

Perspectives

Community College Leadership for the 21st Century

MAY 2014

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Fully realized, college and career readiness will better prepare individuals, communities, states and our country to compete and succeed.

- Achieve: American Diploma Project Network

Lack of readiness for college is a major culprit in low graduation rates... Improving college readiness must be an essential part of national and state efforts to increase college degree attainment.

- Nancy Shulock

Future InSight Symposium: Competency-Based Education

To be held in Traverse City, Michigan July 21 & 22, 2014 \$150 registration fee.

College Readiness: The First Step to Completion

Cynthia Wilson, Ed.D., Vice President, League for Innovation in the Community College

Among the keys to success in just about any endeavor, preparation is perhaps the most fundamental. Examples of this are plentiful: Musicians practice, athletes train, and actors rehearse long before the concert hall fills, the starting whistle sounds, or the curtain rises. Preparation is a key to success in higher education as well, and a lack of it can be a serious obstacle for students seeking a college credential. Community colleges have a long tradition of open access, but if students who come through the open door are not adequately prepared for college-level work, they have a fairly low chance of graduating. Given this reality, the current national emphasis on college completion – the Completion Agenda – would seem to necessitate an equally strong emphasis on the first step toward that goal: college readiness.

Community college leaders are well placed not only to guide the movement for college completion on their campuses, but also to influence the emphasis on college readiness across the educational spectrum in their communities. Leading support for college readiness can take numerous forms, including long-term solutions for student preparedness, effective support for underprepared students, and structural changes that help reduce actual or perceived barriers to enrollment. A brief discussion of these three approaches, along with examples of innovations—some very new—may give aspiring community college leaders insights into guiding institutions in efforts to help students prepare for entry into college and, ultimately, earn high-quality postsecondary credentials.

Develop partnerships for addressing college readiness early. Community college leaders are well positioned to facilitate innovative community partnerships designed to help elementary and secondary students move toward college readiness well before high school graduation. For example, in Rochester, New York, Monroe Community College's president, Dr. Anne Kress, chairs ROC the Future, the local Cradle-to-Career initiative to improve the academic achievement of the community's children. With an initial focus on 3rd-grade literacy – a strong indicator of the likelihood a student will graduate from high school – the initiative is working to improve last year's 6% pass rate of Rochester 3rd-graders on New York's new, more difficult state reading test (www.

actrochester.org/roc-the-future). Monroe Community College may not see an impact on placement exam scores from this 3rd-grade focus for a decade or more, but starting early may help students be better prepared for college when they do arrive. Kress and other ROC the Future partners are pragmatic in taking a long-term view: "Sadly, there is no quick fix. The issues hindering our children's academic achievement didn't start yesterday, and they won't be solved tomorrow. But to address these challenges, we need to start today."¹ This example of leadership expands college readiness well beyond the recent high school graduate and mature returning student, and has the potential to have a significant effect on the city and its residents.

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Other kinds of partnerships can help smooth the student transition from secondary to postsecondary institutions, but they, too, need support from college leaders. For example, the League for Innovation in the

Community College's Significant Discussions project developed a free guide for faculty and administrators who seek to align high school and community college curriculum.² Support from college and school leaders in building partnerships and participating in the discussions can help these kinds of conversations reap benefits for students, such as reducing the need for remediation, decreasing time to completion, and lowering the overall cost of education.

Reexamine current processes and practices that support student readiness. College leaders can support faculty and staff in analyzing institutional practices in the context of data about student success, retention, and completion in college-readiness programs, specifically developmental education. With approximately 60% of their students placing into at least one remedial course, many community colleges have long-established developmental programs for underprepared students. Still, fewer than 25% of students who place into developmental education complete a degree or certificate within eight years.³ College leaders can encourage and empower faculty and staff to improve the student experience and success rate by providing time and resources to support exploration, innovation, and transformation.

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EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

Postsecondary students expect to pursue academic programs that result in degrees and certificates of value that prepare them for either further education or entry into the workforce. As a result, colleges today are tasked with addressing the learning needs of a wide variety of entering students, many of whom may be academically and/or personally under prepared for the challenges of higher education. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below.

Erik Huntsinger, M. S.

Faculty, Estrella Mountain Community College
Avondale, AZ

Community colleges pride themselves on their open access mission. Though this mission serves a moral imperative in our society, it leads to a disproportionate number of under-prepared students coming to the institutions. How can community college leaders best support underprepared students without compromising quality or their institution's open access tradition?

