HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

INSIDE HIGHER ED

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Introduction

For many colleges, student success is an all-encompassing goal. From the moment students enroll to when they don a mortarboard and then beyond, institutions are deeply engaged in ensuring student retention, completion and preparation for the future. Doing so involves steering students into pathways on which they can succeed, helping students learn in meaningful courses and programs, guiding them to internships and preparing them for careers.

True student success involves not just one of those tasks but all of them. This can be challenging for institutions, particularly if departments are using different objectives, tools or measurements. The articles in this booklet consider high-impact practices that promote this kind of success – retention, career readiness, assessment and other priorities – at a wide range of institutions.

We hope that this collection sparks an idea or otherwise encourages the student success efforts at your institution. As new methods are developed and applied, *Inside Higher Ed* will continue to report on the practices that promote student success. We welcome your comments on this compilation and your ideas for future coverage.

--The Editors
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Students enter college hoping it will be a major step up from what they were doing before, writes Roger Martin, but they are often disappointed.

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Many young people have precious little experience in the working world -- which makes it more incumbent on universities (and their faculties) to help prepare them better for it, Ryan Craig argues.

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To do justice to students and as a matter of professional duty, faculty members should be at the center of defining and measuring undergraduate learning outcomes, argue Josipa Roksa and Richard Arum.

Closing the **Skills Awareness Gap**

At a time when college closure rates are rising[1], enrollment is down[2], student loan debt exceeds $1.5T[3], and 43% of recent graduates are underemployed[4], institutions are feeling the pressure to prove the value of their degrees. Meanwhile, employers are claiming there is a "skills gap" because they struggle to find enough graduates with the right combination of hard and soft skills. This paints a grim picture for the economy and future of education.

At Portfolium, rather than debate on the existence of a skills gap, we focus on what we believe to be an even more important problem. We call it the skills ***awareness*** gap[5], where students fail to translate the language of academia into the language of workforce competencies. Viewed through this lens, the problem becomes manageable and solvable by bringing together students, employers, educators, and technology to fix it.

The Skills Awareness Gap is the misalignment between an educational experience that's designed and assessed in the language of student learning outcomes and the understanding, articulation, and application of the skills and competencies derived from that very educational experience.

At Portfolium, we have helped hundreds of institutions parse their existing courses, programs, degrees, pathways, and link academic and co-curricular experiences to career-relevant skills. Then, we give faculty and administrators the tools required to automatically help students showcase and reflect on those skills, attached to evidence of their learning, so employers can view them in a lifelong learning ePortfolio.

Solving this is important for institutions because it will help fuel enrollment, support student retention, require assessment activities be *for* teaching and learning, improve career outcomes, and build a stronger alumni network. Students will find meaning in their education when it is tied directly to relevant learning outcomes that will impact their career.

Employers will be able to hire students based on competency instead of degree or pedigree, renew their trust in partner institutions to provide qualified talent and work with schools to begin teaching the skills that will be required in the future of work.

The future of work depends on us collaborating to solve these problems. The vicious cycle of underemployment needs to disappear completely. No student should graduate without knowing exactly what they learned, the relevance it has to their career, and the value of their degree.

Students need to see the value in what they're learning from day one and need to map their journey to completion and beyond. Above all, students need a way to showcase evidence of the skills and competencies they've acquired in exchange for their tuition and time.

The skills awareness gap is solvable and there are specific high impact practices we should be focusing on in 2019 to speed up progress.

Adam Markowitz
CEO / Founder, Portfolium Inc.

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NEWS

Teaming Up in Houston

Houston area colleges and universities are working across sectors and sharing information and data to improve student outcomes.

By Ashley A. Smith // August 7, 2018

HoustonGPS

Colleges across the country are designing academic and career pathways, improving student transfers between institutions, or reforming how they provide remedial education -- all to improve student outcomes and increase graduation rates.

In Houston, some of the region's two- and four-year institutions have taken those efforts one step further. They are partnering to create pathways across sectors as a way to improve graduation rates not just at individual colleges but throughout the entire metropolitan area. The University of Houston System, which is made up of four institutions; Texas Southern University, a historically black college; Houston Community College System; Lone Star College System; San Jacinto College District; Wharton County Junior College; Victoria College and College of the Mainland have all signed on to the initiative, called Houston GPS, and teamed up with Complete College America to achieve that goal.

The initiative was started four years ago after Tom Sugar, the former president of Complete College America and now vice president of partnerships at EAB, a research and technology services company, had a conversation with Paula Short, senior vice chancellor for academic affairs for the University of Houston System, about guided pathways and other college initiatives to increase student success.

The two decided that focusing on how students go to college and putting the interest of students ahead of the institution was the way to go.

"Ultimately that bet will be good for colleges, too," Sugar said.

Guided pathways are traditionally designed to set an academic course for students from the time they enroll until they graduate. While many of those initiatives decrease the amount of time it takes students to earn degrees, the programs have shortcomings, Sugar said.

He and Short wanted to address those weaknesses. What if they approached guided pathways in the same way that students approach attending college, they asked.

"That may mean supporting students when they change community colleges or transfer from a community college to a four-year school, whenever they do it, either after the first year of community college or transferring after a degree," Sugar said. "That's how students go to school these days."

Sugar then drafted an agreement that would encourage colleges to not only pursue guided pathways but also to align their math courses to specific careers and majors so programs that don't require calculus would not force students to take requisite entry-level algebra classes. The agreement included other popular reforms that colleges have been pursuing separately, such as meta-majors, which are broad, career-oriented content areas that help students identify the major they want to pursue. Colleges would also agree to corequisite remedial or developmental education that requires students to enroll in college-level gateway English and math courses with additional support.

The agreement also includes seamless transfer between two- and four-year institutions so students would be granted junior-level status once they complete their associate degrees. Colleges would agree to track student progress, using predictive analytics and intrusive advising, and to revise college schedules to make attending classes easier for students who work.

Meanwhile, Short started digging into UH's data and was not pleased with what she found. She learned that students earned 151 credits on average toward a bachelor's degree, although the typical bachelor's degree program requires only 120 credit hours to complete. Researchers have found that excess credits often don't lead to college completion and place students in more debt. As a result, she started having conversations with the community colleges about improving student outcomes. Houston GPS was established soon after.

The agreement calls for combining remedial education with credit accumulation, helping students balance work and college responsibilities, and providing technology to support these efforts.

"They're working with the partner institutions to design academic plans and degree maps that align, and that's nirvana," Sugar said of the college leaders. "They never had conversations like that. It's always been them designing degree maps within their institutions and not looking down the street at … a competitor school and asking, 'What are you doing down there?' "

Last week Houston GPS institutions met with officials from EAB, which is providing the predictive analytics tools and software colleges will use to offer easily accessible degree maps to students and provide early warning systems of students at risk of failing and real-time tracking of students' success to faculty and advisers. Houston GPS will fully launch across the colleges this fall.

> "That may mean supporting students when they change community colleges or transfer from a community college to a four-year school, whenever they do it, either after the first year of community college or transferring after a degree."

"Technology is the next phase of the pathways work," Sugar said. "Proactive advising requires technology, makes it scalable and more sustainable."

Making the software available to students will also better connect them to advisers and coaches who can help them when they're struggling academically or need support from the financial aid office, for instance.

"We spend a lot of time and energy communicating with students in ways they don't want to communicate," said Wendell Williams, a special adviser to the president at Texas Southern, one of the newest universities to join Houston GPS. "If you make a phone call, 90 percent of our phone calls are not answered, or the number is not correct."

By using the new technology tools, students will get "nudges" to meet with advisers and have access to their degree maps.

The colleges participating in Houston GPS have traditionally been competitors often going after the same types of students. But Houston is growing and remains the country's fourth most populous city, behind New York, Los Angeles and Chicago. The region added more than 95,000 people between 2016 and 2017, according to U.S. Census Bureau data released earlier this year. That means there are plenty of students for each of the institutions to pursue.

There were about 300,000 students in all Houston GPS institutions, Williams said. "But there could be 700,000 students who should be in these institutions."

Getting students to enroll is one thing, but holding on to them and making sure they leave with a degree is another, he said.

The Texas Legislature has also called for colleges to improve their outcomes. In 2015, the state set a goal for at least 60 percent of the state's 25- to 34-year-old residents to have a college degree or certificate by 2030. Currently, 42.3 percent of that population has a degree or a certificate, according to a 2018 report from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Not every institution participating in Houston GPS is operating at the same level; others are further along than their peers in launching the initiative. Sugar said competition between the institutions has helped create less resistance to change. Administrators at one college, for instance, were embarrassed that they weren't further along in using corequisite remediation, which places students in college math and English courses with additional supports, after seeing the results from a peer institution, he said.

"That soft accountability advances the work," he said.

The colleges are not just sharing ideas and programs, they're also sharing data; eight of 11 of the Houston GPS institutions are using the same EAB software.

"It was important for us to share data across sectors, across community colleges, universities and governing boards," Short said. "That's almost unheard-of."

> "Technology is the next phase of the pathways work. Proactive advising requires technology, makes it scalable and more sustainable."

The Houston area is also incredibly diverse, with the region ranking as the fifth most diverse metro area in the country according to a Bloomberg analysis of 2010 and 2016 Census data. Sugar and Short believe the work the colleges are doing with Houston GPS will have an impact on closing equity gaps between white and underrepresented minority students.

"When we succeed in Houston -- and we will -- we will have achieved a great outcome in furtherance of equity and social mobility in America, because that's the nature of Houston," Sugar said. "These are urban institutions predominantly serving students from underrepresented populations. Many don't make it to graduation day. Many are first generation. If you want to see America of the future, look to Houston today." ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/08/07/houston-colleges-and-universities-team-boost-student-success

States Struggle to Close Degree-Attainment Gaps

> Across the country very little progress has been made in closing degree-attainment gaps among white, black and Latino adults, hindering goals to increase the overall number of adults with degrees.

By Ashley A. Smith // June 14, 2018

SOURCE: ISTOCK / RAWPIXEL

Most states have set goals for the proportion of their residents that should have a college degree or certificate in the next few years.

But many of those states will not reach those goals if they don't close gaps between black and white and Latino and white adult students, according to a set of reports released today by the Education Trust.

Nationally, 30.8 percent of black adults and 22.6 percent of Latino adults have earned an associate degree or more, compared to 47.1 percent of white adults between the ages 25 and 64, according to the reports.

Ed Trust graded states in two areas: overall attainment for black and Latino adults and the gains states made for those adults since 2000, said Andrew Nichols, the group's senior director of higher education research and data analytics, who co-wrote the reports. But the organization also rated states on whether their gaps were larger or smaller than the average gap across all states.

Take West Virginia, for instance. Education Trust gave the state an F for its 24 percent black adult degree attainment and a C for increasing the attainment of black adults by 7.3 percentage points since 2000. But the state is rated as "below average" for its small gap between white and black students.

"For black folks in West Virginia, they have extremely low attainment, but white folks in West Virginia also have low attainment," Nichols said. "That's not something we want to applaud."

Forty-two states have set attainment goals in the footsteps of Lumina Foundation, which set a national goal of 60 percent of Americans holding a degree or credential by 2025. In 2009 President Barack Obama set a similar goal for 60 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds to have earned an associate or bachelor's degree by 2020.

"We certainly think equity and racial and ethnic equity has to become much more of a focus of attainment goals in order for us to make the progress we need as a country," said Danette Howard, senior vice president and chief strategy officer at Lumina. "Unless more states focus on closing these pervasive and long-standing gaps in attainment that exist by race and ethnicity, we will not meet the outcomes we would like to see."

