framework for institutional planning, the SSP forces college stakeholders to think about what they believe the college should be doing to improve and expand student learning. As the pathway model evolves, it summons the faculty, administrators, support staff, and trustees to collaborate on answering questions such as these:

1. At which points in the pathway are we losing students?
2. What are we doing really well to help students gain momentum through the pathway?
3. What milestones should we establish along the pathway that we can use to examine our progress?
4. At which points do we want to introduce a promising or high-impact practice?
5. How do we connect the various programs, practices, and experiences along the pathway?
6. How can we increase the number and quality of connections our students make with faculty and staff, and each other, as they navigate the pathway?
7. Who in the institution is best qualified to implement the programs and practices along the pathway? What are the roles of support staff, administrators, full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, student services staff, students and student organizations, and community volunteers? How can each group contribute to maximize impact and resources?
8. What is the role of students in navigating their own pathway? What information and tools do students need to navigate the pathway successfully?
9. What resources are needed to keep the pathway functioning efficiently and effectively?
10. How do we evaluate the various programs and practices of the pathway to determine success and to make improvements?
11. What research and information needs to be collected and analyzed to monitor individual student and institutional progress at each step along the pathway?
12. What are our highest ideals about the meaning and value of a college education, and how can we build those ideals into the curriculum and experiences students will embrace as they navigate the pathway?

The Student Success Pathway model creates a visible and instituiton-wide roadmap that all college employees can monitor. The SSP will make visible the components, programs, and practices the college champions, and highlight the milestones the college deems important. The SSP is an ideal framework for the college's strategic and long-range plan.

A Framework for Individual Student Planning

The Student Success Pathway also provides a visible and integrated roadmap for students and should be used as the framework for their individual educational plans.

Welch (2011) reminds us that "…student achievement is at the heart of the educational mission of the college" (p. 84). Students are much more likely to achieve their goals if they work with college advisors, counselors, and faculty to create a detailed educational plan, a personal roadmap, before classes begin. But, "For many students at community colleges, finding a path to degree completion is the equivalent of navigating a river on a dark night" (Scott-Clayton, 2011, p. 1).

Colleges need to help students to create a customized educational plan that will guide them through assessment, placement, orientation, career counseling, financial aid literacy and counseling, and academic advising. Every student does not need every service the college offers. Some students will need only a course or two. Some students will require only a signature; others will require hours of case management. Because many students will change their plans from term to term, colleges must create systems of technology that will archive these plans and make them readily available to students and to the staff who will work with them on revisions and updates. In some cases, students will need to create an educational plan after they are enrolled and when they have had time to explore options through courses and additional assessments.

Ideally, entering students will be assessed in a number of ways to determine their readiness for college-level work. ACT's COMPASS and the College Board's ACCUPLACER are common standardized tests used by colleges, but by themselves are not very accurate in diagnosing levels for developmental education. High school grade point average is more accurate for course placement (Belfield & Crosta, 2012, p. 39) and should be used, in addition to the standardized tests, high school grades in English and math, and an assessment of student interest and experience to place students in developmental or college-level courses. Some community colleges are assessing affective factors to better serve students; at California's Chaffey College, leaders are working with Gallup to assess levels of hope in students to determine who needs support.

Placement in the appropriate courses where students can succeed is important, but more important in creating an educational plan, and more challenging, is the process in which students make decisions about future careers. Fortunate is the student, and the advisor and counselor, when a student knows exactly the career he or she wants to pursue. Advising at this point is a matter of matching student goals with college resources and courses, and monitoring the educational plan as it unfolds across semesters or quarters.

Students who are undecided or unsure about their career choice, or who want an opportunity to explore options before deciding, require a great deal of support from the college in making decisions. Offices dedicated to career planning and exploration offer assessments of interests, abilities, values, and personality, as well as career counseling and courses and other experiences in career exploration. If these services do not help students make a decision about a career area, colleges often offer, and should require, students to enroll in a program specifically designed for undecided or unsure students. A student success course that includes opportunities to explore personal values and philosophies, make deep connections with other students, and learn study skills and time management is a minimum requirement for undecided students. Better still is a first-term learning community that includes a student success course, a college-level or developmental communications course, and a psychology or other course that reflects the student's interest.

Financial aid literacy and counseling are crucial for a majority of community college students. Navigating the options and the regulations of financial aid is a formidable challenge for most students, but clear and
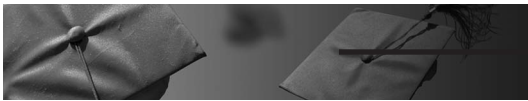
affordable decisions about financial aid must be made to support the student's educational plan. In a national study by the Center for Community College Student Engagement, three-fourths of entering students said they applied for financial assistance. Almost 60 percent said they applied one month or more before classes started. Less than half indicated they received funds before the beginning of the term. Less than half (49 percent) also agreed that the college provided them with adequate information about financial assistance (McClenney & Arnsparger, 2012, pp. 62-63). The cumbersome process of securing financial aid is a major barrier for many students; colleges need to streamline the process, publicize the need for early application, and provide more personal support for students at this juncture of the pathway to prevent them from dropping out.

These initial intake services—assessment, placement, orientation, career counseling, financial aid counseling, and academic advising—are the key services colleges provide to help students create an educational plan. Orientation helps students understand how the college works in general and how these intake services work, in particular; and registration is the final act in the term that launches the educational plan. When all these services and programs are integrated and designed to serve students efficiently, the student's chance for a successful college beginning is considerably enhanced. Many colleges have designed one-stop shops and online information systems to make these services more accessible, but institutions still must ensure that the staff providing the services are well prepared and informed and that there are enough of them to meet the needs of a great number of students with diverse needs.

The Student Success Pathway begins to take shape in the student's individual educational plan; it is the primary guide the student and the college will use to steer the student to successful completion.

Creating a Model of the Student Success Pathway

For many community college students, the pathway they travel looks like the depiction in Figure 1, with zigs and zags as they stumble without much direction through the jungle of choices and regulations.

Colleges that are committed to the Completion Agenda are attempting to create pathways with clear direction for students, and there are a number of emerging models. Each college must create its own version of a Student Success Pathway based on its resources, culture, and priorities. Common metaphors for such pathways may prompt creative models. The Student Success Pathway can be thought of as:

Figure 1

Developed by Greg Stoup, Rob Johnstone & Priyadarshini Chaplot, The Research and Planning (RP) Group
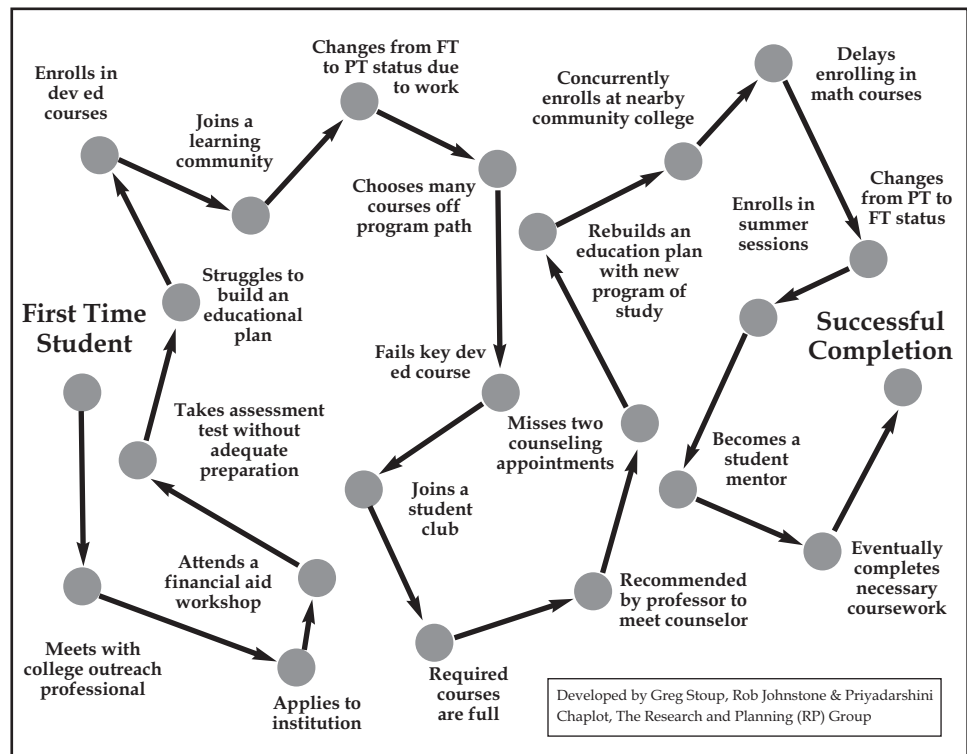
(Used by permission from Gregory Stoup, Rob Johnstone, and Priyadarshini Chaplot of The RP Group, http://www.rpgroup.org/)
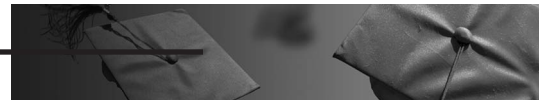
- A framework for planning and action;
- A template for design;
- A palette to practice the art of teaching and learning;
- A laboratory to practice the science of teaching and learning;
- A highway with off and on ramps so students can exit and re-enter when needed; and
- A roadmap to help students navigate the college experience.

