

# Community College Students and the Pandemic

**INSIDE**  
HIGHER ED

By Madeline St. Amour

A compilation of *Inside Higher Ed's* most important coverage of how the global pandemic and economic crash are affecting U.S. two-year college students.

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# Reporter's Letter

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After the COVID-19 pandemic struck, many predicted a future where community colleges grew in enrollment and in importance. Students would opt for their local community college to keep costs low and stay close to home in this time of uncertainty. Adult workers would return to community colleges, as they often do in recessions, to learn new skills and get better jobs.

But that hasn't happened. Instead, the sector, which serves nearly half of undergraduates, is grappling with record enrollment declines. As of late September, enrollments were tracking 9.4 percent below where they were the previous year, according to an early indicator from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Community colleges are still more important than ever—for their students and their communities. *Inside Higher Ed* has been covering the sector and issues that affect it throughout the pandemic. Much has changed since March, and much will continue to change as we move forward into 2021. This collection of reporting should serve as a resource for community college administrators looking for ways to better serve students during this tumultuous time and for faculty members who want to learn more about what their students are experiencing.

This booklet does not include every aspect of how this crisis has affected community colleges and their students. Instead, it provides insight into some of the most critical considerations for these institutions as they move forward. How can they better support students—financially and socially? How are their peer institutions adapting to teach students in a virtual age? What struggles lie ahead? The stories in this booklet are arranged by topic so you can quickly flip through to what issues most interest you.

First among them is a piece of exclusive reporting. I talked with several students in different parts of the country and pored over student surveys to better understand how community college students have been doing since March. The pandemic has forced many different experiences onto these students—some difficult, some eye-opening, some surprising. The one thing they all have in common is a determination to move forward with their education.

Sincerely,

**Madeline St. Amour**

Reporter, *Inside Higher Ed*

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# Student Life and Learning

- The pandemic is affecting all the aspects involved in students' transition to young adulthood.
- Students need colleges to deploy social support strategies to help them feel connected.
- High rates of suicide contemplation among people of traditional college age point to a need for colleges to invest in counseling and mental health services on campuses.
- The populations that community colleges serve are more likely to have experienced trauma during the pandemic. They'll often need more support to continue their education after losing loved ones to COVID-19 or getting sick themselves.
- Emergency funds for basic needs like food and rent are a must in normal times. Now, those funds are needed even more—possibly to cover internet bills or funeral expenses.
- Simply moving lecture-based classes online because of the pandemic is likely to fail vulnerable students.
- Faculty members need training and professional development to do well in online environments—whether fully online, hybrid, asynchronous, asynchronous-like or synchronous.
- Asynchronous online courses can be particularly helpful for community college students, who have a range of needs and other demands on their time in addition to being students.
- Asynchronous learning is not students learning on their own. It is learning at a time that suits them best. Faculty members still have to be deeply involved.
- Find mixes of asynchronous and synchronous learning styles that match particular courses, topics and groups of students.
- Building community and humanizing online learning increases students' chances of being successful.

## How the Pandemic Disrupted Students' Lives

Community college students were hit with academic, professional and personal challenges as the coronavirus disrupted normal life.

### Special to this Publication



SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/DAMIRCUDIC

Jonathan Ramirez was enrolled in the pre-nursing program at Long Beach Community College before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

He lived with a roommate in a converted garage in Los Angeles. To make money, he drove for the ride-sharing service Uber.

When the shutdowns began, his roommate decided to move out—the day before rent was due. The landlord demanded Ramirez, 28, pay the full amount or leave. Without a proper lease or contract, Ramirez was forced to leave his home.

He brought most of his things to a friend's house for storage, keeping two bags for himself to live out of while couch-surfing. At first, he kept driving for Uber. In normal times, he would make about \$12 an hour after deductions. After things shut down, he wasn't making any-

thing—and he was paying Uber \$220 per week to rent one of the company's vehicles while his car's transmission was broken.

Unable to justify the cost, Ramirez stopped working. He used an application on his phone, since he didn't own a computer, to look for jobs through a temporary job agency. Sometimes he got lucky. But most opportunities had dried up.

Ramirez has little in the way of close family. He continued to bounce between friends' houses to shower, sometimes sleeping on couches or floors, other times spending the night in his car.

With no permanent home or income, Ramirez went to Long Beach Community College's website to drop his classes for the spring.