An analysis last year by the Educational Testing Service found that under the current rate of degree production and with existing achievement gaps, the federal government's target would be achieved by 2041, Lumina's goal could be met by 2056 and black, Hispanic and Native American populations wouldn't reach the federal goal until 2060.

Nichols defined the problem as an economic crisis. For both black and Latino adults, current degree-attainment levels are lower than the attainment level of white adults were in 1990, according to the Ed Trust report.

"A college degree is essential in a modern economy and folks need it to achieve an American dream," he said. "We want states to be transparent about the gaps, make them their own and take responsibility for educational and broader policies to improve attainment."

For Latino adults, immigration has played a significant role in their overall attainment rate. Native-born Latinos, for instance, are more likely to hold some form of a college degree, with a 29.8 percent attainment rate. The attainment rate for Latinos born outside the United States is 17.2 percent. However, even among native-born Latinos, the attainment rate is 20 percentage points lower than the rate for white adults.

The report also points out that degree attainment is lower among Mexican-Americans, at 17.4 percent, than for Puerto Ricans (30 percent) and Cuban-Americans (40 percent). This ethnic diversity among Latinos means that a state like Florida, with a high population of Cuban-Americans, received an A-plus in Latino attainment and an A in the attainment change since 2000 from Ed Trust. But states like California, Texas and Arizona, with high populations of Mexican-Americans, each received a D for Latino attainment rates.

"The Latino adult population has increased 72 percent since 2000," said J. Oliver Schak, a senior policy and research associate for higher education at Ed Trust, who co-wrote the reports. "The white population has remained flat and the black population has grown about 25 percent, so it is increasingly critical for institutions and states to focus on the success of students of color and first generation."

> "We certainly think equity and racial and ethnic equity has to become much more of a focus of attainment goals in order for us to make the progress we need as a country."

The gaps differ by degree level. For instance, the gap between black and white adults at the associate-degree level is one percentage point and between Latino and white students is 3.4 percentage points. However, the discrepancy is larger at the bachelor's degree level, where 14 percent of black adults and 11 percent of Latinos have a bachelor's degree compared to 23.7 percent of white adults.

"What we have in this country is a stratified education system and stratified social system," Nichols said. "You see a lot of black and brown and low-income families iced out of four-year educational opportunities and pushed toward community colleges."

Certificates and two-year degrees can help increase employment options, Nichols said.

But "we have concerns to some extent that black and brown students will essentially be pushed toward a community college degree due to systemic inequalities in this country. We understand states are including certificates in attainment goals, and that's fine, but we want to ask states to improve so that certificates aren't the only opportunities for black and brown students," he said.

Ed Trust recognizes that those discussions on the state level may be politically uncomfortable, but they shouldn't shy away from focusing on race in reforms like guided pathways or developmental instruction, said Tiffany Jones, director of higher education policy at Ed Trust.

States will often attempt to capture black and Latino students by using terms like "at-risk" or "low-income" in policy decisions, but ultimately, they may end up losing those students because the policies are too broad, she said.

"We have to make sure race is at the center of student-success strategies," Jones said. "If states want to see outcomes, they need to rethink their investment strategy … about how to emphasize and focus on outcomes, incentives and rewards for students of color."

Howard said there are states that have recognized the importance of centering race in policy discussions to increase attainment rates. She points to efforts in Colorado, for instance, where state officials are closing equity gaps.

“Colorado made equity the centerpiece of the attainment agenda,” she said. “They went institution by institution and developed specific plans to help learners at those institutions meet specific attainment goals. And they worked with faculty to make sure they were prepared to teach a much more diverse student body.”

Colorado has a 37.1 percent attainment rate for black adults and 22.2 percent for Latinos. However, the state was ranked “above average” by Ed Trust for its large Hispanic-white and black-white attainment gaps.

“In no state did we see black or Latino degree attainment surpass that of the white population, so the work is not done,” Nichols said. “The conversation often tends to be focused mostly on income or economic status, but there is a significant amount of research that shows socioeconomic mobility and gaps cannot be explained by just income. Race is a factor.” ■

> “If states want to see outcomes,
> they need to rethink their investment strategy
> … about how to emphasize and focus
> on outcomes, incentives and rewards
> for students of color.”

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https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/14/states-struggle-close-degree-attainment-gaps-black-latino-students

The Degree Rules, for Now

> College credentials still loom large in hiring. But a new survey of HR leaders finds growing interest in skills-based hiring, online microcredentials and prehire assessments.

By Paul Fain // December 14, 2018

SOURCE: ISTOCK / BERNARDBODO

Recent headlines have touted the move by several big employers to stop requiring new hires to hold college degrees. Meanwhile, a drumbeat of studies show increasing labor market returns for degrees, and employers say they value the critical thinking skills of liberal arts graduates.

These seemingly oppositional trends are both real and on display in a new report from Northeastern University's Center for the Future of Higher Education and Talent Strategy. The report sheds light on a technology-enhanced shift in the way workers are being hired in the knowledge economy.

The traditional college degree remains by far the best ticket to a good-paying job, a well-established fact bolstered by a survey the center conducted. But the results also suggest that college leaders should pay close attention to the gradual, ongoing transformation of HR functions as well as to nascent changes in how employers view alternative credentials, particularly of the digital variety.

"The way employers relate to higher education is shifting," said Sean R. Gallagher, the center's executive director and the report's author. "It's employers getting savvier."

The center surveyed 750 hiring leaders at U.S. employers in August and September. The results are nationally representative, spanning a wide range of industries and organizational sizes.

Most respondents reported an increase (48 percent) or no change (29 percent) in how they value educational credentials in hiring during the last five years. Just 23 percent reported a decline.

A majority (54 percent) of those surveyed agreed with the statement that college degrees are "fairly reliable representations of a candidate's skills and knowledge." And 76 percent agreed that completing a degree program is a "valuable signal of perseverance and self-direction" in a job candidate.

Likewise, 44 percent of respondents said the level of educational attainment required or preferred for the same job roles had increased over the last five years. Most who responded that way (63 percent) indicated that additional education requirements were due to evolving skills needed for jobs, rather than the mere availability of candidates with better credentials, a finding that argues against conventional wisdom on credential inflation.

In addition, 64 percent of respondents said the need for "continuous lifelong learning" in the future will drive demand for higher levels of education and more credentials.

While the traditional degree's currency is secure for now, the survey found that employers increasingly are moving toward hiring based on applicants' skills or competencies. And while it remains small, the market for nondegree microcredentials is growing rapidly, according to the survey.

The report points to the increasing use of data and analytics in hiring, noting that another study found 30 percent of HR departments reporting some form of analytics usage this year, up from 10 percent a few years ago.

As a result of the increasing reliance on artificial intelligence and analytics in hiring, the report predicted that employers are likely to change their preferences for credentials.

One area where this is happening is the rise of skills-based hiring that often de-emphasizes degrees and pedigrees. These typically technology-enabled strategies involve employers defining specific skills that are necessary for the job and seeking them in candidates. As examples, the report points to IBM's New Collar Jobs project and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Talent Pipeline Management Initiative.

The survey found that 23 percent of respondents are moving in this direction, with another 39 percent reporting that they are exploring or considering such a move.

Going Online and Micro

Online credentials have become mainstream, the report states.

"Both the education market and the HR function are less digitized than many other sectors," Gallagher said, pointing to finance and health care as examples. "It's coming to education."

The survey found that 71 percent of HR officials have hired someone with a degree or credential that the employee earned completely online. However, 39 percent of respondents viewed online credentials as being second class, saying they are generally lower quality than those completed in person. Yet more than half (52 percent) said they believe that in the future, most advanced degrees will be earned online.

That hunch is backed by data the Urban Institute released earlier this week about master's degrees.

The rate of enrollment in online master's courses or programs has increased substantially since 2000, the analysis found, and is more common than in bachelor's degree programs. In 2016, the institute said 31 percent of students in master's tracks reported that their program was entirely online, with 21 percent reporting that they took some online courses.

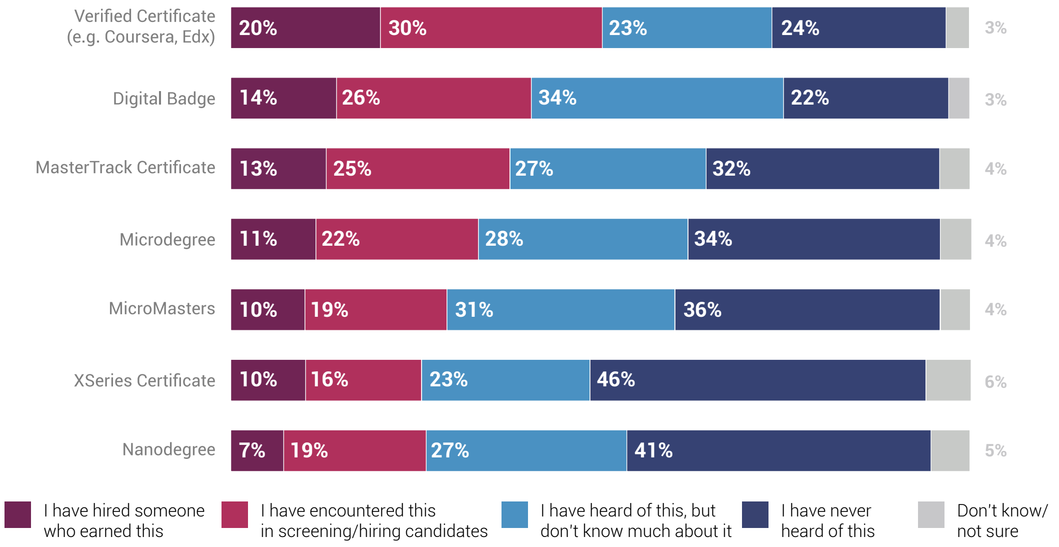
The growth of digital learning options has spawned a variety of short, subdegree awards. These microcredentials include digital badges, MicroMasters from edX and Udacity's Nanodegrees.

Awareness of these credentials in HR departments remains relatively low, according to the survey, yet still substantial. For example, 29 percent of respondents said they had encountered MicroMasters in the hiring process, and 10 percent said they had hired a candidate who had earned one. Another 36 percent said they had never heard of the credential from edX.

Microcredentials currently appear to be functioning as a supplement to degrees, the survey found. But that could change. A majority of respondents (55 percent) agreed with the statement that microcredentials are "likely to diminish the emphasis on degrees in hiring over the next 5-10 years."

The biggest near-term challenge

Figure 8. Level of Awareness or Experience with the Various Types of "Microcredentials" that May Appear on a Candidates' Resume



to the reliance on degrees in hiring, the survey found, is the use of prehire assessments such as online tests given to job candidates.

More than a third of respondents (39 percent) expect these assessments to have an impact on hiring within three years, and nearly 70 percent within five years.

Those findings build on a report Ithaka S+R released earlier this week in an attempt to map the "Wild West" of prehire assessment.

The report documented a "wave of rapid innovation" in this space. The interest is being driven in part by the perceived gap between job candidates' competencies and employers' needs, the group said, which in turn is contributing to a growing distrust by employers in "signaling credentials" such as college degrees, endorsements from industry associations, and state licensures.

"We are at the early stages of a new market, a new industry," said Martin Kurzweil, director of the group's educational transformation program.

Kurzweil co-wrote the report with two colleagues from Ithaka S+R: Meagan Wilson, a senior analyst there, and Rayane Alamuddin, associate director for research and evaluation.

As an essay published by *Inside Higher Ed* earlier this week noted, prehiring assessment faces regulatory and legal challenges in this country, including the risk of lawsuits alleging that such screening of hires is discriminatory.

Yet plenty of experimentation with the practice is occurring, said Kurzweil. The activity around prehiring assessment brings both promise and risks, he said.