Models take many forms and almost always appear linear, suggesting that students move from A to B to C in lock-step fashion. Anyone who has worked in a community college understands that is far from reality, but no one wants students to have to go through the maze illustrated in Figure 1 (page 14). The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation created the model in Figure 2 to illustrate the work required of colleges in its Completion by Design Initiative.

Figure 3 illustrates another version of the Gates Foundation model broken down into key components of the pathway colleges create to move students along to completion.
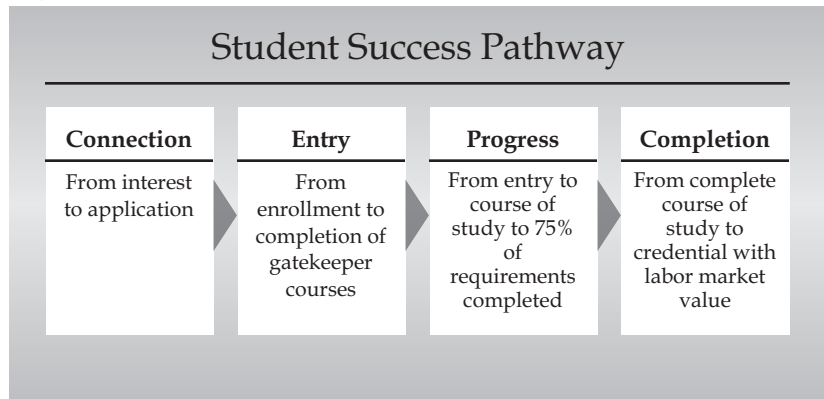
Figure 4 illustrates a version of the Student Success Pathway created by this author and staff at the League for Innovation in the Community College designed to be more student-centric.

Regardless of the model a college adopts, the components need to be designed and treated as an integrated, cohesive, systemic, connected series of experiences the students and the college will use to map out the route students need to navigate to reach desired student and college goals and milestones. Connecting students to services across the college must

Figure 2

Student Success Pathway

Connection	Entry	Progress	Completion
From interest to application	From enrollment to completion of gatekeeper courses	From entry to course of study to 75% of requirements completed	From complete course of study to credential with labor market value

(Used by permission.)

Figure 3

Pathway Components

Connecting to high school & adult students	Connecting to the college	Preparing to begin classes
Providing remediation	Providing classroom instruction	Monitoring first-term progress
Prepaing for subsequent terms	Preparing for completion & next steps	Celebrating milestones and completion

Figure 4

Pathway Components

Connecting to high schools

Preparing to begin classes

Providing remediation

Providing classroom instruction

Monitoring first-term progress

Preparing for completion & next steps

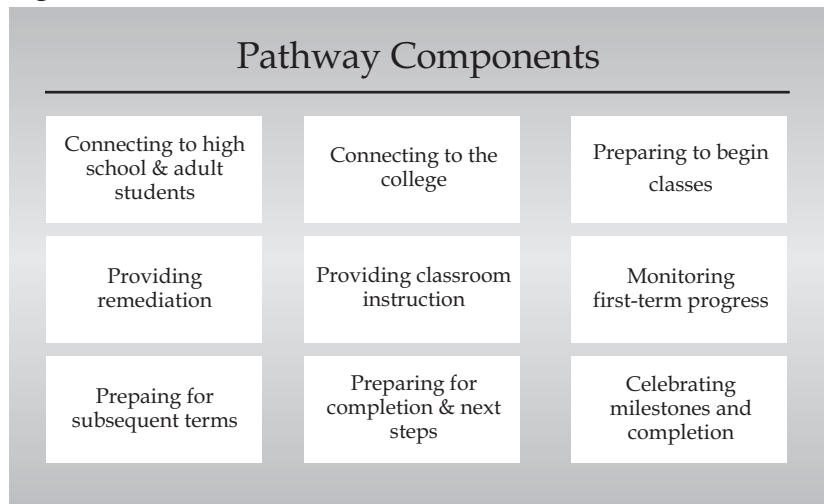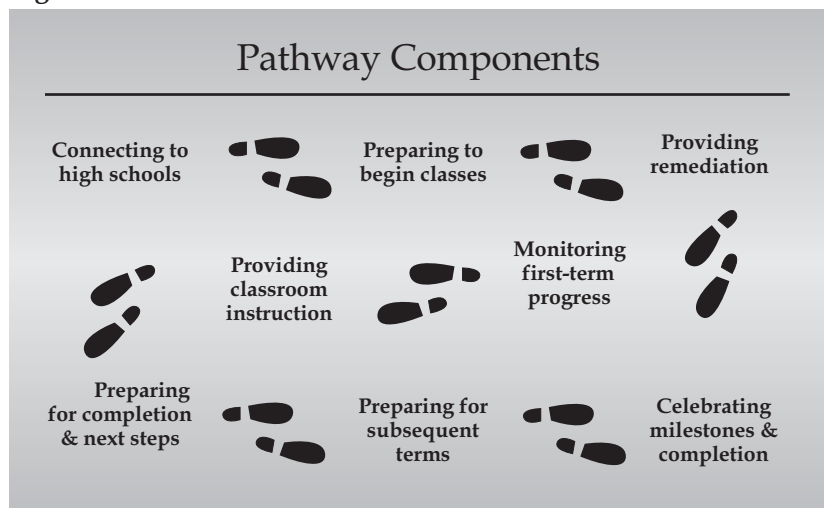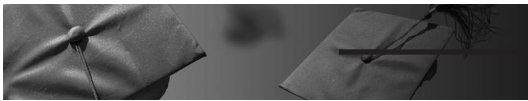Preparing for subsequent terms

Celebrating milestones & completion

be intentional and purposeful. The pathway needs to have on and off ramps to make it easier for students to get off and back on when the realities of their lives demand it. Students do not move from one component to another in a synchronized sequence. Their progress is more like that of entering a roundabout where they swirl in and out, making wrong exits and entrances, and running into dead ends. It is the college's responsibility to facilitate the ebb and flow of the traffic to ensure that each student reaches the desired destination as smoothly as possible.