Instead, he saw a tab about emergency aid. He filled out an ap-

plication, and the college provided him with a loaner Chromebook for the fall. A few weeks later, the college called him, asking about his situation.

Ramirez explained that he was homeless, and college staff told him about weekly grocery drives on campus and at a community organization called Jovenes. Ramirez called Jovenes as soon as he received the information, met with organization representatives the next day and was put up in a hotel for the weekend. On Monday, he moved into a house he would share with roommates.

"I just cried of joy," Ramirez said. "I was in shock."

Jovenes helped him create an education plan. In a few months, the organization will help him pay for a studio or shared apartment. Long Beach Community College

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also paid the remaining balance Ramirez needed to get his car's transmission fixed.

As the country opened up over the summer, Ramirez found more steady work. As of the fall, he was helping to reorganize aisles and products at Lowe's. He would work 10 hours overnight, return home to sleep and then turn to homework.

"It all just happened so fast. It was like, wait, I have financial aid, my car is fixed, I have a roof over my head?" Ramirez said. "I'm so grateful."

Ramirez's story sounds like it should be an outlier, especially in one of the wealthiest states in one of the richest countries in the world. But he's not alone. He's one of many community college students who faced immense difficulties after the novel coronavirus rattled the country. Even students who are relatively privileged dealt with the challenges of isolation and loneliness while trying to continue their education.

### Overwhelmed

Every Learner Everywhere, an organization devoted to using technology to improve teaching and student success, partnered with GlobalMindED, a nonprofit dedicated to closing equity gaps, and the Equity Project, a consulting firm focused on equity, to survey just over 100 students in September. Their survey is unique because it focused only on students who are constituting the new majority in higher education—those who are first generation, adults, students of color, disabled, from rural areas or low income.

One-quarter of respondents questioned returning to college in the fall.

"Students felt extremely overwhelmed," said Jessica Rowland

Williams, director of Every Learner Everywhere.

The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University surveyed more than 38,000 students between April and May to see how the pandemic was affecting their lives. It assessed food insecurity over the prior 30 days and housing insecurity at the time of the survey's completion.

Nearly three in five respondents said they were facing some kind of basic needs insecurity. At community colleges, 44 percent of respondents said they faced food insecurity, and 11 percent said they were homeless due to the pandemic.

It's not hard to understand why. A 2018 report from the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University found that 70 percent of full-time students are working. One-third of working students lost a job due to the pandemic, according to the Hope Center report. Basic needs insecurity was highest among those who had lost a job or suffered pay cuts.

Josseline Cruz, 23, is majoring in business administration at Northern Virginia Community College. She has a 4-year-old daughter and is expecting her next child in December.

Before the pandemic, she worked at a cardiac diagnostics lab. She lost her job because her employer didn't want her to get sick while pregnant. Her employer gave her some assistance at first, but now she is relying on unemployment compensation.

"I honestly thought working was hard, but not working, especially having a kid with you, has been very difficult and overwhelming," Cruz said.

She lives with a woman who is like a second mother to her, and

## WHAT STUDENTS SAY

We asked students what community college leaders could do to better support them. Here are their answers:

### Communication is key

- Make sure faculty members and advisers are consistently talking with students and working with them as they navigate problems.
- Professors should reach out to students one on one to see how they're doing.
- College leaders should initiate connections with students.

### Faculty behavior matters

- Faculty members should dedicate class time to talking about current events.
- Train faculty members to use available technology to make classes more engaging.

### Make support programs work

- Raise awareness about student support programs. Tell students about those programs through multiple avenues.
- Train faculty and staff on what's available so they can also spread the word.
- Find ways to normalize asking for help.

### Connect campus to remote students.

- Require students to meet with advisers at least once so they feel more connected to the college, even if they can't go to campus.
- Create ways for students to connect and talk to each other even while remote.



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they reached an agreement to pause rent payments.

But Cruz still faced difficulties. When the pandemic started, she wasn't hearing back from professors or her adviser.

"It was just like, everything crumbling down to the point where I thought I was going into depression mode and I was getting anxiety," she said.

She withdrew from her spring classes to reset. After losing her job, she decided to focus on college completely. With help from a coach from Generation Hope, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization that helps student parents complete college, Cruz drew up a plan for the summer and fall.

But the spring semester left her with financial aid issues. Cruz said she was passed around from office to office when trying to apply for financial aid remotely. She had to pay tuition up front, so she could only afford one class in the fall semester, even with the help of a scholarship from Generation Hope. She didn't end up qualifying for emergency aid.