Reexamining and restructuring the student experience is easier said than done.

~ Erik Huntsinger

Dr. Kay McClenney, Director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement, observed that "a system is perfectly designed to get the results that it is getting"1. Therefore, if we want to change the results of a system, we must change the system itself, from start to finish. To do this with a finite budget, colleges first need to evolve a culture of evidence, replacing anecdote with data. Using their own and peer institutions' experiences, best practices should be widely disseminated and scaled up. Data should be continuously analyzed to discover what works. The emerging field of predictive analytics will play an increasingly important role in this type of data-driven decision making.

Thankfully, many best practices have already been identified. At the beginning, there should be a clear and inescapable educational path so that students start off right. This includes mandatory orientation, student success experience, assessment, academic advising, educational plans, and financial aid counseling. Colleges should foster student engagement with peers to create social support networks. There needs to be fewer and better defined degree pathways. Students need intrusive academic support and guidance. Recommendations for next classes to take and options for the shortest time to completion should be automatically generated.

Reexamining and restructuring the student experience is easier said than done. It requires the college community and its leaders to have both a singularity in purpose and extraordinary courage. Yet improving student success rates without reducing quality or access must be accomplished; millions of students, and society, are counting on us.

Sources: 1. McClenney, K. (2013, February 7). Personal interview

Erik Thor Huntsinger, a full-time Economics faculty member at Estrella Mountain Community College since 2006, has served as co-chair of the college's Student Academic Achievement Committee, which is focused on student learning assessment. He holds a M.S. in Economics from Arizona State University and is currently a student in Ferris State University's DCCL program, working on a dissertation focused on improving student success rates through the use of predictive analytics.



QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

What can community colleges do to help underprepared students achieve their learning goals?

Tanya McFadden, Ed.D.

Interim Dean of Student Affairs,
Lansing Community College, Lansing, Michigan

The issue of academic and personal unpreparedness for the rigors of college is a growing concern facing community college leaders nationwide. The effects of unpreparedness are far-reaching, affecting local communities and wreaking havoc with state and national economies. The ramifications of unpreparedness also have global repercussions; whereas the United

States was once a leader in college degree attainment amongst industrialized nations, the nation has now fallen to 16th, according to Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan.

"Right now, three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require more than a high school diploma. Yet, just over half of our citizens have that level of education... Half of the students who begin college never finish." ~President Barack Obama

Despite countless reform attempts at the K-12 level, little has succeeded in changing the deficiencies that exist in public education. Recognizing the perpetual decline of college readiness in high school graduates, President Barack Obama challenged community college leaders to attract, retain and graduate more students than any other industrialized nation by the year 2020. The president's new proposal, **The American Graduation Initiative**, serves as a catalyst for college leaders to find ways to help students succeed.

Current research suggests there are several promising strategies that community college leaders can employ to help unprepared students reach their learning goals:

- ▲ First-Year Experience Programs
- ▲ Community college and K-12 collaboration for college readiness/alignment of curriculum
- ▲ Early advising/creation of an Educational Development Plan
- ▲ Intrusive advising
- ▲ Pre-enrollment financial aid advising
- ▲ Peer and faculty mentoring
- ▲ Early warning systems that monitor the first year of enrollment
- ▲ Student engagement

These practices are not new; they just require a paradigm shift that calls for a renewed focus and commitment to ensuring their quality and success.

Dr. Tanya McFadden is the Interim Dean of Student Affairs at Lansing Community College in Lansing, Michigan. She previously served as Associate Dean in Health and Human Services at Lansing Community College and as Director of Student Services at Oakland Community College. Tanya holds a Master's degree from Eastern Michigan University with a concentration in Higher Education and General Administration, and recently completed the DCCL program at Ferris State University.



NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

Postsecondary students expect to pursue academic programs that result in degrees and certificates of value that prepare them for either further education or entry into the workforce. As a result, colleges today are tasked with addressing the learning needs of a wide variety of entering students, many of whom may be academically and/or personally under prepared for the challenges of higher education. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below.

Naomi DeWinter, Ed.D.