It is also the college's responsibility to make the pathway as simple as possible with clear directions and language students can understand. Several years ago, St. Petersburg College in Florida rebranded its advising/testing/registration area as the MAP Center, with MAP standing for My Answer Place; the tagline was "Life is hard, you need a MAP." The MAP idea was abandoned when students kept coming to the center looking for a campus map. Does any student know what bursar means? First-generation students have no background of experience and no family culture to teach them how to navigate college. Too many students fail to enroll at all because they encounter the kinds of challenges expressed by these two students:

> They do have information available for the college, but I found that trying to navigate their webpage is like trying to figure out a calculus problem when you have no clue what calculus is. (McClenney & Arnsparger, 2012, p. 59)

> This college is like an airport in a foreign country. There are a whole lot of people rushing around, looking as though they know where they are going. But even when I see signs telling me where to go, they are written in a language I don't understand. (McClenney & Arnsparger, 2012, p. 60)

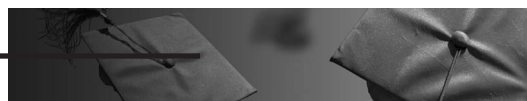**Guidelines for the Student Success Agenda**

Most colleges launch their student success agendas by exploring and experimenting with specific practices and programs marketed as solutions by well-meaning

> The instructor as lone cowboy cannot move the herd roughly west without the help of others.

advocates of progress. In the language of the Completion Agenda, there are two kinds of practices: *high-impact practices* are supported by research as effective; *promising practices* appeal to us but are not yet supported by research. Most colleges have approached the Completion Agenda by examining the Student Success Pathway to determine where students are dropping out and implementing high-impact or promising practice interventions at key points to improve student success. For example, knowing that about one-third of students in high school who intend to enroll in college melt away over the summer, colleges have intervened by instituting early college high schools that have proven effective in bridging the divide between the high school and enrollment in a community college. Knowing that almost 50 percent of community college students leave by the second year (Berkner & Choy, 2008), colleges have intervened with early-alert systems and first-year experiences.

There are dozens of such practices that may improve student success along the pathway, but through experience we have come to the realization that even if an individual faculty member succeeds in tweaking a classroom practice or implementing an innovative practice, it makes little or no difference in the overall impact of the college on student success. The instructor as lone cowboy cannot move the herd roughly west without the help of others. In fact, piecemeal reform, boutique programs, and the application of a practice by an individual faculty member or college will not bring about significant change in an institution. Davis Jenkins (2011) of the Community College Research Center, after examining dozens of studies on what works to improve student success concludes, "Piecemeal changes focused on discrete programmatic interventions will not suffice" (p. 12).

Although eventually colleges will test and implement specific programs and practices, they will be more productive if they create basic guidelines for student success to be launched collegewide by a critical mass of college faculty and staff. This will be necessary if we really want to make something significant happen—such as doubling the number of students who complete a

certificate, associate's degree, or transfer by the year 2020. Overarching guidelines provide a larger umbrella under which more faculty and staff can convene to discuss, examine, and test specific programs and practices.

While there may not be universal agreement on key guidelines for student success, there is an emerging consensus that such guidelines need to be created to support the goals of the Completion Agenda. A number of colleges are beginning to draft such guidelines. A lead college in the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Completion by Design initiative, Miami Dade College (MDC) implemented college plans for completion subject-matter teams by mapping both the current student pathway and the ideal student pathway required to drive student success. The final outcome of this process is a set of essential elements, the fundamental building blocks of a comprehensive approach to improve student success and completion. In other words, the faculty and staff at MDC created a set of key guidelines for student success to drive their efforts. The following guidelines are currently providing a foundation for the Completion by Design initiative at MDC:

- **Structured intake process** that includes mandatory orientation, assigned advisors, and *diagnostic and holistic assessments*;
- **Structured curriculum plans** with sequential coursework and focused course choices at all levels of instruction to ensure that students know the requirements to succeed and will enter programs of study early in their college careers;
- Increased forward momentum, especially in developmental education and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), through the closing of skill gaps with *customized, mastery-based instruction, concurrent enrollment*, and decreased enrollment in noncredit courses, to minimize the time required to be college ready;
- Increased *transition assistance from developmental education and EAP into college-level* programs of study and from there into transfer and/or career outcomes;
- *Integrated academic and student* support programs aligned with learning outcomes; and

- *Increased student engagement* through participation in communities of interest. (Miami Dade College, 2012)
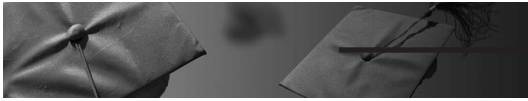
Most of these guidelines from MDC focus on the experiences the college plans to provide for students; they are guidelines for student success. Valencia College, also in Florida, has created a set of guidelines that reflect the values and conditions that should exist across the college to support student success; they are guidelines for institutional success and are referred to as Valencia's Big Ideas:

> An important part of the sustained efforts toward improving student learning at Valencia College has been the development of several key ideas that serve as fulcrums for change, signifiers for emerging organizational culture, and rallying points for action. The process for moving from promising innovation to large-scale pilot, to sustained solution, that is, the process of institutionalizing the work, depends heavily on a community of practice shaped by powerful common ideas. (Shugart, 2011, p. 123)

The Big Ideas include

- Anyone can learn anything under the right conditions;
- Start right;
- Connection and direction;
- The college is how the students experience us, not how we experience them;
- The purpose of assessment is to improve learning; and
- Collaboration.

If a college accepts the proposition in this monograph that the Student Success Pathway is a useful framework for institutional planning and individual student planning and has begun to design the parameters and components of its institutional plan, the challenge that remains is to identify and distill what is known about what works to improve and expand student learning and success. From the experiences of leading colleges and from a review of the rapidly expanding body of research on student success in the community college, we can create a set of guidelines colleges can use to continue their journey in meeting the goals of the student success agenda.

The challenge in creating a set of guidelines is to sort out the multiple and overlapping conversations that are taking place among stakeholders committed to student success in the community college. There have been numerous efforts to create a set of principles, such as the Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, CCCSE's Design Principles for Effective Practice, Completion by Design Pathway Principles, and the Six Core Principles of the Learning College. On close examination these lists of principles are not always principles, which are defined as a law or rule of fundamental truths. These lists include some principles, but they are mostly lists of practices, processes, and recommendations. The word *guideline* is a more accurate reference for a list of suggestions colleges can use to provide direction for their efforts in helping students succeed and complete.

However, there is still some confusion in conversations about the desired outcomes for students and the processes colleges should use to achieve those outcomes. As soon as we begin to agree on what we desire for students, we immediately begin to plan what we need to do to make it happen; the codification of those two impulses results in a mixed bag of principles. What we have tried to do here is to clarify the conversations by suggesting a set of key Guidelines for Student Success that reflect some of the activities we want students to experience and that we believe will contribute to student success. Then, we have separated what colleges should do as an organization to create the processes and conditions that will help bring about those outcomes; these are identified as Guidelines for Institutional Success.

Guidelines for Student Success

These guidelines represent some of the core experiences that most community colleges will agree are important for student success, but they are not cast in concrete. Each college should take the time to create its own set of guidelines that represents the values of the majority of the college's stakeholders and that reflects the culture of the college and the resources available.
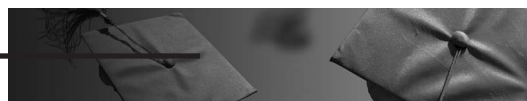
1. Students will make a significant connection with another person at the college as soon as possible. The Center for Community College Student Engagement

has surveyed almost two million community college students and has conducted more than 200 focus groups and interviews with students. When students were asked to identify the single most important thing that keeps them coming back to their college, they consistently answered that a faculty member, counselor, advisor, student, or other person at the college "knows my name" (Arnsparger, 2012). This is a poignant plea from students—especially those who are first-generation, underprepared, and from lower socio-economic backgrounds—to make a human connection that will provide some anchor for them to stay in college.

> There is emerging consensus in the community college field that no matter what program or practice a college implements, it is likely to have greater impact if the design incorporates certain principles. At the heart of these principles is the value of helping students make connections—connections to the college and its people, connections with other students, connections between students' coursework and their futures, and connections to all the services and opportunities the college offers to support their learning. (McClenney & Arnsparger, 2012, pp. 43-44)

Connections begin to occur when a security guard in the parking lot welcomes a student and helps her locate the right place to park, when a student assistant provides support and direction at the admissions kiosk, and when a faculty member stands at the door and welcomes each student to the new class. A new project, Getting Connected, involving the League for Innovation and researchers at the University of Arizona and Claremont Graduate University, is field testing social networks such as Facebook in eight community colleges to determine their value in helping students make connections. Colleges committed to the Completion Agenda should involve all faculty, administrators, support staff, and returning students to help new students make connections in their first encounters with the college. More important, for deeper and more sustaining connections, colleges should offer—or require students to participate in—learning communities, first-year experience programs, student success courses, or service learning activities.