"This has put me back about two semesters," she said.

### Reaching Students

Economic stress is leading to mental health issues in some cases. Half of the respondents to the Hope Center survey said they had at least moderate anxiety. About half of respondents from community colleges said they couldn't concentrate on schoolwork during the pandemic.

"Many of our community college students have always faced some sort of barrier, but I think it's just magnified even more now," said Brian Mitra, dean of student affairs at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, N.Y., and a subject

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Dean of student affairs, Kingsborough Community College  
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matter expert for the Jed Foundation, a nonprofit focused on preventing suicide in young people.

These students may have lost study spaces on campuses, lack technology to complete their online courses or struggle with the virus's effects on their families and friends.

The switch to telehealth services both helped and hurt efforts to support students during the pandemic, Mitra said. On one hand, caseloads were easy to switch over to an online format, and in some cases students find it easier to meet with a counselor online. On the other hand, outreach to students has been harder.

"Those days of tabling in hallways and going into classrooms are gone," Mitra said.

Kingsborough used social media to meet students where they were, he said. That may be difficult for colleges that don't already have a strong presence on social platforms. But institutions should also update websites with the latest information for mental health services and inform faculty of the services, too.

Faculty members are on the front lines, Mitra said. They can notice when students seem off, or when a potential warning sign is hidden in students' writing.

Once counselors receive a referral, the pandemic has created a more laborious process of phone calls and follow-up emails.

"It takes now six or seven interactions just to reach out to one student," Mitra said.

Ashley García, 18, is studying music education at El Paso Community College in Texas. Her first year at college didn't start how she imagined it, proving to be a stressful time.

She lives with her parents, who go to work and run essential errands. Every time they leave the house, García worries that they'll catch the coronavirus—especially when El Paso saw a resurgence of cases.

"It's very scary," she said.

Her instructors were supportive. She had a talk with one of her professors that helped ease her mind. Faculty have been understanding of what students are going through right now, she said.

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García thinks it would be beneficial for professors to reserve a class, or at least some class time, every so often to ask students how they're doing and how they may need help. Without someone prompting them to discuss their problems and extending a helping hand, students can quietly slip away.

"Many people won't tell you what's going on, and then one day they're gone," she said. "We're not always going to tell you how we feel, because we're scared."

If professors spent time during class or in one-on-one chats asking how students are doing, it may make a difference.

## Hands-Off Learning

The efficacy of online learning is another obstacle highlighted in the survey by Every Learner Everywhere. An overwhelming majority of respondents, 90 percent, said they were comfortable using online learning technology, but their professors were not.

"Students really wanted faculty to be better trained in the software," Rowland Williams said. "There was a lot of variability in the experiences that students had from course to course, in terms of the quality of the instructor."

Several students didn't feel they were learning as well in the remote environment. Some professors seemed hands-off, they said.

Lluvia Gutierrez, 26, is studying criminal justice at El Paso Community College. She's juggling two children and a job at a restaurant on top of college.

Online learning has been difficult for her. Most of her professors told students to read their textbooks and then answer questions. Learning on her own without lectures or discussions is difficult, she said.

Communication was also lack-

ing. She emailed one professor with questions on her homework and didn't receive a response back until three weeks later, she said.

"You can't tell somebody to read and do a handout and expect them to learn the material," Gutierrez said.



Daniel Christman studies engineering at Northern Virginia Community College.

Lab work also became harder in an era of remote learning. Daniel Christman, 23, studies engineering at Northern Virginia Community College. His lab courses were much easier in person, he said. An activity that would've taken him 30 minutes to finish normally started taking hours as he navigated an online lab platform.

He found support among his peers by starting servers on Discord, an online messaging platform. That helped students ask classmates questions about homework or lectures, creating a sense of community during remote study, he said.

Christman also faced variability in his online courses. Two of his professors in the fall semester used the technology well, making it simple to see assignment due dates, he said. They also engaged students throughout their lectures and provide short breaks.

His other two professors proved less tech savvy, though. They tended to lecture for three hours straight, leading Christman and others to suffer from Zoom fatigue.



Kyra Childress says her professors sympathized with students who struggled to adapt to online learning.

Kyra Childress, 20, struggled to learn at home. She attends Long Beach Community College and is more of a hands-on learner.

"Now I'm just trying to turn in work without really understanding it," she said.