Kurzweil is excited about the prospect of "hiring people based on what they can do rather than their pedigree." But the stakes are high, he said, particularly as profit-seeking companies move into the space.

The marketplace for prehiring assessments already is flooded, according to the report. Content and software across assessments and employers' human resources systems often are incompatible. And higher education administrators and industry association officials tend to be out of touch with new methodologies used by employers and assessment providers.

The time is ripe for college leaders to play a role in shaping the use of prehire assessments, Kurzweil said, such as contributing to norms around how the tools are used.

"We think higher education should be more engaged in what's happening," he said. "This is a historical force that's sweeping through. It's going to happen." ■

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Code Switch

> A coding boot camp and a liberal arts university share instructors and accreditation to create a new computer science degree, aimed at making graduates of both institutions more employable.

By Lindsay McKenzie // November 28, 2018

A Make School classroom and the Office of Admissions at the Dominican University of California

What do a coding boot camp founded by two college dropouts and a small liberal arts college founded in 1890 have in common? Quite a lot, it turns out.

Make School and the [Dominican University of California]() both want their students to be more employable. But neither one thinks they can do that entirely on their own.

In an unusual partnership, the two institutions are working together to trade expertise and share accreditation to offer degrees that combine a traditional liberal arts education with cutting-edge coding skills.

Make School is helping Dominican to create a computer science minor. In exchange, the university will teach general education to Make School students as part of a new accelerated bachelor's degree in applied computer science, which Dominican will oversee. During the multiyear "incubation" period for the degree program, Dominican will guide the boot camp as it transitions from a college alternative to an accredited degree-granting institution.

Faculty members from Dominican and Make School will teach courses jointly for the computer science program at Make School's location in San Francisco, near Union Square. The boot camp has temporarily become a branch campus of Dominican. The university's traditional campus is located about 20 miles north, just outside of San Rafael in Marin County.

Dominican conducted focus groups with its students as the university mulled whether to bulk up its computer science offerings, said Mary B. Marcy, Dominican's president.

"We were stunned by the level of interest," Marcy said.

Dominican is working toward a trial launch early next year of its computer science minor, with a plan to enroll a small number of students. But the university hopes that eventually about half of its undergraduates will take at least one course in computer science.

Make School and Dominican jointly designed the curriculum for the minor, which will be delivered by instructors from Make School. Dominican is working to develop the capacity to run the minor in-house.

The union was blessed last week by the WASC Senior College and University Commission, Dominican's regional accreditor. Officials from both institutions praised the accreditor for being open-minded and having a policy in place to make the jointly offered degree possible.

The commission's decision is an

exciting and important development for accreditation, said Judith Eaton, president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

"This is the way in for alternative providers," said Eaton. But she adds that "partnering is a lot of work."

Jeremy Rossmann, Make School's co-founder, viewed the boot camp as a "two-year college replacement" when he helped launch it in 2015. The boot camp seeks to give students the skills needed to get in-demand tech jobs in software engineering. Many people studying computer science in college weren't gaining enough relevant experience to get jobs, he argued. Make School was different -- it emphasized creating over studying.

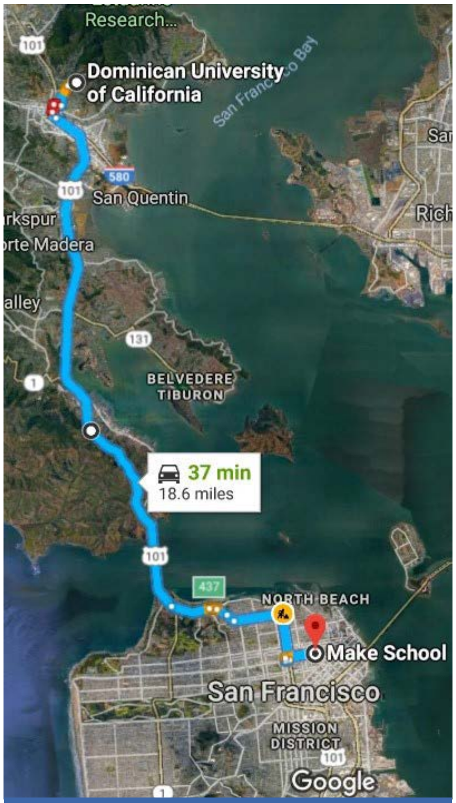
But at a time when many alternative providers are pushing digital badges and other nondegree credentials, Rossmann is headed in the opposite direction.

An MIT dropout, Rossmann doesn't want Make School to be a "college replacement" anymore -- he wants it to be a college. He wants to be able to offer his students the "safety net" of a bachelor's degree, and says the breadth of a liberal arts education will help students better understand the societal impact of technology they create.

With each iteration of Make School's curriculum, Rossmann said the boot camp started to look more like traditional higher education.

"We were really building a college," he said, adding that "we know we benefited tremendously from the liberal arts."

Becoming a degree-granting institution, however, is not easy. Rossmann knew he needed help, and he began searching for a college partner that could help shepherd Make School through the accreditation process.



Dominican University of California

It was a call that Marcy, president of Dominican, answered.

Ready for Change

Dominican, like many small private colleges, is under pressure. With an increasingly diverse student body, the university faces challenges with limited resources as it seeks to ensure that more of its students succeed.

For example, while the university's finances are sound, its endowment is roughly $33 million. That relatively small amount makes it hard for Dominican to meet the financial needs of its many low-income students.

In the past few years, the call for Dominican to teach computer science has gotten louder, said Marcy. Faculty members want their students to have better digital literacy skills, and students from all disciplines know that basic knowledge of coding could give them an edge in a competitive job market.

But Dominican didn't have any faculty members who could teach students how to build their own websites or apps, said Marcy. Creating a computer science major from scratch would cost more than $1 million, take four or five years to enroll its first students and would only benefit a small portion of the university, she said.

"We had some generalized anxieties that we needed to provide more for our students than we were," said Marcy. "But we knew that just adding a computer science degree was probably not going to work for us."

When Marcy was introduced to Rossmann two years ago, she saw the potential for a partnership. The faculty had just voted overwhelmingly in favor of significant changes to the university's general education curriculum and its organization of majors and minors. She said this "fertile, creative time on campus" meant that professors were receptive to the idea of Make School teaching their students computer science.

"Faculty just rolled up their sleeves and worked really closely with the team at Make School," said Marcy. A key concern was ensuring quality, which a faculty-led task force has overseen. Marcy was given the green light from her Board of Trustees to pursue the partnership on the condition that it would not cost the institution any money.

"Do I have worries around the margins? Sure. I want to make sure we do it right. I want to make sure that the courses are of the quality we think they will be," Marcy said. "It's a significant change for us," she said, but a "more radical change for Make School."

Geology ... for Coders?

Friday is now "Science and Letters" day at Make School. Instead of attending their regular coding tutorials, students like Jasmine Anderson now devote the last day of their workweek to physical geology, English or psychology as part of a general education pilot program the boot camp started this semester.

Anderson, a 29-year-old from Florida who previously worked in retail management, moved across the country to attend Make School to try to achieve her dream of becoming a software engineer. She didn't set out to get a degree.

Tech companies care more about hiring people with the right expertise than the right piece of paper, said Anderson. But she can see the value of a degree. "If I have experience coding and this piece of paper, that puts me above the competition," she said.

Learning about physical geology also has been surprisingly enjoyable. "I'm seeing the value as I take the class," she said. "I'm learning things that will help me in life."

Her instructor, Amy Young, is an assistant professor of physical science at Dominican. She lives in San Francisco, so her commute to Make School is easier than her typical journey to Dominican's campus. Young said she agreed to take part in the pilot because she thinks the university's partnership with Make School "is an exciting and fun idea."

Young knows her students were somewhat skeptical at the beginning of the semester.

"They self-selected for a practical education that launches them into a very specific career," she said. "They thought, 'I'm here to learn coding, why do I need geology?' But I think some of them have even started to look forward to Fridays."

Young described her students as "very driven" and said she likes how much they engage with her and ask questions.

Make School's current class is 72 percent male and 42 percent underrepresented students of color, according to the boot camp. Half of its students come from households where the annual income is under $60,000.

"They're very focused on problem solving," Young said. "They want to open up the hood and see how things work." She hopes some of her students go on to tackle environmental problems with technology. "I want them to become engaged citizens."

General education isn't compulsory for the minority of Make School students who hold a college degree. But the boot camp encourages its students to take general education courses, said Anne Spalding, dean of Make School. She said most students have reacted "very positively" to the prospect of getting a bachelor's degree in applied computer science.

"We even have alumni reaching out to us, asking if they can come back and get a degree. But we haven't figured that out yet," said Spalding.

Incubation and Accreditation

Policy makers of all political stripes often criticize accreditors for putting red tape in the way of promising innovations. But Dominican's accreditor did not prove to be a barrier to the partnership with a boot camp.

Last week the WASC Senior College and University Commission approved the affiliation between the two institutions. Marcy said the university now can begin admitting students into the new bachelor's degree program in applied computer science. And Dominican next semester will begin offering computer science courses to nonmajor students at its main campus.

The regional accreditor granted the noncollege Make School access to Dominican's accreditation -- and to federal financial aid -- under an incubation policy it created a few years ago. It's the first such incubation under the three-page standard, which allows a nonaccredited entity to evolve within the accredited university to become an accreditable one under the commission's policies.

The policy grew out of the commission's 2014 approval of degree

> "They're very focused on problem solving. They want to open up the hood and see how things work."

programs offered by the Minerva Schools through its [unusual partnership]() with the Keck Graduate Institute. That affiliation between a start-up, selective institution with a global reach and an accredited one helped the commission think through how to offer an incubation option for similar partnerships.

"We are trying very hard to help institutions be creative," said Jamienne Studley, the commission's president and CEO and a former official in the U.S. Department of Education during the Obama administration. "The standards are broad and leave a lot of room for institutions to create the programs, pathways and models."

The incubation rules require that Dominican retains academic control of the degree program. "They are responsible until the new creature is finally accredited," said Studley.

Likewise, Make School also must remain in the partnership until Dominican gains its own ability to be autonomous with its computer science offerings.

"We can't spin off until Dominican is ready to teach the minor themselves," Rossmann said. In the future, the partnership could serve as a template to bring the computer science minor to other liberal arts colleges, Rossmann said.

Marcy said creating the incubation partnership was challenging.

"The depth of the integration and collaboration -- between two very different education institutions -- is unique," she said. "It truly is an act of co-creation."

Challenging a 'False Dichotomy'

Many small colleges, particularly those without faculty members in computer science, have reached out to Dominican about the partnership, said Marcy. She said the collaboration has enabled the university to launch a series of courses in coding and app and web development with remarkable speed.

Steven Polacco, associate professor of graphic arts at Dominican, said he was "dazzled" by how quickly Make School adapted its curriculum to meet the university's standards. Traditional universities have to think deeply about things like learning outcomes as part of the accreditation process -- something Make School hadn't done previously. "We had to teach them to speak university," he said.

Polacco had pushed for a computer science minor for years. But he said it kept being put on a back burner because of the expense. Dominican graduates can find jobs in graphic design without coding skills -- but they probably can't lead teams of designers without "at least some rudimentary knowledge" of the coding language Python, Polacco said. And the new minor will change that.

Dominican is among several small institutions that are trying to "find the sweet spot" between the liberal arts and professional training, said Ashley Finley, senior adviser to the president and secretary to the board for the Association of American Colleges and Universities, who was previously associate vice president for academic affairs at Dominican.

"I think this is a fantastic lesson for other small liberal arts colleges," she said.

Marcy hopes Dominican's partnership with Make School will help "ameliorate the false dichotomy" between the liberal arts and in-demand skills training.