2. Key intake programs including orientation, assessment, advisement, and placement will be integrated and mandatory for students.

A community college student's first experience with college is through the intake processes that prepare students for classroom instruction. Many never get through the process because the various services are not linked and are sometimes scattered around the campus. First-generation college students do not come from family backgrounds where such concepts as orientation, assessment, and GPA are discussed and taken for granted. If they do not understand the culture and language of college, and if the first encounters with that culture are cumbersome and require standing in long lines at multiple locations, students become discouraged and drift away. Many colleges have integrated such services in one-stop centers staffed with counselors, selected faculty, and experienced student aides—supported by comprehensive technological services. The LifeMap program at Valencia College is an exemplary model of integrated intake and academic advising services.

Universities have historically required new students to participate in these intake processes, sometimes requiring students to be on campus for an entire week before classes begin. Community colleges have been reluctant to make any of these services mandatory, but there is a growing trend, prompted by the goals of the Completion Agenda, to require all new students to participate before they can register. Community colleges have begun to heed Kay McClenney's warning that, "Students don't do optional" (McClenney & McClenney, 2010, p. 23). In the Student Success Pathway, the intake services are embedded early as some of the most significant steps a student takes to begin the educational journey.

3. Students will be placed in a program of study from day one; undecided students will be placed in a mandatory program of study designed to help them decide.

A program of study is a coherent set of courses with a

> The Student Success Pathway is not a jungle through which students hack their own trail; it is a roadmap students can count on for direction.
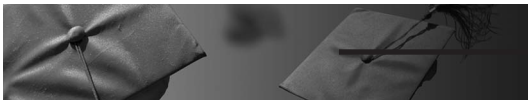
prescribed pathway to completion. In historical terms, a program of study is the student's major. In the community college, STEM programs, nursing, business, criminal justice, and liberal arts are examples of programs of study. In Wisconsin, a recent study indicates that enrolling in a program of study improves the success rates of returning adults:

> By definition, enrolling in a program is necessary for earning a technical college credential. However, looking deeper at program enrollment and credit accumulation shows unmistakably that low-skill adult students do not build momentum in their college experience unless they are in a program. We might think of program enrollment as a basic requisite for student engagement, and this deepens our appreciation of program enrollment as an important milestone for college success. (Chung, Cocina, & Dresser, 2012, p. 16)

Research has also shown that enrolling in a program of study early increases a student's chance of success. In a study of 20,220 first-time-in-college students, Jenkins and Cho (2012) found that students who passed a concentrated set of courses (a program of study) in their first year were twice as likely to earn a credential within five years than students who entered a program of study in subsequent years. First-generation, underprepared students are especially vulnerable to dropping out when they are allowed to make random selections of disconnected courses and just wander around in the curriculum as is the case at too many community colleges. The Student Success Pathway is not a jungle through which students hack their own trail; it is a roadmap students can count on for direction.

Scott-Clayton (2011a) suggests that students are confronted with too many choices and need more structure regarding courses and programs. She notes that "community college students will be more likely to persist and succeed in programs that are tightly and consciously structured, with relatively little room for individuals to deviate on a whim—or even

unintentionally—from paths toward completion…" (p. 1). Scott-Clayton cites an example of too many choices: Harvard offers bachelor's degree programs in only 43 academic fields and requires all students to complete a core curriculum while nearby Bunker Hill Community College offers 72 associate degree or certificate programs in 63 academic and applied fields with no required core curriculum.

The Texas Completes (2012) design team addresses the issue of too many options for students in the next phase of its statewide initiative:

> We learned that they don't have the luxury of wandering among many options and "finding themselves." What we saw as a treasured benefit—multiple options and freedom to choose—actually creates barriers…. Our institutions are like the menu at the Cheesecake Factory. When given 40 pages of dinner options, no one can decide what to eat…. We need to provide a better structure to support students in making informed decisions. (pp. 4-5)

We need to take seriously students' pleas, "Tell me what to take," and to heed the advice a student in a CCCSE focus group gave to college leaders: "If you know what students need, and we don't, why don't you make us do it?" (McClenney & Arnsparger, 2012, p. 57).

For students who are unsure or undecided about a program of study, colleges need to create programs of study to help them decide. If these students are taking only one course, it should be a student success course that includes opportunities to explore personal values and philosophies and make deep connections with other students, in addition to study skills and time management. A program of study for the unsure or undecided could include a student success course, a developmental or college-level writing course, and a psychology or other related course that reflects the

> **Community colleges need to create programs focused on the *first-week* experience to monitor and intervene at the first sign of possible failure.**

student's interest. For decided and undecided students, the goal is to enroll them in a mandatory program of study at the earliest possible time.

4. Students will be carefully monitored throughout the college experience—especially in the first term—to ensure successful progress; the college will make interventions immediately to keep students on track.
Too many colleges wait until mid-term to give students feedback about their progress, which is too late; by mid-term, many struggling students will have already dropped out. Some colleges have initiated the first-year experience as one way of addressing retention, but for so many community college students this program is also too late. Community colleges need to create programs focused on the *first-week* experience to monitor and intervene at the first sign of possible failure: not attending class, not turning in assignments, not following guidelines for online courses, not participating in class discussions.
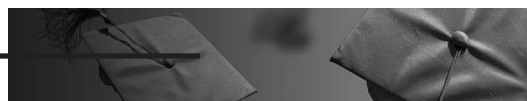
Fortunately, technology now makes it possible for colleges to use data analytics to predict which students will need special help. And, early-alert systems are in place in a few colleges to identify students who require immediate assistance. At Rio Salado College, one of the Maricopa Community Colleges, using data analytics, class rolls are coded to alert faculty to students who might need help; early-alert systems can be activated by a faculty member to summon success coaches to intervene with students needing help. The key is that early means early; if colleges can provide just-in-time assistance for students, the chances of those students staying in college and making progress are considerably enhanced. The Student Success Pathway provides the framework in which the college can determine where and when to apply alert systems.

5. Students will engage in courses and experiences designed to broaden and deepen their learning.
The Completion Agenda has focused primarily on creating degrees and certificates with marketplace value.

Americans' expectations of higher education, especially as framed by the lingering aftereffects of the recent "Great Recession," have narrowed considerably to focus on the private, individual, economic benefit of college. The result has been an overemphasis on market priorities and an underemphasis on longstanding civic commitments and the public good. (Tritelli, 2012, p. 4)

That limited perspective sells our students and our society short. Our students deserve an education that prepares them for a good job and broadens and deepens their perspectives and understandings of how to live a fuller life. These goals should not be mutually exclusive.