Fortunately, her professors were understanding. They also struggled due to the pandemic, so they sympathized with students and extended deadlines, Childress said.

## Thinking Ahead

Community colleges face challenges themselves. Fall enrollment dips are concerning.

"A lot of it right now is about the lack of confidence in higher education," said Christina Hubbard, senior director of strategic research at EAB, a consulting firm.

Especially worrisome is that community colleges did try to adapt—they offered online courses, hybrid courses and mini semesters.

"They've always been some of the most agile institutions out there, yet when push came to shove, students didn't put their trust there," Hubbard said.

Part of it may be that many community colleges chose to remain online for the fall semester, which Hubbard said was a wise choice from a public health perspective



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because their populations are constantly coming and going from campus. But it's also that community colleges are not offering the experience many students envisioned.

Hubbard is confident students will come back. But higher education was a risky bet for vulnerable students as of fall 2020.

"This was not the time to take on more risk," she said.

Two-year colleges and their faculty members should be strongly communicating how they can support students, Hubbard said.

It's a complex issue, as some community colleges held back on promoting their emergency aid funds from the spring federal stimulus package, the CARES Act, because they worried about running out, said Paula Umaña, director of institutional transformation at the Hope Center.

"Had colleges been more transparent and the Department of Education been more clear about the limitations, everyone would've been

able to do a better job," Umaña said.

Colleges also need to improve processes to get aid. Confusing application systems can lead students to make mistakes or give up altogether, Umaña said. In the April-to-May survey, few students reported applying for aid. Many thought they weren't eligible, or they simply didn't know how to apply, she said.

It's also important to ensure the application process doesn't stigmatize needing help, Umaña said. If applications require students to "perform their poverty" by providing letters and documents, students can be traumatized, she said.

"It's difficult enough to come to [someone for help]," she said. "Why do you want to get all this paperwork and make them prove they're deserving?"

This could also help remove the stigma for students who are too embarrassed to ask for help. Ramirez, from Long Beach, felt embarrassed to get the aid he did. It took some time, but he's now moved past that

feeling and just feels grateful for the assistance.

"It's part of the culture of the institution," Umaña said. "There's no magic formula for all institutions."

How colleges adapt to support students and raise awareness of the supports they offer will be critical for how the future plays out, Hubbard said. The effects of the recession and pandemic are likely to continue at least into the spring and summer, so it's still possible more students will start seeking out education to boost their resumes.

Students who are on the fence need to be given reasons to be confident about enrolling in higher education.

"As an industry we need to be communicating to students that we're here to support them," Hubbard said. "In the past, students had a general sense of what higher education looked like. All of that was thrown out the window with the pandemic." ■

## The Moment Is Primed for Asynchronous Learning

Experts argue that asynchronous learning is a valuable tool, especially now. But it needs to be done in a thoughtful way to help students succeed.

September 16, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/FIZKES

Most instruction at community colleges remains remote this semester as the COVID-19 pandemic stretches on.

Some are concerned that remote instruction will further widen [equity gaps](#) among students. [Previous research](#) shows that students who take courses online are less likely to persist than their peers who take courses face-to-face, and underrepresented minority students have lower performance than other groups, like Asian American students, in online courses.

But experts in online learning argue that it's the way a course is designed, not whether it's synchronous, that determines whether a student will succeed.

"For community college students in particular, because they're usually

nontraditional students, asynchronous learning is really useful," said Sean Morris, senior instructor of learning design and technology at the University of Colorado at Denver and director of the Digital Pedagogy Lab. "In our current situation, asynchronous learning is the way to go."

The Instructional Technology Council, which does research at community colleges, doesn't collect data on how many colleges are using an asynchronous model versus a synchronous model, but its board members said their colleges are using a combination of learning models, with asynchronous being the most commonly used.

Karen Stout, president and CEO of Achieving the Dream, a network organization of community colleges, said their members don't

choose between the two, but rather use both depending on what they're teaching.

"Most colleges we work with are offering both but ensuring faculty have the professional development they need to deliver effectively whether using asynchronous, synchronous or a hybrid," Stout said in an email.

Asynchronous learning does provide more flexibility, she said, which is helpful for community college students, who are already more likely than students at residential four-year colleges to have [several responsibilities](#) outside of their classes. Many are older, 15 percent are single parents and more than half work at least part-time jobs. The pandemic adds another layer of burdens, as parents may have to

# The Moment Is Primed for Asynchronous Learning

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help their children learn at home or take on extra jobs to make up for a family member's lost income in the recession.