"Our goal at Dominican is to create more graduates who combine a strong grounding in the liberal arts with the technical skills necessary to be successful in graduate school or their careers," said Marcy.

"Some of these students will be graduates in the liberal arts and sciences. Some of these students will be computer scientists," she said. But "all of them will have the ability to think critically, communicate effectively and apply these skills to relevant work and graduate programs." ■

-- *Paul Fain contributed to this article.*

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https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/11/28/liberal-arts-college-and-boot-camp-team-offer-new-computer-science-degree

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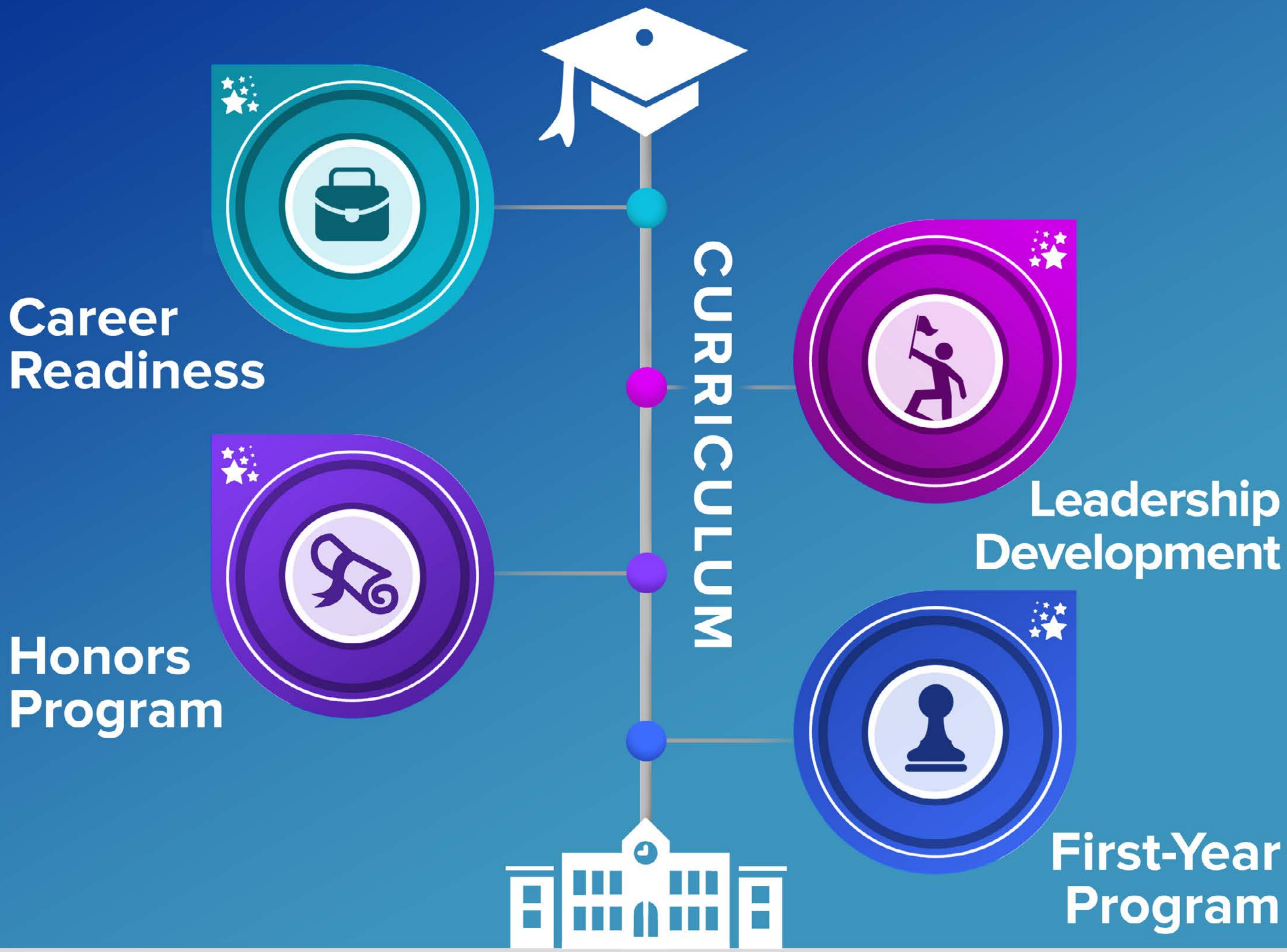

CURRICULUM

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Leadership Development

Honors Program

First-Year Program

> “Portfolium's integrated network will support our goal of advancing a holistic model of student success through guided pathways of signature curricular and co-curricular polytechnic experiences for our diverse students.
>
> **Larisa Preiser-Houy,** *Associate Dean*
> Cal Poly Pomona’s College of Business Administration

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Making an Impact in Online Courses

> Instructors are turning to high-impact practices that have proved effective in the classroom to make online course experiences more dynamic.

By Mark Lieberman // January 31, 2018

SOURCE: ISTOCK / JACOBLUND

WASHINGTON -- Educators employ high-impact practices in the classroom with the goal of keeping students engaged in the course material and developing skills they can apply in other courses and beyond. During a panel last Friday at the Association of American Colleges and Universities conference, three instructors offered insights into practices they've adopted in their online classrooms that elevate the course experience beyond conventional recorded lectures and quizzes.

Steven Greenlaw, a professor of economics at the University of Mary Washington, in Virginia, recently participated in an institution-wide study aimed at the challenges of offering high-quality instruction in online and hybrid formats. A key finding of the study, according to Greenlaw, came when looking at the potential for high-impact practices to make a meaningful difference. The term "high-impact practices" encompasses classroom activities designed to promote learning, engagement and completion. Examples of high-impact practices are in bold throughout the story; others include learning communities, practicums, supervised fieldwork and first-year seminars.

"High-impact practices work pretty much just as well in an online environment as they do face-to-face," Greenlaw said. "You just sometimes have to do things a little bit differently."

Gretchen McKay, a professor of art history at McDaniel College, in Maryland, keeps her students writing throughout her course in Byzantine art, part of the Council of Independent Colleges' effort to offer more options to students at multiple institutions through online courses. In addition to participating on discussion boards, McKay asks students to maintain a regular learning log, upon which they reflect at various points throughout the semester -- replacing class discussions that would take place face-to-face. Active reflection in this **writing-intensive** environment helps them deeply process and more easily recall the material, even at a distance.

Greenlaw incorporated writing-intensive elements into his introductory economics course, which is populated mainly by residential students who opted for the online option. His instructions for writing papers were identical to those for face-to-face students, but he gave online students the option to turn in early drafts for feedback before they submit the final version.

One of the key projects in McKay's course is a **collaborative** writing assignment -- using image searching to document classical visual references in *The Paris Psalter*, a Byzantine illustrated manuscript from the year 1133. Though the logistics of partnerships between students who don't have physical access to each other might seem daunting, McKay said she lets the partnerships form organically, and her students have generally managed to equally distribute the workload through email communication.

The finished products end up occupying an online digital humanities project that collects student work around Italo-Byzantine art, helping McKay hit two more high-impact practices: **student content creation and student-faculty collaboration**.

Collaboration within assigned three-person study groups was similarly fruitful in Greenlaw's course, though he was never able to avoid the reality that "certain students didn't want to play the game." He also held a synchronous weekly Google Hangout, during which he fielded questions and offered some lecture. The videos were immediately archived after recording wrapped up, and most students returned to them at least once, Greenlaw said.

At St. Edward's University in Texas, Rebecca Frost Davis, director of instructional and emerging technology, collaborated with her institution's academic affairs department, instructional designers and other faculty members to create an online version of her **capstone** course when she heard that many students had already fulfilled their other requirements and left the university -- to apply for medical school or otherwise prepare for their postgraduate careers -- but still needed to complete this last course.

The learning objective is for students to think critically and apply moral reasoning to complex problems, and to make reasoned decisions about issues in accordance with their values. Davis asked students to choose a policy issue, write about it from multiple perspectives and ultimately determine their own position.

To prevent the exercise from becoming overly insular and academic, Davis incorporated a **community-based learning** element: requiring students to complete interviews on both sides of the issue with experts. Motivating students to complete this task was a challenge, Davis said, until she scaffolded the assignment by requiring proposals for interview subjects early on.

Expanding Definitions

Friday's panel ended with an opportunity for audience members to weigh in with ideas for incorporating high-impact practices in their own classrooms. A photography professor, for instance, said she incorporates **peer review** by requiring online students to draw each other's photographs using only a written description.

Jesse Stommel, executive director of the division of teaching and learning technologies at Mary Washington, said during that portion that he wants to see informal, self-motivated discussions considered as a high-impact practice of sorts. In his face-to-face classes, he sometimes starts class by asking how students spent their weekends, and students sometimes approach him after class for free-flowing conversations that last 10 minutes or more.

He thinks creating an environment where similar spontaneity can flourish would make a high impact as well. ■

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Building Community for Part-Time Students

> Officials at Boston's Bunker Hill Community College are finding that students are more likely to re-enroll in learning communities that offer mentors and additional advising.

By Ashley A. Smith // August 28, 2018

Bunker Hill Community College

Research has shown that the more college credits students take per term, the more likely they are to graduate -- and on time.

Many colleges and states have responded to those findings and implemented new programs, offered incentives and enacted policy that encourage students to pursue at least 12 college credits per semester to graduate on time within two or four years. But every student can't attend college full-time.

That recognition led Bunker Hill Community College to refocus how instructors and advisers engage part-time students. The college started requiring the students to take learning community seminars and then adapted the seminars to fit the needs of students.

A report from the Center for American Progress found that the seminars specifically increased retention and persistence among part-time students. Marcella Bombardieri, a senior analyst at CAP who authored the report, said Bunker Hill could be a model for other colleges across the country looking to improve part-time student performance.

Although offering learning communities and accommodating students' schedules isn't new or unique, especially in a community college setting, what Bunker Hill is doing is different.

"The biggest thing that is different is that part-time students are targeted," said Bombardieri, who has been approached by several organizations interested in Bunker Hill's model since the report was released. "That's who they're paying attention to and that's what distinguishes them from a lot of the conversation about increasing completion."

There have been a few initiatives around the country directed at helping part-time students, but they've mostly focused on increasing the number of credits students earn and encouraging them to attend college full-time, she said. Bombardieri cited the City University of New York's well-regarded Accelerated Study in Associate Programs as one example.

Evelyn Waiwaiole, executive director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin, also considers CUNY's program beneficial. But when it comes to helping part-time students who plan to continue attending only part-time, she said the typical approaches she hears from colleges are that they stay open later and provide services that accommodate students' schedules.

"When students are connected, they are engaged," she said in an email. "If students are in learning communities, they are connected to their peers. It's no surprise the outcomes are changing."

There are other colleges that have restructured how they offer classes in order to help part-time students. Trident Technical College in South Carolina, for instance, altered courses by dividing semesters into seven-week periods. Furthermore, if students at Trident Tech choose to withdraw after seven weeks, they don't lose the credits they accumulated.

Odessa College in Texas uses eight weeks of accelerated learning instead of the traditional 16 weeks to increase academic outcomes for part-time students, said Karen Stout, president and chief executive officer of Achieving the Dream, a completion-focused nonprofit group, of which Bunker Hill is a member institution.

"What's interesting about Bunker Hill's work is that it's inside the classroom," she said. "It's the designing and linkage of courses that's exciting."

Stout has been critical of initiatives that solely work to encourage part-time students to take on more credits than they can handle.

"This data from Bunker Hill is promising and presents a lot of questions," she said. "Can we go further with the intentional design of the part-time student experience that borrows from the best high-impact practices that work for full-time students in the learning community design?"