The Campaign for the Future of Higher Education (2011) makes a good case for a broad and diverse education:

> Our economy demands a population that is broadly educated for critical thinking and innovation. Narrow job training alone can condemn graduates to dead-end paths in low wage jobs, unable to repay their student loans, and ill-equipped to adjust to changing job markets and careers. The value of a broad and diverse curriculum extends beyond economics. In the increasingly interconnected world of the 21st century, we will need more people who understand its history, who can think outside of narrow boundaries, and who have the tools to function in a culturally diverse environment. Our democracy needs a broadly educated citizenry. Civic participation cannot flourish when a liberal education is reserved for the elite, and narrow training is provided for everyone else. (Section 2, para. 1)

As we create new pathways to success for our students, we need to consider how to infuse our curriculum and our programs with core values and concepts from

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liberal education—what the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) calls Essential Learning Outcomes—to ensure that our graduates and certificate holders are able to make informed decisions and use clear judgment about how they invest and spend their resources and their lives. Carol Geary Schneider (2012), president of AAC&U notes,
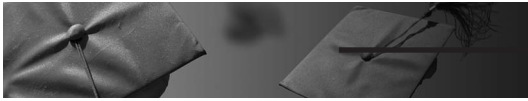
> When we create incentive systems for enhanced degree production, with no questions asked about the sufficiency of learning, the door is literally wide open to choices that deplete rather than build educational quality…. The real key to economic opportunity and advancement depends not on whether the student possesses a credential, but rather on whether students actually leave college with that rich portfolio of learning that employers seek and society urgently needs. (para. 4)

A sound liberal education is designed to liberate students from ignorance; in our current society, ignorance has many champions, with seductive spokespersons in the national press and among well-known political leaders. We need to resuscitate Earl McGrath's early definition of general education—a common core of knowledge for the common person—to help our students develop coping skills, life skills, and team skills so they can create a satisfying philosophy by which to live and contribute to the general welfare.

General education is a corollary of liberal education, but both have suffered in application throughout the community college curriculum. Most general education programs today are a Chinese menu where students are required to select one course from among many in each column. These distributed models of general education no longer meet the standards of curriculum integrity and cohesiveness, once the hallmark of such programs in the 1950s and 1960s.

6. Students will participate as full partners in navigating college services and the curriculum and will take primary responsibility for their own success. K. Patricia Cross (1984), almost three decades ago, told us,

> If schools are to meet the foreseeable demands of the learning society, they will have to… gradually put students in charge of their own learning so that they can make wise choices from among the many learning options that will confront them as adults in the learning society. (p. 172)

Cross suggests gradually because she is well aware of the dependence students develop on teachers in elementary and secondary schools. The goal is to help students become independent, lifelong learners, but many community college students are dependent, first-generation college students who will require careful attention and support—especially in the first week and the first term.

The individual educational plan is a personal contract between the student and the college that maps out what a student needs and chooses and what the college agrees to deliver. The plan is a working document that changes from time to time as the student gains confidence in the direction he or she has chosen. Advisors and counselors may make suggestions for change based on their knowledge of prerequisites and transfer requirements, for example, but the student makes the final decision and assumes primary responsibility for these decisions.

Some colleges use learning contracts in courses to ensure the student takes responsibility as a full partner in the teaching and learning process. In these contracts, the instructor outlines what will be required for the student to earn an A, B, or C; the student decides which grade to aim for depending on personal goals, time available, and motivational factors. Students sign the contracts and are then responsible for doing the work involved to achieve the grade selected. If conditions change, the student is responsible for renegotiating the contract with the instructor. Learning contracts provide a transparent agreement of responsibility between the instructor and the student.

Still other colleges have created documents regarding expectations and responsibilities of all students who enroll. These often outline the student's responsibility as a learner and as a member of the collegewide community. Such documents serve to reinforce the guideline that students are full partners in the learning process and must take primary responsibility for their own behavior.
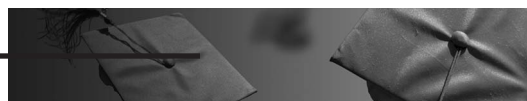
Phi Theta Kappa is the national honor society for community college students and has created the Community College Completion Corps (CCCC) as one way of encouraging students to take responsibility for completing degrees. In the Student Guide (2010), leaders of the honor society say,

> We, the International Officers of Phi Theta Kappa, have formed the CCCC—the Community College Completion Corps. We are committed to completing our degrees and we are calling on you to educate your fellow students on the importance of staying the course and completing a college credential. (p. 2)

Students are encouraged to create signing day events where students and faculty sign a commitment statement to complete degrees. The Lamda Beta Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa at Mohawk Valley Community College, for example, held a completion event in the fall of 2011 where over 600 students signed a statement committing to completing their degree; over 100 faculty signed statements to support student completion. The CCCC has spread to many community colleges and is a good example of how students themselves are taking the lead in getting other students to take responsibility for completing college.

Mark Milliron (2012) suggests that students should take a more assertive role in assuming responsibility for their own education. In an open letter to students Milliron states,

> I've come to the conclusion that the voice that will push real change is yours. Indeed, if you— the students—are willing to accept a set of key educational responsibilities as you stand up for

your core educational rights, you might be the real game changer we need in catalyzing next-generation learning. (p. 26)

The core educational rights include "learning-centered, data-rich, and high-value educational pathways…a learning experience that will prepare you to both live and learn well" (p. 31). As course and program options increase for students, especially massive open online courses (MOOCs), students are increasingly in a position to shape educational culture to make it more responsive to their needs.

The guidelines for student success noted here are designed to stimulate discussion and deliberation among faculty, administrators, support staff, and trustees. Colleges can use these guidelines as prompts to modify this list and to add additional guidelines not referenced here. Once a college secures general agreement on a set of guidelines for student success, the next step is to involve as many college stakeholders as possible in determining priority programs and practices that will be considered in implementing each of the guidelines. Such decisions should be made, of course, on the basis of as much evidence as possible.

Guidelines for Institutional Success

Most community colleges will agree that the following guidelines address the key conditions that should exist in an institution that commits to the Student Success/Completion Agenda. But college leaders must agree on the conditions that represent their values and reflect their culture and the available resources. In addition, college leaders must ensure that a critical mass of faculty and other staff will support these conditions. "Meaningful and lasting change may require more than tweaking around the edges; it may require overhauling the organization so that all aspects of the institution are aligned to promote student success" (Scott-Clayton, 2011a, p. 21). These guidelines are the beginning steps in overhauling the organization. (Several of these guidelines appeared in "Pathways to Completion: Guidelines to Boosting Success," O'Banion, 2011.)
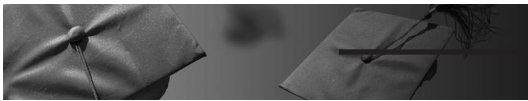
1. A leader or core of key leaders must champion the Student Success/Completion Agenda and be able to rally a critical mass of faculty and staff to commit to the effort. From trustees to the college president and top administrators, and from senate and union leaders to chief influencers among faculty, staff, and students, it will take a sustained, collaborative effort to achieve success. Five years is a starting point; the institutional change called for in achieving the goals of the Completion Agenda will require intentional, continuous improvement for 10 to 15 years.

How to get the leading stakeholders to agree on this agenda and to collaborate on making it successful is the major challenge. The historical architecture of education that many community colleges adopted from their four-year counterparts encourages silos, not collaboration: faculty members divide into departments around disciplines; staff in student affairs and academic affairs hardly communicate on some campuses; and the curriculum is bifurcated into career/technical education and liberal arts/transfer education.

Though every member of the college community has a stake in the Completion Agenda, faculty—full- and part-time—must be strongly committed and deeply involved. In the first major evaluation of Achieving the Dream (ATD), researchers at MDRC and the CCRC recommend in *Turning the Tide* (Rutschow et al., 2011) that colleges do more to involve adjunct and full-time faculty in reform efforts and concentrate on teaching and learning in the classroom. Mark Milliron, chancellor of Western Governors University Texas, and Vincent Tinto, a well-known educational researcher from Syracuse University, recently drew attention to the importance of faculty involvement during their "Taking Student Success Seriously: Focusing on the College Classroom" series of presentations at national conferences, where they pointed out what most faculty already know: Teaching matters most.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) weighed in on this issue in March with its *Student Success in Higher Education* (2011) report. "Student success is what AFT Higher Education members are all about" (p.1), the union said.

The AFT believes that academic unions, working with other stakeholders, can play a central role in promoting student success. Making lasting progress, however, will have to begin at tables where faculty and staff members hold a position of respect and leadership. (p. 5)

The report is an important statement about the critical role of faculty in the Completion Agenda. Others have emphasized the key role of the president. Byron and Kay McClenney, in *Reflections on Leadership for Student Success* (2010), in the context of their experience with Achieving the Dream and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, note, "There are many important aspects of the Student Success Agenda…. But significant change will not occur—and stick—without visible, persistent leadership from the college president or chancellor" (p. 3).