"In those situations, the concept of showing up at a certain time is unthinkable and discriminatory," Morris said.

What it comes down to is how the course is designed. Simply moving a lecture-based class (which can be ineffective for some students even when done in person) to an online format is not going to work for more vulnerable students, said Jessica Rowland Williams, director of Every Learner Everywhere, a network of organizations aiming to improve teaching and learning with technology.

"What we need to start asking instead is, how do we distribute the benefits of learning across a broad range of learners?" Williams said.

Community colleges may typically serve adult learners who are better at self-motivation, but they may start to see more traditional students enroll to save money during the pandemic. First-time freshmen may not have the skills necessary to do well online.

But there are solutions, Williams said, like peer support groups so students can help each other build those skills while building community along the way. Faculty should also give students options. They can make synchronous class events optional and provide a recorded version, Williams said. This way, students who need to work or care for children or family won't fall behind because of scheduling conflicts.

It's similar to webinars for professionals, which are often recorded and provided after the event so that people can view them on their own time, she said.

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## How do we distribute the benefits of learning across a broad range of learners?

**Jessica Rowland Williams**

Director, Every Learner Everywhere

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"We need to afford students the same luxuries that we afford ourselves in our professional lives," she said.

Student engagement is another key factor for success, Morris said. He advocates for "synchronish" remote teaching, where students learn at the same pace but don't work together at the same time.

"So everyone feels like they're part of something, but it doesn't have to happen at a single moment," he said, adding that faculty can also use chat tools so that students can reach out with questions and feel connected to their teacher.

For example, people from 20 different time zones attended the Digital Pedagogy Lab's annual event, making it impossible to host synchronously. Instead, the event used discussion forums so people could connect.

Faculty can also use tools like Google Docs and Hypothesis to let students annotate documents or websites. Their peers can then respond to their annotations and build conversations, he said.

Above all, faculty have to avoid making online learning feel transactional.

"The idea of 'post once, reply

twice' needs to die," Morris said, referring to a popular assignment for courses that use discussion boards. Faculty should ask open-ended questions so that students can have a dialogue that produces knowledge, rather than reproducing it to prove they did the reading, he said.

Faculty can also choose when synchronous learning is necessary, said Jennifer Mathes, CEO of the Online Learning Consortium. Rather than requiring students to show up each time, faculty can instead use synchronous learning for especially complex topics that would benefit from real-time discussion.

It's also up to faculty members to build their presence when using asynchronous learning styles, Mathes said. They can do this with videos welcoming students to a new week, sending announcements via video or reaching out individually to students.

And while research exists arguing against asynchronous or online learning, saying that it can broaden equity gaps and leave students less engaged, there's also research supporting the model, Mathes said. Online courses have been shown to [boost outcomes](#) for community college students, and other re-

# The Moment Is Primed for Asynchronous Learning

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search shows that taking steps to [build community](#) or [humanize online learning](#) raises the chances of student success.

"I've talked with faculty who saw asynchronous learning as being totally on your own. That's what you have to be careful of," Mathes said. "You can have an asynchronous class, but you've got to make sure that the teacher is also present in that class in different ways."

Providing meaningful feedback

to students, beyond a simple grade or comment of "great job," is one important aspect of this, she said. Faculty should also participate in discussion forums along with students.

Faculty need training and professional development to learn these strategies and improve their online teaching, Mathes said.

While that could mean more time, money and effort for colleges, it's worth it, because asynchronous

learning can increase college access, Morris said.

"When you're asking people to do something that looks more like our idealized vision of what college is — living on campus, not working — that ends up being discriminatory, because so many people can't participate in that," he said. "Asynchronous online learning has to be available to anyone who needs it, and it absolutely needs to get better." ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/09/16/dont-dismiss-asynchronous-learning-experts-say-improve-it>



## Pandemic Increasing Suicidal Ideation

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a dramatic rise in mental health problems. Experts urge colleges to invest in mental health services, rather than slash their budgets.

August 17, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/LORENZOANTONUCCI

One in four people aged 18 to 24 seriously contemplated suicide in June, according to new research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The [data](#) are the latest in a series of reports highlighting increases in anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

The data do not have a breakdown for college students, but they do break responses down by age groups. People who are in the traditional age group for college students seem to be especially vulnerable to mental health issues, compared to other age groups, and experts believe colleges should be investing more in mental health services during this time. With the ongoing

recession, though, some worry that counseling and other services will be on the chopping block.