At Bunker Hill, students attend the seminars, for which they can earn college credit, for a few hours each week to study a single topic or theme that is relevant to their major or life experiences. The seminar topics may range from Becoming a Teacher to Parents as First Teachers, Sports Psychology: Success in Sports & Life, or Latinas: A Culture of Empowerment.

The seminars are culturally relevant, rigorous and tied into student supports, said Lori Catallozzi, dean of humanities and learning communities at Bunker Hill.

"They give part-time students more of an advantage because they won't get that anywhere else from the college."

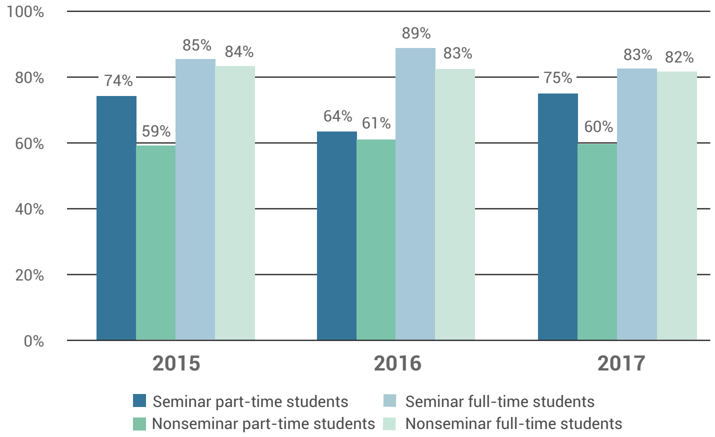
While these seminars have long shown academic benefits for full-time students, in 2013 Bunker Hill began requiring first-year students with at least a nine-credit course load to also attend the seminars after administrators saw higher rates of students re-enrolling.

For instance, in 2017, 75 percent of part-time students who attended a fall seminar remained enrolled in the college the following spring, compared to 60 percent of part-time students that did not attend a seminar. In 2016, 49 percent of part-time students who enrolled in a seminar re-enrolled in the college the next year compared to 41 percent of part-time students that did not attend a seminar, according to data from the college.

FIGURE 1

Persistence in Learning Community Seminars

Newly enrolled students who took a fall seminar and remained enrolled in the college the following spring

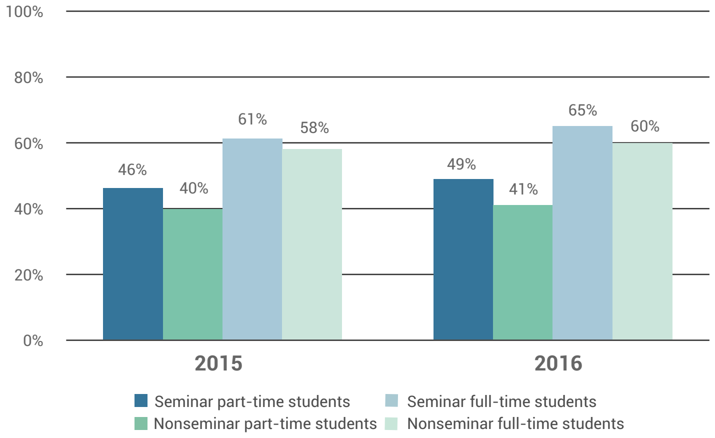


Note: The nonseminar comparison group is newly enrolled students not in a Learning Community Seminar.
Sources: Data were prepared by the Bunker Hill Community College Office of Institutional Effectiveness and provided to the author through email and phone communications between May and July 2018 with Amanda Collgan, Director of Institutional Research, and Lori A, Cataliozzo, Dean of Humanities and Learning Communities.

FIGURE 2

Retention in Learning Community Seminars

Newly enrolled students who took a fall seminar and remained enrolled in the college the subsequent fall



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About 4,700 of Bunker Hill's nearly 14,000 students enrolled in a learning community seminar last year. More than 2,100 students were part-time for at least one of the semesters during which they took a seminar. About 65 percent of the college's overall enrollment is part-time.

In Bunker Hill's learning community seminars, student mentors participate in every class and help their peers with issues that arise outside the classroom, such as problems with off-campus housing. Success coaches are also on hand to help students develop their career skills or map academic plans.

"When I think about the life of a part-time student here, they're more likely to come for a couple of classes and then they're leaving for family reasons … leaving for full-time jobs," Catallozzi said. "Their lives are more complex and fuller than full-time students'. If they're going to benefit from support services or a sense of integration with the college, or relationships with faculty or peers, it'll happen in the classroom."

Some part-time students who come to the Boston campus in the evenings and on weekends may find student advising or support offices understaffed or closed. But success coaches or academic advisers are always present and available to students in the seminars, said Arlene Vallie, director of learning communities at Bunker Hill.

"Those are the things that make a difference," she said.

Bunker Hill offers three types of seminars in the evenings and on weekends to accommodate the schedules of part-time students.

One seminar focuses on a topic that may be of interest to students and includes a peer mentor and success coach who works alongside the instructor. Another learning community is taught as a "cluster" seminar where a group of students takes two courses together in the same semester and the professors coordinate and plan their instruction around common themes. The college recently introduced the success coaches and peer mentors to the cluster seminars. The third seminar is a professional studies community, which is available for students majoring in fields such as information technology or nursing. These students are required to take the professional seminar as part of their degree plan, and they are also paired with coaches and mentors.

Bombardieri said that while increasing enrollment and getting students to take more classes is a worthy goal, she and her colleagues are concerned that the push to increase the number of full-time students excludes those students for whom attending part-time is the only option.

A report last year from CAP indicated that part-time students are often overlooked by colleges and policy makers. The report showed that about one-quarter of exclusively part-time students graduate and slightly more than half of the students who attend part-time during their college career earn a degree. Meanwhile, 80 percent of exclusively full-time students attain a degree.

"When I talk to people in the community college, they generally say, 'Most of our students are part-time and everything we do is for part-time [students],' " Bombardieri said. "I know they mean that, but at the same time they aren't necessarily looking specifically at that population and how their needs might be different."

The challenge for Bunker Hill administrators is taking what they know works and expanding it to more students, Bombardieri said. She said it would also be interesting to look at the effect of learning communities on part-time graduation and transfer rates.

Although Bunker Hill is still analyzing the data in the CAP report, Catallozzi said discussions are under way about expanding the learning community requirement to students who are enrolled in classes totaling at least six credits, and adding internships and apprenticeships as components. ■

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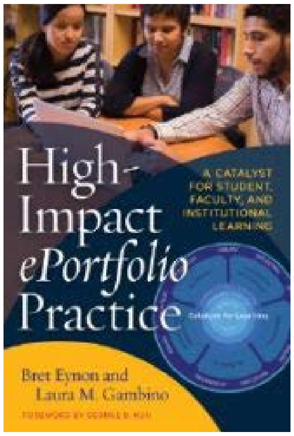
https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/08/28/bunker-hill-sees-increase-part-time-retention-and-persistence

Getting the Most Out of ePortfolios

> Authors discuss new book on how colleges and students can gain the most from an increasingly popular tool.

By Scott Jaschik // February 13, 2017


High-Impact ePortfolio Practice
A CATALYST FOR STUDENT, FACULTY, AND INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING
Bret Eynon and Laura M. Gambino
FOREWORD BY GEORGE D. KUH

About half of all colleges report some use of ePortfolios, in which students create a digital archive that tracks their learning progress and demonstrates knowledge and skills gained in college. But are colleges and their students all engaged in best practices? Probably not, suggests a new book, *High-Impact ePortfolio Practice: A Catalyst for Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning* (Stylus).

The authors are two educators at community colleges of the City University of New York: Bret Eynon, associate provost of LaGuardia Community College (a pioneer in ePortfolios) and Laura M. Gambino, associate dean for assessment and technology Guttman Community College. Via email, they answered questions about their new book.

Q: ePortfolios aren't new. How are they different these days than in the past?

A: There's a lot that's new. ePortfolio technology is becoming more fluid, supporting creative design and visual storytelling. And ePortfolios are increasingly linked with emerging learning technologies, such as digital badges and digital planning and advisement (or IPASS) tools. More importantly, we now recognize that ePortfolio is more than a technology, it's a technology-aided practice, guided most effectively by integrative social pedagogy. Reflective ePortfolios make student learning visible, creating opportunities for students to integrate their learning and share it with others, in the classroom and beyond. Finally, we now have powerful evidence that demonstrates the impact of sophisticated ePortfolio practice on student, faculty and institutional learning. That evidence was crucial in persuading George Kuh and the the Association of American Colleges and Universities to recently add ePortfolio practice to the list of recognized and validated "High-Impact Practices."

Q: You both work at community colleges. Are ePortfolios particularly helpful to those in community colleges?

A: The 24 campuses of the Connect to Learning (C2L) network -- the basis of our research on the impact of ePortfolio -- included Research I universities, public comprehensives, and liberal arts colleges, as well as community colleges. Evidence from a constellation of campuses -- from Rutgers University, San Francisco State University, and Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis, as well as LaGuardia, Tunxis and Queensborough Community Colleges -- showed that ePortfolio practice "done well" correlated with improved learning and student achievement (grade-point average), higher levels of retention, and accelerated progress to the degree. Like all high-impact practices, there appears to be a compensatory benefit to "new majority" students, many of whom start in community colleges. But it's clear from our research that students in many different settings benefit from integrative practices that help them connect education and lived experience, build a greater sense of agency, and engage in processes of what Marcia Baxter Magolda calls "purposeful self-authorship." That's the underlying power of integrative ePortfolio practice, and it's widely applicable.

Q: Many faculty members are dubious of assessment methods that they view as too standardized. How can ePortfolios work in assessment to impress those demanding assessment but maintaining the individuality of courses, instructors and students?

A: Great question. ePortfolio practice can help move assessment past numbers and standardized tests, typically used when assessment focuses on accountability. ePortfolio practice helps to ground assessment in authentic student work, facilitating faculty ownership of the assessment process. Seeing the connection to their own students and their own classroom practice helps build faculty engagement with assessment. Equally importantly, an inquiry process based in this connection expands opportunities for "closing the loop," helping faculty design and implement changes in practice that actually improve student learning. That's the bottom line for anyone interested in assessment. In our experience, pairing ePortfolio-based outcomes assessment with the assignment design "charette" process developed by Pat Hutchings and others at the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) can be particularly valuable in deepening these efforts.

Q: How can colleges help faculty members who are new to ePortfolios learn about them?

A: The two word answer is "professional development." But the value of professional development activity is not limited to faculty who are new to ePortfolios. We found that well designed and broadly inclusive professional development was a crucial indicator for effective ePortfolio initiatives. We all have to work together to invent the integrative social pedagogies that help students connect learning across courses, disciplines and semesters. Professional development that engages faculty with Student Affairs staff and peer mentors is critical to efforts to link academic experiences with co-curricular learning, advisement or life experience. We found that professional development was particularly productive when it involved sustained processes that combine inquiry -- using the classroom as a laboratory -- with reflection on the implications for faculty's evolving practice or craft.

Moreover, professional development linked to ePortfolio offers exciting opportunities to bring student work into the conversation, and to highlight longitudinal nature of student learning and development. That shifts the conversation from "my course" to "our students," and that's transformative.

Q: Your book talks about doing ePortfolios right. What are some of the common challenges to doing so -- and how can colleges get the most out of ePortfolios?

A: ePortfolio is not a simple "plug and play" technology. Our research suggests that the biggest challenge to realizing the promise of ePortfolio practice is that it requires faculty and colleges to think about student learning and growth in new ways. The richest ePortfolio learning emerges when students use it to connect learning in multiple courses, across disciplines and semesters. And integrating academic learning even more broadly -- linking with mentoring, co-curricular experience and community-based learning -- only adds power.