Ed Hughes, president of Gateway Community and Technical College in Kentucky, is one such leader. In the spring of 2011, Hughes held a series of sessions designed to help college employees better embrace an institutional shift from access to success. "We need 100 percent participation in this critical dialogue because what we decide to do will impact our lives and our students for a long time," wrote Hughes. "Each of us must embrace this unique opportunity to transform student learning and success through a collective effort of the college community" (para. 4).

2. All decisions regarding policies, programs, practices, processes, and personnel will be based on evidence to the extent it is possible to do so.
Achieving the Dream has had a major impact on community colleges in terms of prompting their commitment to make decisions based on a culture of evidence. Most community colleges have embedded this commitment in their value and program statements. And, fortunately, an enormous amount of research has been conducted over the past decade that provides evidence of what works and does not work. The Community College Research Center at Columbia University has produced over 300 reports on community college programs and practices. These reports are having significant impact on policy at state and federal levels, on foundation initiatives, and on programs at individual
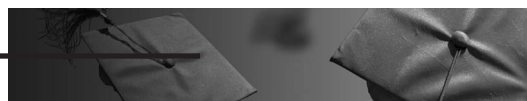
colleges. There are also a half dozen other agencies and institutes conducting research on the community college. Never in our history has so much research been focused on the community college, most of which is supported by foundations championing the Completion Agenda.

Even though colleges are committed to a culture of evidence, and evidence is increasingly available, actual practice in making decisions based on evidence lags behind and may be hindered by resource constraints. In the first major study of the initial 26 colleges in Achieving the Dream, after five years of placing a priority on using evidence to make decisions, about one-fifth of the colleges still struggled to implement many of the recommended practices, "hindered primarily by weak institutional research capacity" (Rutschow et al., 2011, p. iii). Colleges use their offices of institutional research primarily for compliance reporting, providing required data for the state and federal government and accreditation and funding agencies, rather than focusing on data for program improvement and decision making. More disturbing, a national study by Morest and Jenkins in 2007 found that top community college administrators generally do not use data on student outcomes for decision-making.

There is an increasing amount of research on what works for community colleges, but unless community colleges can increase the capacity of their offices of institutional research to apply and field test this research for relevancy to their colleges, and convince college leaders to use the data for decision making, colleges will continue to rely on anecdotes and committee recommendations for achieving the goals of the Completion Agenda. Professional development for all key decision makers in how to use data for decision making may be part of the solution.

3. Colleges will realign current resources and identify potential new resources—funding, personnel, facilities, and community backing—to support the goals of the Student Success/Completion Agenda.
It is ironic that community colleges have been called on at this time by the nation's leaders to play a key role in reviving the economy—a time in which the community college is experiencing dramatic increases in enrollment

and even more dramatic decreases in resources. This is not the best of times for community colleges to take on a mandate to double the number of completers in the next decade and a half. Hilary Pennington, who headed up the postsecondary agenda at the Gates Foundation, says, "Dramatically improving the nation's completion rate can seem daunting and impossible. It's understandably hard to consider retrofitting the airplane you are flying when two of its engines are aflame" (Pennington, 2011, p. 2). To make the best use of the resources we do have, we are going to have to stop and do some restructuring. "Higher education systems and campuses are going to have to be smarter with the resources they have," says Pennington.

> No more nibbling at the edges in an attempt to wring efficiencies out of a higher education model built in a different era. We are nearing a watershed moment in American higher education. We can either keep doing things the way we've always done them, with less money and diminishing success, or we can make the bigger structural reforms we need—strategically and smartly. Realistically, this is our best option for long-term success. (Pennington, 2011, p.1)
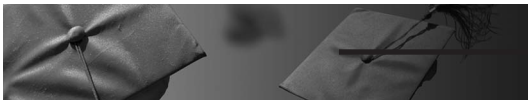
Pennington cites Valencia College in Florida, which, with the same resources as other Florida community colleges, posts graduation rates that are 15 percentage points higher than its peers (2011, p. 1). President Sandy Shugart explains Valencia's success: "We stopped spending so much money and energy trying to get butts in the seats and instead began seeing the college through the eyes of the student" (Shugart, Phelps, Puyana, Romano, & Walter, 2011, p. 1). Other leaders also recognize the reality of working within the confines of current resources:

> As the focus on student success and completion intensifies on campus, community college leaders know the only way to stay viable is to change the culture of their institutions. With state and federal coffers in perpetual free fall, that means leveraging existing resources to spur reforms. (Violino, 2012, p. 1)

In an analysis of the major reform efforts at Chaffey College in California focused on increasing student success, researchers pointed out that "…services seem to be funded by using existing resources more intelligently and less wastefully" (Gabriner & Grubb, 2012, p. 27).

In addition to using current resources more wisely, community colleges must exercise entrepreneurial skills to create more resources to support student success and completion. There are a number of promising practices for better realigning or garnering more resources:

- Establish income-producing programs and services for the community: catering, rental facilities, weekend flea markets, athletic facilities, consulting services, assessment programs, specialized training, and more.
- Expand partnerships with business and industry to include customized training programs beyond the current slate of programs—Humber College in Toronto, for example, offers customized training in more than 35 countries—and engage business and industry in directly supporting high-demand job programs with funds for program development, staff training, equipment, internships, and scholarships.
- Earmark portions of current state and federal funds for the Completion Agenda.
- Explore the Economics of Innovation model (Boroch, 2010, p. 175) created in California that demonstrates a good return on investment through increasing the number of full-time enrollments by improving support services and other elements of the Student Success Pathway in developmental education programs.
- Since education is a labor-intensive enterprise, audit the numbers of potential volunteers in the local community and consider how to use them to supplement current personnel. Many adjunct faculty, classified staff, students, and citizens will volunteer if called on to help with tutoring, advising, coaching, and teaching. At

Alverno College in Wisconsin, hundreds of local citizen volunteers are trained as external assessors to give students feedback about their progress. An audit at Tidewater Community College in Virginia revealed 1,956 college employees, 32,808 students, 45,117 associate degree graduates, and a population in the college's service area of 1,090,400. The tally did not include the number of service clubs, churches, nonprofit agencies, and businesses, and industries which are all sources of volunteers. The United States has a strong culture of volunteerism that colleges have not yet fully tapped.

It is the responsibility of leaders to realign resources to support the Completion Agenda. Realigning resources is one of the most difficult challenges for colleges and can only occur with strong leadership from the president and the board of trustees. Most college leaders will also work to identify and garner new resources; *The Entrepreneurial Community College*, edited by John Roueche and Barbara Jones, is an outstanding source for leaders seeking new resources.

4. Colleges will apply appropriate technological innovations to create, implement, and monitor the Student Success Pathways to optimize efficiency and effectiveness.
With technology, colleges can do much more than in years past and do it better than before. Colleges can better manage learning, track a student's navigation through the system, provide services, and help students make connections with faculty and with other students— faster, smarter, better. Technology expands and improves the reach of the teacher and enriches the learning environment with more efficient and effective inclusion of curriculum support materials. And, with the emerging emphasis on open-source systems, colleges, faculty, and students alike can benefit from technological innovations at little or no cost.

A recent explosion of technology-based innovations will likely play a central role in supporting the Completion Agenda. Consider, for example, EDUCAUSE's Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC). NGLC is intended to dramat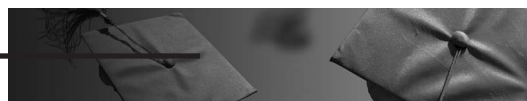ically improve college readiness and completion in the United States through the applied use of technology, particularly among low-income individuals. With more than $20 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the initiative is designed to fund technological solutions with proven potential and disseminate these for scaling up in other colleges and universities. Projects are being funded in waves. The first wave focused on the sustainable adoption-at-scale of successful technology-enabled product, project, or service-based solutions, including learner analytics, blended learning models, interactive technologies, and modular courseware in high-enrollment developmental and general education courses.