Dean of Student Services,
North Central Michigan College, Petoskey, Michigan

Although community colleges long have wrestled with student unpreparedness, it could be argued that they were created in part to serve this unique section of our population – students who are academically or personally underprepared. The increased challenge today is that more high school graduates and adults are choosing to attend college, thus the number of underprepared has risen. Prevailing best practices revolve around the following concepts:

1. Start earlier. The number of high school students who have the opportunity to start taking college courses has greatly increased and represents a promising practice nationally. A U.S. Department of Education (2013) study reports:

High school students took 2 million college courses in 2010-11, up from 1.2 million in 2002-03. This represents an annual growth rate of greater than 7% over the intervening eight years (US Department of Education, 2013).

Starting college early means finishing earlier, decreasing the time it takes to become employed or transfer to a senior institution. In Michigan alone, 44 early/middle colleges have been developed to achieve the goal of increasing college graduates regionally and nationally.

Early college students are reported to attend college at higher rates after they graduate from high school. An Oregon study demonstrated that dual credit students had higher college participation rates (81.4% vs. 72.6%), and had accumulated more credits by the start of their second year (61.3 credits vs. 49.8 credits), than non-dual credit students.

2. Develop Student Services and instructional partnerships. Students with high-risk factors likely will need extra support both in and outside of the classroom to achieve academic success. Faculty have the most intimate knowledge of how students are performing academically and interacting with other students. Lack of confidence is an emotion with which high-risk students constantly struggle. Positive feedback should be given regularly when students are doing well academically and socially. When faculty observe behaviors that are not positive, e.g. attendance issues or lack of preparation for classes, referrals should be made to advisors and Student Services staff who can assist in mentoring students and getting them back on track. A partnership must exist between those who know how students are performing in class and those who can assist with developing appropriate student and life skills.
3. Assist with the transition to college. Colleges are employing success coaches and mentors since transitions are important.

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~ Naomi DeWinter

Students who previously have not seen themselves as going to college do not magically wake up with a skill set that will help them become successful. Educators must help students acquire the skills to be successful in college and in the work environment. First Year Experience courses have also been proven to assist in this transition and can help students learn and practice a new set of behaviors that are more likely to result in college success.

4. Identify appropriate goals based on student interests, strengths and job market demand. Many underprepared students are not familiar with job opportunities in emerging or non-traditional fields for which preparation times may be shorter than an associate's or bachelor's degree. In Michigan, ten "Career Liaisons" were hired in 2013 with funding from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) to close the skills gap. Career Liaisons are working with businesses and high schools to bring this information to the forefront.
5. Care about these students. Occasionally, we all wish that our students would arrive better prepared. We love to spend time with students who are receiving academic honors and we feel pride that they have chosen our colleges. But many times, those are not the students who need our services the most. Our job is to work with the students who are before us. The ones who need the most assistance are often the academically and socially unprepared. If community colleges do not embrace them, then who will?

References:

Oregon University System, Office of Institutional Research (2010). Dual credit in Oregon 2010 Follow-up. An analysis of students taking dual credit in high school in 2007-08 with subsequent performance in college.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2013). Dual credit and exam-based courses in U.S. public high schools: 2010-11

Our job is to work with the students who are before us.

~ Naomi DeWinter

Naomi DeWinter, Ed. D., is the Dean of Student Services at North Central Michigan College in Petoskey, Michigan. North Central is an Achieving the Dream Leader College and has made significant progress in improving advising and orientation services, college readiness, and shortening the developmental education pipeline. Dr. DeWinter is past President of the Michigan Community College Student Services Association and is a 2013 graduate of the Ferris State University DCCL program.





QUICK TAKES
Highlights
from the Field

Reshaping the College Transition, by Barnett, Fay, Hare Bork, and Weiss:

Although states have increased high school graduation requirements during the past decade, graduates are still under prepared for college and the workforce due to a number of factors, including a mismatch between the high school curriculum and college and employer expectations. This study examines the promising results of state initiatives employing early college readiness assessments to 11th grade students and needed structured interventions or transition curricula. Read the complete article at: <http://bit.ly/1hPEyJg>

The Condition of College Transition and Career Readiness, 2013: First-Generation Students, by ACT and Council for Opportunity in Education (COE):

Research has revealed that first-generation students often lag behind their peers in meeting college readiness benchmarks. College access programs such as TRIO and GEAR UP provide academic tutoring, mentoring, counseling, and other supportive services. This report from ACT and COE highlights the necessity of developing state policies to promote college readiness with the needs of this population in mind. Read the complete article at: <http://bit.ly/1ma3DAn>

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Published by the Alliance for Community College Excellence in Practice, Ferris State University, Doctorate in Community College Leadership Big Rapids, Michigan