But this is a challenge for us, as individual educators and as educational institutions. To make this happen, we have to see our courses and activities as part of a larger whole, and to work together more effectively across departments and deeply rooted institutional divisions. As Randy Bass has written, if we want our students to learn and think integratively, colleges must begin to plan and act in a more integrative fashion. Done well, ePortfolio practice can stimulate or catalyze that effort. That's why our guidelines for ePortfolio "done well" -- the Catalyst Framework for High Impact ePortfolio Practice -- encourages colleges to link integrative pedagogy and digital technology with professional development and authentic assessment in a strategic scaling process. If we do that, we not only help students, we also help our colleges become more cohesive and agile learning organizations, prepared to adapt and thrive in our fast-changing learning ecosystem. ■

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We Can No Longer Ignore the Slump

> Colleges and universities must build on first-year programs to help sophomore students define the questions that will guide their academic journeys, write Sarah Barber and Robert Thacker.

By Sarah Barber and Robert Thacker // September 29, 2017

SOURCE: ISTOCK / DEBENPORT

Everyone in higher education has heard of the sophomore slump. At most colleges and universities, first-year students are welcomed, encouraged and provided programs and services designed to help them navigate new academic expectations and build social networks. But they often come back the following fall with an unavoidable question: "So what do I do now?"

No longer new yet usually without a major (at least at liberal arts colleges) and still seeking a firm social place in the community, many sophomores lack focus and drift. They get into trouble, drop out, get sent home, transfer.

Higher education can no longer ignore the sophomore slump. The sophomore year is the toughest year in college -- it is where retention lives. We have to build on first-year programs to empower sophomore students to define the questions that will guide their academic journeys, to identify the opportunities and activities that will lead to their desired postcollegiate careers, and to develop relationships with faculty members, staff members and peers who will mentor them along the way. Individual institutions will have to determine their own approaches, remaining true to their mission and values. But retaining sophomores should be the overriding goal.

> "Higher education can no longer ignore the sophomore slump. The sophomore year is the toughest year in college -- it is where retention lives."

"Sophomore" derives from the Greek *sophos*, meaning "wise," and *mōros*, meaning "fool." Keeping that notion in mind as we envision and design programs for sophomores is probably a good start. Scholars who have focused on the sophomore year, such as Molly Schaller of Saint Louis University and Julie Tetley at the U.S. Air Force Academy, have also advocated for a combination of academic and social programs directed solely toward sophomores. Those programs include dedicated housing, enhanced live-in academic advising, career and major-discovery programs, programs that single sophomores out and acknowledge their presence, and courses specifically designed to help second-year students answer vexing questions about their place and purpose on the campus and beyond.

At St. Lawrence University, we have been working on those questions for about a decade. While we have a longstanding and robust yearlong program for first-year students, like most institutions, we have long known about and acknowledged some of the usual slippage during the sophomore year -- especially between the spring of the first year and the declaration of a major during the spring of the second year. During that time, students, especially young men, often avoid advisers, struggle with time management and overembrace new freedoms from parental and academic structures -- all of which results in them neglecting their academic work.

We have, however, taken steps of the sort suggested by Schaller and Tetley. Under the aegis of a 2007 grant from the Teagle Foundation, we worked with colleagues at Colorado, Connecticut and Skidmore Colleges to learn about the academic and social circumstances of sophomores at liberal arts colleges, and we then produced a white paper. Based on both quantitative and qualitative data gathered at each college, this paper recommended a variety of initiatives, still quite pertinent, that encourage sophomores to define and explore the goals that animate them within the liberal arts. We began by surveying our students about their interactions with their academic advisers, the challenges they felt, their campus involvements and their overall satisfaction. Those results led each college to initiate high-impact programs focused on sophomores.

While those program offerings varied at each institution, we all reconsidered our advising structures and set about designing complementary initiatives. At St. Lawrence, we created a menu of sophomore seminars and held discussion dinners. The seminars were shorter than usual courses, designed to feel different and focused on questions of personal values. (Two sample titles: "The Meaning of Life" and "What's Important to Me?") These seminars have continued and, through a 2016 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, we are in the process of expanding them as a central element in a program we have called Sophomore Journeys.

Some of our new Sophomore Journeys seminars feature the same type of practical, hands-on, experiential learning that students so often praise in our successful first-year program. Students learn how to create podcasts and documentary videos or explore techniques for designing and assembling books. Other seminars have community-based learning components, like a book group with community members or a semester-long project with a partner social services organization. Still others will address pressing contemporary issues like the diversity of ways to practice Islam; the impact of the sport on national discussions of race, identity and policy; or how to evaluate the influence of Twitter on a presidency.

Every Sophomore Journeys seminar in our rotating menu of courses offers sophomores significant mentoring from faculty members outside the normal structure of office hours through teas and coffees, shared meals, and field trips. And every faculty member who teaches a sophomore seminar receives

> "Students, especially young men, often avoid advisers, struggle with time management and overembrace new freedoms from parental and academic structures -- all of which results in them neglecting their academic work."

extra training on how to integrate into classroom discussions advice about selecting a major, obtaining internships and pursuing research opportunities, as well as how to talk more comfortably with students about their extracurricular activities and residential and social environments.

Many institutions, not just liberal arts colleges, can adapt these strategies. Where targeted classes for sophomores may not be possible, departments and programs can reshape their foundational courses and expand elective offerings with an appeal to sophomores in mind. Where overtaxed advisers must restrict their focus for efficiency's sake to course selection or graduation requirements, colleges and universities can build peer-to-peer mentoring networks.

Attention to the sophomore year works: during the decade ending in 2016, St. Lawrence's first-year-to-sophomore-year retention has held steady at about 90 percent. But more than numbers, important as they are, colleges and universities have an implicit pedagogical and moral imperative as teachers of undergraduates. The cost of ignoring the sophomore slump is not just lost tuition dollars when we fail to retain our sophomores. It is less engaged, less motivated juniors; it is seniors uncertain about their futures after graduation. Institutional culture and reputation depend on how we help sophomores shape their own best answers to the question "So what do I do now?"

Enticing high school graduates to our institutions implies the responsibility of providing direction and support throughout each of a student's years on campus. On students' arrival and first adjustment, and during the years focused on the major, we all know well how to proceed. But now, and most especially, we need to keep focusing on the sophomore year as our "wise fools" seek to find their way -- helping them in discovering passions and direction, finding the modes that work, and leading them where they want to go. That's just what they should do now. ■

Bio

Sarah Barber is an associate professor of English at St. Lawrence University. Robert Thacker is the Charles A. Dana Professor of Canadian Studies and English and was the first associate dean for academic advising programs at St. Lawrence University.

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/09/29/how-improve-retention-sophomore-students-essay

Let's Focus More on the First Year

> Students enter college hoping it will be a major step up from what they were doing before, writes Roger Martin, but they are often disappointed.

By Roger Martin // February 29, 2016

SOURCE: RMC.EDU

Do we have our priorities backward?

It has long been a truism in American higher education that junior and senior year are seen as at the top of the curricular pecking order. That is when the major is taken and, frankly, that is where most of our senior faculty really prefer to teach.

First year, on the other hand, is seen by many of us as less important. And because of this, guess who is often assigned general education and introductory courses? Adjuncts, graduate assistants and our most junior faculty.

It's almost as though introductory and general education courses that define the first two years of college are what students get through as quickly as possible so that they can get to the good stuff in their third and fourth years -- that is, upper-level courses and the major.

But this view is out of sync with what many prospective college students and their parents are thinking. In a book I recently wrote about the transition from high school to college, virtually all of the high school seniors I interviewed, along with their parents, hoped that the first year of college would be a major step up from what they were doing in high school. But they are often disappointed.

At many colleges and universities, first-year students take large introductory courses in classes of 100 or more. Teaching is usually done by an instructor lecturing in front of the classroom while students dutifully take notes later to be regurgitated on a quiz. There is very little class participation involving discussion and debate. Writing anything over a few pages is unusual.

Arizona State University has gone even further. They are offering a Global Freshman Academy that allows first-year students to take their courses by the use of MOOCs (massive open online courses). Students won't even have to leave the comfort of home to complete their first year! First year is seen as a means to an end, with the end being upper-level courses and the major.

But I would argue that the first year of college is far more important than this -- perhaps, in some ways, just as important as the final years of college.

Why do I believe this?

- First year is when college students get a sound, cross-disciplinary grounding in the liberal arts and sciences, especially those who go on to vocational majors like engineering or nursing. The liberal arts are where they learn how to think critically and how to communicate effectively, skills that are crucial for a generation that will have many different careers in their lifetime.
- First year to sophomore year is when attrition is at its highest. When I was a college president, 20 percent of first-year students at my institution didn't return for their

sophomore year. Some transferred, but many dropped out of college altogether. Why does this happen? In far too many exit interviews I have seen, dropouts say that they found their first-year classes meaningless.

I will never forget the admissions tour I took at a well-known university with my youngest daughter. We were in the university's amazing library, and the tour guide, a sophomore, was bragging about the fact that most of his teachers were graduate assistants. "They're really cool," he said, "and understand our generation," whereupon a mother standing next to me uttered sotto voce (but loud enough for everyone to hear), "Why am I paying a small fortune to have my child taught by someone who is only a couple years older than she is?"

That parent was articulating what many parents I interviewed for my book were saying: for $50,000 or more per year, the expectation is that their children will be taught by experienced faculty with the requisite credentials, not by part-time employees or graduate students.

Of course, many of the instructors assigned to introductory or general education courses including adjuncts and graduate students are quite capable teachers. But I believe that first-year students could really benefit from also being taught by senior faculty members who excel in the classroom. In many ways -- and I know this is heretical -- assistant professors who just completed their Ph.D. dissertations are probably the most capable of teaching the major that requires up-to-date knowledge of their discipline. Senior faculty, on the other hand, who through wisdom and experience have a wider view of the world are, in my opinion, the most qualified to teach general education courses designed to give first-year students a broader perspective on human knowledge and, in the process, excite them about what will come later.

Increasingly, colleges are coming to see the crucial importance of the first year. At one college I feature in my book, the freshman writing seminar is largely taught by the college's most distinguished and experienced senior faculty, who are handpicked because they are also master teachers. First-year advising is also being given a new emphasis. At far too many colleges, advising is relegated to new faculty who have limited knowledge of the curriculum or to adjuncts who have equally limited office hours. But many colleges, realizing that solid advising reduces attrition, are assigning experienced faculty who are skilled at advising or professional advisers to first-year students.

For these colleges and universities, the first year has been given a new priority.

I'd like to end by saying that there is money to be raised by rethinking the first year, which should make presidents who are reading this article happy. I believe that philanthropic individuals and foundations, concerned about the cost of higher education and the human waste when students prematurely drop out and don't graduate, will resonate to programs that support first-year students and keep them in college. I'm talking about:

- Innovative first-year general education programs that challenge and excite first-year students through active learning (including discussion, debate and writing) so that they don't want to leave college.
- Endowed writing centers and other support systems that can save kids who come to college with academic deficiencies.
- Endowed first-year opportunity programs that keep underserved and first-generation students in college.

Attrition is enormously expensive. A college of 2,000 students like my own that loses 20 percent of the first-year class potentially forgoes $5 million or more in tuition, room and board, which for many colleges is more than the development office raises each year in the annual fund.

In summary, by putting more energy and resources into the first year I believe we keep more of our students in college and thereby cut down on the enormous human waste when otherwise good students prematurely leave college with outsize debts they can't pay back because they are unemployable. At the same time we improve our bottom line by not losing so much in tuition dollars. Most important, we graduate students for whom education from the very beginning is a pleasure, not a hardship to be endured. ■

Bio

Roger Martin is president emeritus and professor of history at Randolph-Macon College. He is the author of Off to College: A Guide for Parents. This essay is based on a presentation at the Council of Independent Colleges' Institute for Chief Academic and Chief Advancement Officers.