One such project funded by NGLC is the Student Success Plan (SSP) at Sinclair Community College in Ohio. The SSP is a software application designed to be used with advising or counseling to increase the persistence, success, and graduation rates of at-risk students. Through holistic counseling, web-based support systems, and intervention techniques, students who are at greatest risk of failing in college are identified, supported, and monitored. The software, in conjunction with Sinclair's Pathways to Completion intensive advising system, has a proven track record of success improving student outcomes. Pathways to Completion students have a 1.06 higher average quarter-to-quarter GPA and a 0.74 higher annual GPA compared to nonparticipating students. Pathways to Completion students have a 39 percent higher quarter-to-quarter rate of persistence and a 52 percent higher annual rate of persistence compared to nonparticipating students (Sinclair Community College, 2011-12). See a demonstration of SSP at http://studentsuccessplan.org.

5. Colleges will create and implement guidelines for rapid, expansive scaling up of successful programs and practices.
The lack of programs that scale up was highlighted in the initial evaluation of ATD. According to the report, *Turning the Tide* (Rutschow et al., 2011),

> While colleges instituted a wide range of strategies to improve student achievement under the auspices of Achieving the Dream, a majority of these reforms reached less than 10 percent of their intended target populations—likely too few to make demonstrable progress on improving student achievement overall. (p. ES 3)

Scaling up innovations and promising practices in education is a lot more challenging than scaling up successful outcomes in business. If a creative worker at a McDonald's franchise figures out a faster and more cost-effective way to add pickles to a hamburger, for example, the infrastructure, the reward system, and the culture at McDonald's are in place to test the innovation and scale it up rapidly across thousands of other outlets. Community colleges are often challenged to scale up a proven practice in a single department.

In a 2005 interview, Chris Dede, a thought leader and endowed professor at Harvard University, summarized the challenge of scaling up innovations in education: "Scaling up involves closing gaps that exist between the innovation's demands and an organization's capacity" (Joyce, 2005). Successful scaling occurs when innovations or promising practices can be applied to large numbers of students and faculty and if the proven innovations are not too costly. Case management, for example, is an effective practice, but it is too costly to apply to large numbers of students and should be reserved for students who require more special attention. Other programs require extensive collaboration; scaling up learning communities, for example, requires a change in curriculum structures, the interest and involvement of faculty leaders, support from the registrar's office, and revisions in the college catalog and other documents, among many other changes. Colleges need to analyze what will be required to scale up a specific program or practice, and whether the college has the capacity to do so—and that analysis needs to occur well before colleges decide which programs or practices they are going to implement.

Community colleges that have been successful in scaling up innovations and promising practices first pilot the practice and gather data supporting its effectiveness. Champions of the practice then herd it through institutional pastures and gain support from key leaders. Too often, the process of scaling up receives attention after an innovation has been proven effective. Guidelines for scaling up need to be determined ahead of time and applied from the beginning of any initiative to improve and expand student success and completion. *Complete College America* notes the important role states can play in scaling up reform efforts:
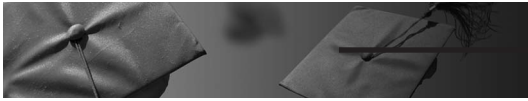
States are the best positioned to ensure reform across systems and campuses by setting goals, establishing uniform measures, and monitoring progress. They can also serve as the most efficient clearinghouses of best practices, allowing for rapid scaling of successful reforms. (Jones, 2012, p. 9)

North Carolina's Completion by Design initiative, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is an excellent example of how the state has taken the lead in orchestrating policy issues and scaling up successes piloted in the colleges.

6. Professional Development for all college stakeholders will focus on student success and completion as the highest priority.
If colleges are to be successful in achieving the goals of the Completion Agenda, college leaders will need to develop their skills and knowledge of how to manage change, how to create collaborative efforts across the college to implement new initiatives, and how to use data to make decisions. Faculty will need to develop skills and knowledge in new approaches to teaching and learning, new applications of technology, and understanding of and commitment to programs and practices that work. Support staff will need to increase their skills and knowledge as key players in creating and supporting a college climate of student success, helping students make connections, and implementing the processes and practices on the Student Success Pathway that will increase retention and completion rates. Every employee of the college has a role to play in the Completion Agenda, but all are not prepared to play those roles in an efficient and effective manner required for success.

The challenge for community colleges in professional development is that most wait until it is too late to address the issue. The place to begin is on the front end, when new faculty, administrators, and staff are being considered for employment. Colleges need to create criteria that reflect the skills and abilities each group will need to ensure student success and completion, and use these criteria in selecting all new employees. Each new employee's contract should include an agreement that the various groups will achieve the

skills and abilities required through intensive training sessions in the first year with updates in subsequent years. Every new faculty appointment is a $1 million investment by the college, yet colleges spend more on the maintenance of a building than they do the maintenance of a faculty member. Even though colleges are not employing as many new faculty and staff as in former years, there should still be a plan in place that embeds their continuing education in the contract as a condition of employment. Such actions, if they can be navigated through unions where these exist, will pay dividends ten years down the road.

Most national reports on the reform of higher education, and many of the reports issued by research and policy centers, end by recommending strong programs of professional development. The recent report from the Futures Commission convened by the American Association of Community Colleges is an example. Referencing the goals of the Completion agenda, the 2012 report noted, "Effecting this transformation will require a clear and steady commitment to professional development across the institution, focused relentlessly on student success and completion" (p. 19). But, historically, professional development programs in community colleges have been woefully inadequate, if they existed at all. Professional development is the Achilles heel of the Completion Agenda. We must begin to take professional development seriously if we are going to have any chance of meeting the goals of the Completion Agenda. Foundations have been reluctant to support such programs thus far, which reflects a failure to recognize that the Completion Agenda will fail or succeed in great part based on the commitment and the skills of the educators on the front lines who are responsible for making it work. Community colleges must place a high priority on preparing their employees for the new challenges and hard work of doubling the number of college completers by creating long-term, systematic, and powerful professional development programs for everyone in the college.

Like the guidelines for student success, these guidelines for institutional success are designed to stimulate discussion and deliberation among faculty, administrators, support staff, and trustees. Colleges should use these guidelines as prompts to modify this list and to add additional guidelines not referenced here. Once a college secures general agreement on a set of guidelines for institutional success, the next step is to involve as many college stakeholders as possible in determining priority programs and practices that will be considered in implementing each of the conditions addressed in the guidelines.
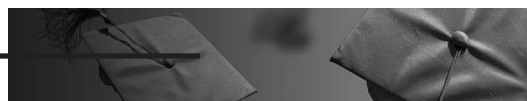
Teaching and Learning Matter

Up to this point in this monograph, the emphasis has been on services and programs outside the classroom. There is no quarrel about the importance of efficient and effective services such as admissions, assessment, orientation, advising, placement, financial aid, and registration; students cannot be successful in the classroom without successful preparation for the classroom.

The tendency of most community colleges that launch initiatives to address the Completion Agenda, however, is to focus almost exclusively on these services—at least in the beginning. The Texas Completes initiative is an example of how colleges place priority on services and programs over classroom instruction. A large cadre of faculty and staff from the five participating college districts in Texas explored for over a year how they could best improve and expand student success, and in their implementation proposal they agreed to focus on three priorities: (a) get students into programs of study; (b) create comprehensive student advising and management systems; and (c) restructure developmental education. All of these goals can be accomplished without ever addressing classroom instruction.

Maybe we find it easier to redesign and restructure these programs and services, or maybe we find it too difficult to redesign what happens in the classroom. In any case, if we are to improve on our record of student success, the role of the teacher in creating learning, primarily through the classroom—be it online, face-to-face, or both—must become a major focus of the Student Success/Completion Agenda. In the community college, the classroom is the only place we have access to students in any kind of organized way.