"I think mental health services are an 'easy' thing, in some people's minds, to cut," said Nadine Kaslow, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Emory University and past president of the American Psychological Association. "I'm very worried."

If you or someone you know is thinking of suicide, call the 24-7 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or text TALK to the Crisis Text Line at 741-741.

The CDC surveyed about 5,400 people in the last week of June on how their mental health has been during the pandemic. About 41 percent reported at least one

negative mental health issue, including symptoms of anxiety or depression, or increased substance use to cope with stress.

Over all, about 11 percent of respondents said they had seriously considered suicide over the past 30 days. Those aged 18 to 24 were significantly more likely to report this, with 25.5 percent saying they had seriously considered suicide. Those identifying as members of minority groups and essential workers were also much more likely to report considering suicide.

Rashon Lane, a behavioral scientist at the CDC who authored the study, said it's important to recognize that these identities can intersect across different populations.

"It's important to think through

## Pandemic Increasing Suicidal Ideation

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how we can provide mental health services to be more culturally appropriate," she said.

Lane recommends using social support strategies to help young adults feel more social connectedness, as well as offering more comprehensive treatment options for students, like harm reduction services.

"Collectively, we're seeing some troubling or concerning patterns," she said.

Of those aged 18 to 24, about one-quarter also said they had increased their substance use to cope with the pandemic, and about three-quarters reported facing at least one adverse mental health symptom.

Alongside the CDC data, other reports predict the pandemic and recession will lead to a rise in suicides. The [Well Being Trust](#) predicts there will be as many as 75,000 "deaths of despair" from the pandemic, stemming from substance misuse or suicide. [Other research](#) has shown the relationship between unemployment and suicide rates.

"It's almost as if everybody is psychologically carrying a heavy load of packages," said Victor Schwartz, chief medical officer at the Jed Foundation, a non-profit that advocates for the mental health of teens and young adults, and clinical associate professor of psychiatry at New York University. "If you were in a hot place carrying a bunch of bags uphill and not knowing how long you had to go, that would cause physical stress and symptoms."

This is the psychological equivalent, Schwartz said.

He worries that colleges are going to slash their budgets, including those for mental health services,

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Colleges will  
have more mental health  
demands than ever.

**Victor Schwartz**

Chief medical officer, Jed Foundation

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due to the recession.

"Colleges will have more mental health demands than ever," he said.

Higher education has, for the most part, improved services and increased young people's comfort with seeking help, Schwartz said. But there's too much demand, so colleges are going to have to think creatively about serving students with an array of issues with an array of solutions, not just traditional counseling, he said.

They'll also have to be nimble, at least for the coming academic year.

"Everybody is going to have to constantly be working with two or three plans," he said. "Everybody's going to have to become improvisers."

Kaslow emphasized the need for colleges to train people to be gatekeepers, who are people in the community who can recognize the warning signs that someone is depressed or suicidal. This will be more difficult, as it's harder to gather cues and clues when people are wearing masks or on Zoom, she said.

People will also have to take what college students say seriously. If they say they feel hopeless, people

can't respond by saying that everyone feels that way, Kaslow said.

"So many college students are saying things like, 'This is the worst year of my life,'" she said. "All of the developmental things that come with the transition to young adulthood are being impacted by this."

Colleges also need to maintain services, and Kaslow recommends they start doing universal screenings of students' mental health.

College leaders need to be prioritizing mental health, said Sarah Ketchen Lipson, an assistant professor of health law and policy at Boston University.

"They're in a position right now to make a lot of decisions about what they're investing in," she said. "In a lot of cases, there are a lot of complicated decisions to make related to finances in higher education right now."

Colleges need to maintain their virtual mental health services during this time and continue promoting them, she said. They also need to normalize mental health for students and raise awareness of how mental health and academic performance are linked. Students should



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also be part of the conversation of how best to support their mental health, she added.

Continuing telehealth options for counseling will be important as the pandemic continues, said Andrew Lee, president of the American College Counseling Association.

"It is clear that these unprecedented times have irrevocably changed our profession. What was once considered a more fringe or novel way of service delivery has now become an essential mode of service provision," Lee said in an email. "While it is unlikely that all students will only desire to receive services via technology, this shift has legitimized the use of remote telehealth sessions."