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/02/29/we-must-pay-more-attention-first-year-college-essay

Why Students Are Anxious About Employment

> Many young people have precious little experience in the working world -- which makes it more incumbent on universities (and their faculties) to help prepare them better for it, Ryan Craig argues.

By Ryan Craig // June 16, 2017

SOURCE: GETTY IMAGES

I got my first real job at the age of 15, as a busboy at Oliver's Bakery Restaurant, one of Toronto's busiest brunch spots. I have so many intense memories from that job -- unquestionably Proustian from the strong smells (fresh-baked rolls) and tastes (café truffle torte, still the best dessert I've ever had) to bringing Sunday's first customer, Lois (always arriving before the waitstaff), her coffee and blueberry muffin; polishing wineglasses with steam from a pot of hot water; learning how to punch orders into the computer system (I still recall all the modifiers for eggs -- sunny side up, anyone?); and being bullied.

When I started, I was the youngest busboy by at least two years. A senior busboy -- let's call him Gord, and not just because most Canadian males are named Gord or Gordie -- would take coffee from my coffee station, often putting an empty pot back on the burner, leaving burned coffee on the bottom (hell to clean). He'd also put his dishes in my bus pans, requiring me to empty them twice as frequently and doubling my exposure to that pervasive restaurant toxin "bus juice," the dark gray sickly-sweet-smelling liquid at the bottom of each bus pan -- my one bad Proustian memory from that job. Finally, he'd collect tips from the waiters and short me every time.

It's been a while since I've been bullied, but last week I had my first experience on Twitter. In reaction to a recent piece on the link between faculty control of curriculum and the challenge of aligning curriculum to employer needs, a number of faculty members on "Academic Twitter" took to our president's favorite medium to denounce the argument and me personally.

Ad hominem attacks aside, several academics found "outrageous" the notion that aligning curriculum with employer needs was a goal that faculty members shared. One prominent professor with an army of over 21,000 followers said, "Sorry, that isn't a shared goal. It is a questionable goal, in fact." She then went on to dismiss the notion that students are focused on employment, saying, "The research shows today's students consider community and family [not employment]." Another who was more accepting of the notion that students might care about getting a good first job said, "That's a labor-market problem that is not going to be solved by the educational system."

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It's clear that many professors simply don't believe New America's finding that today's students enroll in postsecondary programs for what appear to be mundane reasons: to improve employment opportunities (91 percent), to make more money (90 percent) and to get a good job (89 percent). So if colleges and universities are going to do a better job addressing this now pre-eminent student need, it's going to be important for faculty members and administrators to understand why employment has become so important to students.

One reason is the exceptionally poor employment outcomes experienced by college graduates during the Great Recession. Most students have older siblings or friends who were underemployed -- often significantly -- for many years. But if this is the main or only reason, employment concerns should diminish as memories of the Great Recession recede (like the fading Lehman Brothers logo on the coffee mug I keep in my bathroom).

But I don't think they will, because there's a deeper reason for this shift: most young people have little exposure to paid work.

When today's college and university instructors were in high school, even if they weren't working as bussers during the school year, it's likely they worked over the summer. Maybe they scooped ice cream, delivered papers, mowed lawns or worked as lifeguards. But as *Bloomberg* reported last week, last summer only 43 percent of 16- to 19-year-olds were working or looking for a job -- down from nearly 70 percent a generation ago. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts teen work force participation will drop below 27 percent by 2024.

Why is this occurring? *Bloomberg* cites crowding out by older workers and immigrants. Other explanations are stricter teen driving laws and compressed summer calendars. But the most plausible explanation is that jobs like busboy have been devalued by society in general -- and parents in particular -- as useful steps on the road to a successful career.

> “Sadly, by broadly awarding credits for unpaid internships, many colleges and universities are enabling this system of internship peonage, thereby furthering young people's distance from paid work.”

Instead, students are being encouraged to study and participate in as many extracurricular activities as possible in order to burnish their college applications. Jeff Selingo noted as much in his *Washington Post* column last week, quoting one expert as saying, “Upper-middle-class families and above have made the determination that college admissions officers devalue paid work and that if you're not pursuing a hectic schedule of activities you'll be less appealing to colleges.”

I agree with Selingo that sacrificing paid work at the altar of college admissions and the almighty bachelor's degree has not only been shortsighted, but harmful. As Selingo noted, his job in a hospital kitchen “was probably the worst job I ever held, but it was the first time I wasn't surrounded by my peers, so it taught me how to interact with people of all backgrounds and ages. I also learned the importance of showing up on time, keeping to a schedule, completing tasks and paying attention to details (after all, I didn't want to mess up a tray for a patient on a specific diet).”

So whereas college and university faculty members developed their soft skills in hospital kitchens -- and while I learned to navigate jerks like Gord -- their students are at a material disadvantage in this regard (providing some basis for employers' increasing complaints about the soft skills of millennials).

This disconnection to paid work has been exacerbated by the rise of unpaid internships during and after college. The National Association of Colleges and Employers reports the percentage of college graduates participating in at least one internship is now over 80 percent (up from less than 10 percent a generation ago). Technically, unpaid internships are illegal unless the employer is a nonprofit organization, or unless interns receive college credits. Sadly, by broadly awarding credits for unpaid internships, many colleges and universities are enabling this system of internship peonage, thereby furthering young people's distance from paid work.

The result is that for most millennials -- and now Gen Z -- there's no sense of easing in to paid work, no gradual evolution. It's now binary: at the end of college, switch off childhood and switch on employment and adulthood. The anticipation of this sudden shift is producing a great deal of anxiety around the issue of employment, and the first paid job in particular. (An anxiety that today's faculty, Selingo and I never felt because we all had a sense we were employable -- maybe not in the jobs we wanted, but we had a clear sense we would be able to get by.) Of course, the crisis of college affordability and the concomitant mountain of student loan debt means this anxiety is all the more acute.

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I recall a similar sense of anxiety back at Oliver's. When I was promoted to waiter at the age of 17, I was often tasked with Section 6 -- the restaurant's largest section, closest to the front with appealing window-side tables. It was all too easy for hosts and hostesses to accede to customer requests and seat all the tables at the same time. And when it inevitably happened -- switch from deserted section to a dozen tables demanding coffees and delicious desserts like the insanely amazing café truffle torte -- I'd find myself in the weeds, literally in a dreamlike-state, unable to process what to do next. Whenever I got Section 6, I spent the whole shift dreading this moment. As I think about it now, while being in the weeds was taxing, the extreme negative feelings I still have for Section 6 can only be explained by the fact that the anxiety was worse.

So when it comes to employability and aligning curriculum to meet employer needs so students are more likely to get a first job, academics could be more understanding. Many of their students are dreading graduation, paralyzingly anxious at the thought of being in the weeds in terms of paid work.

Perhaps the real reason I was bullied last week is that this topic gives many professors anxiety about their own future employment. But as we've learned, it doesn't have to be a binary shift. By talking it through and getting the faculty comfortable with the inevitable evolution of our system of higher education to one that is more aligned to employer needs, I'm hoping to alleviate some of this anxiety. ■

Bio

Ryan Craig is managing director of University Ventures, a firm reimagining the future of higher education and creating new pathways from education to employment.

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/06/16/why-college-students-are-anxious-about-employment-essay

What Assessment Is Really About

Measuring student outcomes is ultimately about trying to improve teaching and learning, and professors should both support and lead such efforts, writes Kate Drezek McConnell.

By Kate Drezek McConnell // March 1, 2018

SOURCE: GETTY IMAGES

The text came in when my cell signal returned, just as our car crossed over the eastern slope of the Allegheny Mountains. My mother's message read simply: "On the front page of the opinion section … below the fold and half of page 6. Mailing to you Monday." My husband, daughter and I were on our way home from a weekend in the mountains of West Virginia. My mother, 11 hours north of us in Boston, was enjoying her Sunday routine, which always involved the print version of *The New York Times*. I had told her to keep an eye out for an opinion piece that was posted electronically at the start of the weekend, one that had those of us in higher education buzzing about it since it hit.

This was a first for me: my vocation was being called on the carpet in the *Times* by a fellow academic. My chosen profession, higher education assessment, was reduced to pithy descriptions like "bureaucratic behemoth" and "supposedly data-driven" and "expensive administrative bloat." I had to laugh at the sudden fame bestowed upon my rather inside-baseball profession. In a family full of cops and lawyers, I often struggled to say, precisely and concisely, what I did for a living. In contrast, my brother gets to tell people that he is the real-life inspiration for Agent Callen on *NCIS*: Los Angeles. My story? Much less exciting.

For years my shorthand answer to the "And what do you do for a living?" question was that I helped colleges and universities make sure that they fulfill the promise of their brochures to students and parents. According to Molly Worthen, in her piece entitled "The Misguided Drive to Measure 'Learning Outcomes,'" I was at best a well-intentioned if unwitting collaborator with for-profit technology companies, reactionary academic leadership and demanding employers, against which she -- an assistant professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill -- and others like her stood ready to defend the life of the mind. While my colleagues on the assessment professionals' email list dissected her argument line by line, my heart went out to the individuals who work in assessment at Chapel Hill. Though I do not know them personally, it is not a large stretch of the imagination to think that the coming workweek would be a difficult one.

Worthen's op-ed covered an ambitious amount of territory under the guise of addressing measuring student learning: perceived cracks in the regional accreditation system, states' divestment in public education, larger societal ills thwarting the ability of institutions of higher learning to educate, and even former education secretary Margaret Spellings herself, providing perhaps unintended proof of the beautiful, important significance and continuing power of academic freedom, considering Spellings's current position -- president of the

University of North Carolina system, and therefore Worthen's boss. I will leave it to others in a better position than me to address what I see as Worthen's false dichotomy between the life of the mind and the dignity of work, the deficit-model positioning of socioeconomic status in her argument, and issues of institutional inequity, and focus exclusively on her conceptions of assessing student learning.

As someone who spent the better part of the last 15 years working on campuses in assessment and evaluation, I know firsthand the joys and challenges inherent to that role. I fully recognize that there are places where "assessment" remains a dirty word and faculty expertise is not included as part of the process.

That said, such examples should not define assessment writ large. In my current job as senior director for research and assessment at the Association of American Colleges and Universities, I have the unique privilege of working with faculty and assessment professionals (individuals who, frankly, are often one and the same) across the spectrum of institutions, from the flagship state institutions and elite private colleges and universities that dominate any number of prestige rankings to the community colleges, four-year regional comprehensives and less-than-elite regional private institutions, a.k.a. the rest of higher education, which happen to be the institutions that actually educate the majority of today's students.

> "It is time faculty fully adopt the mantle of educator and demand of themselves the same rigorous standards for ascertaining student learning as they do to establishing the credibility of their own disciplinary research."

And what do I work with them to do? Precisely the opposite of the kind of assessment described by Worthen. Well before I joined the organization, at a time when simplistic quantification of learning was the coin of the realm, AAC&U championed the role of faculty expertise in teaching, learning and assessment and created an alternative approach to standardized tests, the VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubrics. For the uninitiated, rubrics are simply an explicit articulation of (1) faculty expectations of students vis-à-vis their learning, as well as (2) descriptions of what student work looks like at progressively higher levels of performance.

And how did AAC&U create the VALUE rubrics? By engaging interdisciplinary teams of faculty members from across the country to author the rubrics, and then making them available to everyone, for free, via a simple Word or PDF download from our website.