Key leaders involved in the Completion Agenda recognize the need to focus more attention on teaching, learning, and classroom instruction. The Lumina

Foundation has been one of the major supporters of the Completion Agenda and has provided millions of dollars in funding for the Achieving the Dream initiative. The Foundation's Big Goal of increasing the percentage of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025 helps drive the Completion Agenda, but its president, Jamie Merisotis, also underscores the importance of keeping a focus on learning. "Oddly enough, the concept of learning—a subject that seems critical to every discussion about higher education—is often overlooked in the modern era. For us, learning doesn't just matter. It matters most of all." (Merisotis, 2009, para. 27).

Kay McClenney and her colleagues at the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) also weigh in on this conversation. "Student success matters. College completion matters. And teaching and learning—the heart of student success—matter" (2010, p. 20). CCCSE leaders champion active and collaborative classroom learning experiences through intensive student engagement:

> Research shows that the more actively engaged students are, the more likely they are to learn, to persist in college, and to attain their academic goals. Student engagement, therefore, is an important metric for assessing the quality of colleges' educational practices and identifying ways colleges can help more students succeed. (2010, p. 7)

Another key leader involved in the student success agenda, Vincent Tinto, suggests,

> If we are to substantially increase college completion, especially among low-income students, we must focus on improving success in the classroom, particularly during a student's first year. We must be sensitive to the supports low-income students need to be successful in college, and lead efforts to dramatically improve their classroom experience, (Tinto, 2011a, p. 2).

Tinto sums up the key conditions for success in the classroom, stating that

> …students are more likely to learn and persist when they find themselves in settings that hold high expectations for their learning, provide needed academic and social support and frequent feedback about their learning, and actively involve them with other students and faculty in relevant learning, in particular in the classrooms, laboratories, and studios of the campus. (2004, p. 4)

These are just a few selected viewpoints about the importance of classroom instruction from leaders currently involved in the Completion Agenda. There is an enormous amount of literature on teaching, learning, and classroom instruction for all levels of education with an overwhelming amount of advice and research about what constitutes successful teaching. For higher education, the best advice and research has been captured in the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). With support from The Johnson Foundation and sponsorship by the American Association for Higher Education and the Education Commission of the States, a group of national leaders (including K. Patricia Cross, Alexander Astin, Howard Bowen, C. Robert Pace, Russell Edgerton, and Richard C. Richardson, Jr.) convened at Wingspread in 1987 to identify the primary practices, supported by research, that promote effective teaching and learning. Art Chickering and Zelda Gamson recorded the outcomes of the discussions, and in their preface to the principles noted,

> These seven principles are not ten commandments shrunk to a twentieth century attention span. They are intended as guidelines for faculty members, students, and administrators—with support from state agencies and trustees—to improve teaching and learning. These principles seem like good common sense, and they are—because many teachers and students have experienced them and because research supports them. They rest on 50 years of research on the way teachers teach and students learn, how students work and play with one another, and how students and faculty talk to each other. (1987, pp. 2-3)

Good practice in teaching and learning:

1. Encourages student-faculty contact.
2. Encourages cooperation among students.
3. Encourages active learning.
4. Gives prompt feedback.
5. Emphasizes time on task.
6. Communicates high expectations.
7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning.
   (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p. 2)

After twenty-five years, these practices still hold up and have been supported by an ever-expanding body of research. They should be embedded as the core content of faculty development programs; they should become the primary focus for the next step in institution-wide student success initiatives. If we cannot guarantee that students will engage with the most effective teaching and learning experiences in the classroom, we will fail to meet the goals of the Completion Agenda.

Given that what happens in the classroom is one of the key components in student success, it is important to ask to what extent faculty support the Completion Agenda. Unfortunately, faculty often view the Completion Agenda as an external mandate championed by administrators or imposed by state and national leaders. Some community college leaders have exacerbated this tension by moving ahead without involving faculty as full partners in institutional reform to improve on student success. In the first major study of the Achieving the Dream initiative, researchers, commenting on improvements needed in the next phase, noted "Bringing faculty and staff voices more concretely into colleges' reform work and focusing more directly on improvements to classroom instruction and services may have important benefits for the next stage of the initiative's work" (Rutschow et al., p. 156). And, the American Federation of Teachers has made a key point about involving faculty:

> The AFT believes that academic unions, working with other stakeholders, can play a central role in

promoting student success. Making lasting progress, however, will have to begin at tables where faculty and staff members hold a position of respect and leadership. (2011, p. 5)

It is beyond the scope of this monograph to examine more thoroughly the issues related to faculty involvement and the key role of faculty in teaching and learning. But it is important to at least note that without significant faculty involvement and significant attention to the processes of teaching and learning in the classroom, the Completion Agenda is likely to fail in meeting its laudable goals.

Conclusion

In this monograph we have briefly reviewed key elements of the Access, Success, and Completion Agendas; posed questions about a definition of student success; and recommended the Student Success Pathway as a framework for institutional and individual student planning. We also recommended guidelines for experiences we want for our students and guidelines for institutional conditions that should exist to ensure that students engage in those experiences. Finally, we touched on the importance of teaching and learning in the classroom as a key challenge yet to be thoroughly addressed in the conversations and initiatives prompted by the Completion Agenda.

There are two key concepts in this paper—the Student Success Pathway and Guidelines for Student Success and Institutional Success—that have great value for improving the educational experience for students, even for colleges not committed to the Completion Agenda. They provide a sound and useful framework and guidance for improving and expanding learning for all students at all levels of education. To help move the needle forward in doubling the number of students in the next decade who complete a certificate, associate degree, or transfer, the Student Success Pathway and the Guidelines for Student Success and Institutional Success provide a foundation for significant impact on the success of our students and our colleges.

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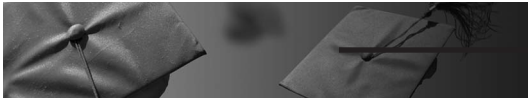
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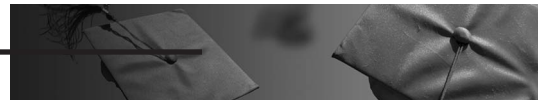
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Terry O'Banion was President of the League for Innovation in the Community College for 23 years until his retirement. Under his leadership the League became an international organization serving over 700 colleges recognized by *Change* as "the most dynamic organization in the community college world." Since retirement O'Banion has worked on special projects for the League for Innovation, MetLife Foundation, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The Chauncey Group International, Walden University, and National American University.

In honor of his decades of service to education, five national awards have been established in his name: the Terry O'Banion Student Technology Award created by Microsoft; the Terry O'Banion Prize for Teaching and Learning created by Educational Testing Service; the Terry O'Banion Shared Journey Award created by the National Council on Student Development; the O'Banion Leadership Scholarship created by Walden University, and the John Roueche and Terry O'Banion International Leadership Award created by the League for Innovation.

In a survey of 11,000 higher education leaders reported in *Change* in January 1998, Terry O'Banion was named one of eleven "Idea Champions" who set the agenda for all of higher education – and the only community college leader on the list.

O'Banion has consulted in more than 800 community colleges in the United States and Canada. He is one of the leading spokespersons in the country on the Learning College and on Student Success Pathways and the Completion Agenda. He has keynoted conferences on these issues in dozens of states and Canadian provinces and in Australia, the United Arab Emirates, and Japan.

In addition to *Access, Success, and Completion: A Primer for Community College Faculty, Administrators, Staff, and Trustees*, O'Banion has authored 14 books and over 170 monographs, chapters, and articles on the community college. His current work includes *Academic Advising: The Key to Student Success*, to be published in late 2012.

O'Banion has served as a dean of students at Central Florida Community College, founding dean at Santa Fe Community College in Florida, and vice chancellor for education for the Dallas County Community College District. He has been a Professor of Higher Education at the University of Illinois; Distinguished Visiting Professor at The University of Texas at Austin; Visiting Professor at the University of California-Berkeley, Florida State University, the University of Hawaii, and the University of Toronto; the Marie Y. Roberts Endowed Professor of Higher Education at the University of North Texas; and a Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence at Antioch University McGregor School of Management.

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