College Readiness: The First Step to Completion

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Numerous community colleges have had success with learning communities, first-year experience programs, summer bridge programs, and other innovations focused on college readiness, and redesigning developmental curriculum can have positive results. In the National Center for Academic Transformation’s (NCAT) Changing the Equation initiative, 32 community colleges used NCAT’s Emporium Model and commercial software to re-design their developmental math programs. Students progress through the modularized curriculum at their own pace in this mastery learning model. Most of the participating colleges saw improvements in student learning and course progression, and course costs were reduced by approximately 20 percent.⁴

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s Statway offers an alternative math curriculum focused on “skills that are essential for a growing number of occupations and professions”.⁵ According to the website, approximately half of developmental math students who took Statway earned college math credit within a year; of those who took developmental math, 16% earned college math credit in two years.

Making these kinds of curricular changes requires time and other resources, including funding for professional development, technical assistance, proprietary or consortium fees, and other expenses.

Reconsider the pathway through college. Academic attainment is only one aspect of college readiness. Many prospective community college students may not be prepared to commit time, money, and other resources to pursue the kind of high-quality postsecondary credentials that are increasingly necessary for today’s workforce. Talking with these prospective students about what it takes to succeed in college may be a dissuasive approach if the context is a traditional education model.

Innovative programs can be designed to save students time and money while opening them to the idea that a college credential is attainable. New innovations focused on personalized learning are revamping degree pathways in efforts to expand student success and completion. For example, the Kentucky Community and Technical College System’s Direct2Degree program, a Next Generation Learning Challenges Breakthrough Model, features a modularized, online curriculum. Students learn at their own pace, taking one module at a time in a continuous process toward an associate degree. Success coaches provide intensive student support via online communication tools, and a monthly subscription model for tuition means students can keep costs low by progressing quickly through the modules. Students can also work through breaks between semesters, hastening their progress toward completion.⁶

Another Breakthrough Model, College for America at Southern New Hampshire University, offers a self-paced

associate degree program that replaces courses and credit hours with a set of 120 competencies students master by following their own personalized academic plan. With no traditional faculty, the program’s coaches and a “multi-layered”, “high-touch” support system help

students direct their own learning, build self-confidence, and keep costs low at approximately \$2,500 per year.⁷

Leading Innovation. These three approaches and the innovative examples illustrating them represent only a few ways

in which strong leadership can impact experimentation around college readiness. Leaders can also incorporate other methods for leading a transformational movement, such as gathering internal support, providing focused professional development for all employees, and including faculty and staff in planning and implementing new initiatives. To help ensure that promising innovations receive the support to succeed over time, leaders can make long-term professional and personal commitments to the college and community. After all, as the ROC the Future partners have reminded us, this kind of transformation takes time. It requires leadership with a long view.

Those who champion the Completion Agenda and its prerequisite, college readiness, can lead by supporting faculty and staff in thoughtful innovation and risk-taking, nurturing promising programs and initiatives that challenge and rethink practices around teaching, learning, and student support. In committing to this kind of leadership, they can help create opportunities for students to take their first steps toward completion well before they enroll, and in programs designed for student success.

References:

- 1 - http://rocthefuture.org/_themes/rocthefuture/asset/Welcome_Letter.pdf
- 2 - www.league.org/significantdiscussions
- 3 - <http://cccr.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/challenge-and-opportunity.pdf>
- 4 - www.thencat.org/Mathematics/CTE/CTE%20Lessons%20Learned.pdf
- 5 - www.carnegiefoundation.org/statway
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- 7 - <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/NG1228.pdf>

Innovative programs such as dual credit and early college can be designed to save students time and money while opening them to the idea that a college credential is attainable.

~ Cynthia Wilson

As vice president for learning and research at the League for Innovation in the Community College, Dr. Wilson leads the League’s publications program and its Learning initiative and also serves as Editor in Chief and as editor of Leadership Abstracts, Learning Abstracts, and Innovation Showcase. She has directed numerous national and international projects and currently leads the Faculty Voices initiative, which seeks to engage community college faculty in the national Completion Agenda conversation, and Community Colleges and Public Health, which is exploring the role of community colleges in the continuum of education for public health. Wilson holds a B.A. and M.Ed. from Southwest Texas State University, and earned her doctorate from The University of Texas at Austin. In 2012 she was awarded the ETS Terry O’Banion Prize for Significant Contributions to Improving Teaching and Learning.