The rubrics themselves are now almost a decade old and have proven to be an essential resource locally to campuses as well as the foundation of national-level experiments in assessing student learning. Philosophically, pedagogically and methodologically, VALUE is designed to afford faculty the opportunity to flex their creative muscles and capture evidence that the curriculum they own and the courses they teach do indeed promote students' development of the very learning outcomes that are essential to a liberal, and liberating, education.

Far from a reductionist tool, research has demonstrated that the VALUE rubrics empower faculty members to help translate the learning that takes place when a student completes an assignment they crafted, one that aligns with and promotes disciplinary knowledge, and -- at its best -- gives students not just the requisite skills for the single assignment, but also advances the ultimate purpose of college teaching: long-term retention of knowledge, skills and abilities and the ability to transfer those skills to a completely new or novel situation. Translation: no "one-off," single exam question should ever "count" as a proxy for student learning along complex constructs like critical thinking. The educational psychologist in me rails against such simplistic conceptions of learning, and our approaches to assessment must do so as well.

But the elephant in the room is this: doing so requires that faculty be all in when it comes to undergraduate teaching. Threaded throughout Worthen's piece is a vision of students coming to our campuses (if not her own) laden with baggage, whose deficits, when coupled with unreasonable demands from callous lawmakers or corrupt capitalists, doom them to failure. Intentional or not, Worthen's opposition to assessing student learning reads as but a strawman for a much more harmful argument: protecting the life of the mind by writing off entire segments of our society from the intellectual and, yes, economically transformative power of higher education.

It is time faculty fully adopt the mantle of educator and demand of themselves the same rigorous standards for ascertaining student learning as they do to establishing the credibility of their own disciplinary research. And yet ...

Worthen's perceptions do not come out of a vacuum. Whether the result of her own lived experience or the powerful anecdote shared by her colleague at Arkansas State University, those of us who represent the field of assessment must not dismiss her concerns out of hand. As someone representing a national organization, I am now in a position to say certain things to faculty and administrators that I would not necessarily have been empowered to say when working on a campus. Of late, that includes truth telling to members of my own tribe.

Last fall, I was invited to give the closing keynote for the 30th anniversary of the Virginia Assessment Group, the state's association for assessment professionals, for which I twice served as president when I was still working at Virginia Tech. In my talk, I challenged my Virginia friends -- all of whom care deeply about student learning at the individual level and a high-quality educational experience at the institutional level -- to look in the mirror and have an honest conversation with the person staring back at them.

My thinking on this has evolved and sharpened over the past few months -- months that included attending at least one regional accreditation meeting as well as AAC&U's annual meeting, aptly focused on whether or not higher education can recapture the elusive American dream. With all of this in mind, I say to my fellow travelers working to measure student learning:

- If your definition of quality is methodologically reductionist, then assessment is not for you.
- If your conception of learning does not encompass the inherent complexities of making meaning within and integrating across disciplines, then assessment is not for you.
- If you see black and white when the world of the mind radiates color and nuance, assessment is not for you.
- If your sole claim to fame is memorization of accreditation standards, then assessment is not for you.
- If you cannot reflect on your own path as a learner, then assessment is not for you.
- If you cannot stretch to be what your faculty, institutions and students need you to be, then assessment is not for you.
- If you cannot speak truth to power, including your provost and president, then assessment is not for you.
- If you cannot promote collaborative processes on your campus, have no tolerance for ambiguity or cannot listen and really hear the concerns of the likes of Worthen, then assessment is not for you.

It is incumbent upon us -- those of us with responsibility for measuring and then sharing what we know about student learning on our campuses -- to belie the easy stereotype of the bureaucratic bean counter, and to avail ourselves of every opportunity to center our work within the teaching enterprise, just as it is our responsibility to counter any and all strawman arguments about what it is that we value.

As we descended in elevation to our home in the Blue Ridge, despite the tone of Worthen's piece, I found myself excited that the assessment narrative has evolved to its current state, and looking forward to continuing the work into the future. ■

Bio

Kate Drezek McConnell is senior director for research and assessment at the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

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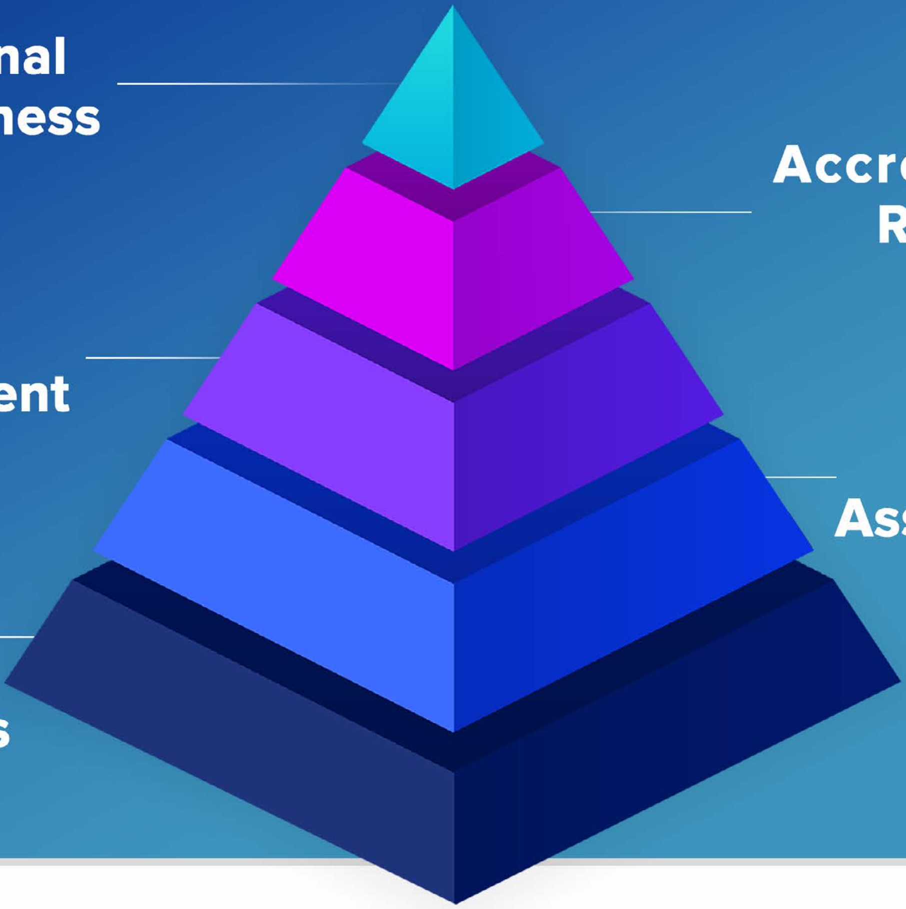

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A Faculty Stand on Assessment

> To do justice to students and as a matter of professional duty, faculty members should be at the center of defining and measuring undergraduate learning outcomes, argue Josipa Roksa and Richard Arum.

By Josipa Roksa and Richard Arum // June 1, 2016

SOURCE: ISTOCK

The higher education lore is that faculty members cannot agree on anything. Like other myths, this accepted folk wisdom is far from the truth.

Indeed, over the course of our careers, we have repeatedly observed faculty members coming together collaboratively to address the challenges faced institutionally or in higher education more broadly. More recently, we have been heartened and inspired in particular by those who spent the last several years grappling with a fundamental question: what should students learn in higher education?

Instead of ignoring external pressures to measure and improve college outcomes, faculty members came together under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council's Measuring College Learning Project, which we have helped lead, to address these pedagogical challenges. Faculty members in six disciplines -- biology, business, communication, economics, history and sociology -- engaged in invigorating discussions, lively debates and difficult conversations. Supported by their disciplinary associations and encouraged by their collaborative spirit, they have articulated frameworks for defining learning outcomes in six disciplines and the principles for assessing learning outcomes in the 21st century, as described in the recently released *Improving Quality in American Higher Education: Learning Outcomes and Assessments for the 21st Century*.

In our work, we have found that faculty members readily agree that higher education is not about efficient acquisition of surface content knowledge and the simple regurgitation of memorized facts. That does not mean that content is unimportant. Content is indeed crucial, but primarily as a building block for more complex forms of thinking. Faculty members are eager to get students to apply, analyze and evaluate from their disciplinary perspectives, to acquire a disciplinary mindset and think like a biologist or an economist.

Faculty members across disciplines in the MCL project rather quickly coalesced around "essential concepts and competencies" for their disciplines, which represent ideas and skills that faculty believe are fundamental to the discipline, valuable to students and worth emphasizing given limited time and resources.There are similarities across disciplines including an emphasis on analytical writing and problem-solving, but these generic skills take form, are defined and are honed within specific fields of study. They are not abstract ideas, but concepts and competencies that faculty members engage, develop and deploy in their work and value in their disciplines.

Faculty members are also often seen as resisting assessment. But, in fact, what they resist are simplistic assessments of student learning that focus on recollection of knowledge, rely on blunt instruments and are narrow and reductionist. They resist, as would all other professions, externally imposed mandates that fail to reflect the complexity of their jobs or that misrepresent the purpose of higher education. But they also believe that what they are doing makes a difference -- that they are teaching students how to see the world in a new light -- and they would be eager to have the tools to demonstrate their contributions to the development of student cognitive capacities.

Constructive conversations about learning outcomes and assessments require the proper context and frame. That is rarely offered in a world in which we in higher education are on the defensive, trying to argue against externally proposed accountability measures based on distal labor market outcomes, instead of being proactive and making the case on our own terms. There is no shortage of proposals in the public sphere about what higher education should do. But those conversations often lack the voices of faculty members, who are the professionals with responsibility for defining, enabling and assessing what students learn.

The faculty should be at the forefront of the conversations about the purposes of higher education and thus at the center of defining and measuring undergraduate learning outcomes. That is not only a matter of professional duty but also of doing justice to our students. Students from all backgrounds and institutions should have an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

Years of institutionally incentivized grade inflation and proliferation of course titles have all but made transcripts irrelevant. In our research, we found that most employers do not even ask to see them. And while some recent efforts have aimed to add extracurricular activities and other accomplishments to college transcripts, none of those tell us what students actually know or can do. Taking a class is not the same thing as mastering the concepts and competencies presented. Being a member of a club similarly says little about the skills a student has developed.

In addition to placing faculty and student learning at the center of the conversation, the MCL project is committed to recognizing the complexity of what higher education aims to accomplish and ensuring that any measure of learning is part of a larger holistic assessment plan. The project focuses on the disciplines. That does not preclude making sure that students are also civically minded and globally competent. It only means that we need to be clear about which part of the puzzle one hopes to address with a disciplinary focused initiative.

The MCL project is committed to ensuring that institutions use assessment tools on a voluntary basis. We have elaborated elsewhere the pitfalls of externally imposed accountability. Only by willingly looking in the mirror will higher education institutions make progress toward improving student learning outcomes.

While assessment should be voluntary, it need not be a solitary endeavor. Collaborating with other institutions makes us not only realize that we all face challenges and struggle with current circumstances but also offers insight into possible ways forward. Measures of learning outcomes must be of high quality and comparable, so they can allow multiple institutions to use them and share their insights. Governed by the principle of continuous improvement, assessments -- albeit limited and imperfect -- are necessary tools on the road toward reaching our goals.

As we look toward the future, we are excited and energized by the commitment and thoughtfulness of the faculty members who participated in the MCL project. They have put forth a bold and forward-thinking vision for the future of learning and assessment in their disciplines: a set of frameworks that will be subject to ongoing iteration and improvement in the years ahead. Instead of waiting for the storm to subside, these faculty members and their disciplinary associations have tackled the challenge head on. They have paved the way for a more promising future. ■

Bio

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