Seeing budget cuts and furloughs at colleges across the nation has been disappointing, said Katherine Wolfe-Lyga, director of the Counseling Services Center at the State University of New York at

Oswego and secretary of the Association of College Counseling Center Directors. But she recognizes the economic issues colleges are facing.

Oswego won a grant to support infrastructure for suicide prevention, which she said could not have come at a better time.

"The financial difficulties that institutions and our students are facing are worrisome. We have seen many college administrators prioritize mental health support systems on campus and hopefully they will maintain that level of commitment as we collectively struggle through this," Wolfe-Lyga said in an email.

It's especially essential given the mental health impacts of financial pressures on students.

"Financial concerns are an important factor that can exacerbate pre-existing mental health concerns or bring students in for treatment," Lee said. "As these is-

suues will likely continue or worsen, it is likely that the need for mental health services on college campuses will continue to rise."

Faculty need to use compassionate flexibility as well, said David Palmiter, a professor of psychology at Marywood University.

"Sometimes people say that might mean a lowering of academic standards, but I don't think so," he said.

Marywood found support groups to be successful in the spring. Creating programs outside of traditional counseling can help serve students who may not yet be comfortable with the idea of sitting down one on one with a therapist, Palmiter said.

"Most people who can benefit from counseling do not get it," he said, adding that he hopes one good thing that comes out of this crisis is a better societal understanding of mental health. ■

[Read Original Article](#) ▶▶

<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/08/17/suicidal-ideation-rise-college-aged-adults-due-covid-19-pandemic>

# Adapting to the Moment

- Community colleges need more resources to serve students in difficult times.
- But with constrained resources, smart allocation becomes even more important. What can be done to keep students' needs top of mind?
- Ask which student populations are stopping out or not enrolling and what can be done to reach out to them.
- Target services for specific student populations to make a difference. Student parents need different support than students returning to college for a career change.
- Smart leaders are using this moment to reconsider how and where they deliver education.
- Many community colleges have had to step in to expand students' access to technology.
- The delivery of some in-person services remains critical. Some colleges are considering microcampuses to provide services like tutoring sessions at strip malls. Others are evaluating the safest, most effective ways to open important offices for advising, financial aid and disability services.
- Keeping students engaged remains critical. Plan synchronous activities for moments when students are likely to start losing motivation. Match them into teams based on hobbies or interests to build a sense of community.
- Continue building community among students with virtual club meetings and activities.
- Surveying students is an important step in understanding what they need during unprecedented times.
- Talking through issues and ideas remains important, even when learning has gone virtual. Some students don't know what questions to ask.
- Many current students were raised with technology and are comfortable with it. Others have only limited access to technology. That means it's important for colleges to be responsive, nimble and skillful in how they use digital tools.
- Community colleges tend to serve vulnerable populations in disproportionate numbers, making their actions during the pandemic particularly important.

## How Tribal Colleges Are Innovating and Adapting

Feeling disproportionate impacts from COVID-19, tribal colleges had to redesign everything they do.

October 6, 2020



SOURCE: DINÉ COLLEGE

Charles M. Roessel, the president of Diné College, was worried in June.

Summer enrollment at the tribal college in Arizona was down 60 percent. Fall enrollment was down 70 percent. And it was easy to understand why: the college serves the Navajo Nation, which was hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. The area where the main campus is located was hit by the virus even harder than the rest of the reservation.

"We started thinking the worst," Roessel said.

Then, a few weeks before the semester began, the college's phones started ringing. Diné was getting 200 calls per day from students. Fall enrollment landed at 1,348, just 75 fewer students than enrollment in fall of 2019.

Roessel is optimistic about the college's future, and it's because of these students, he said.

"I leave here at night sometimes, and I'll see three vehicles in the parking lot," he said. Students will be seated out in lawn chairs with their laptops, sometimes with their own children on laptops next to them, working on homework using the campus's Wi-Fi. "With the resilience of the students, you can't help but be optimistic."

Tribal colleges are facing many challenges as they continue to serve students during the pandemic and a recession. They're starting from a disadvantage, as they are typically underresourced compared to non-tribal colleges. Their students, most of whom are Native Americans, are more likely to be low income. Internet connection isn't even possible

in some parts of tribal lands. Many tribal colleges, and faculty members at those colleges, had no experience with online learning before COVID-19 hit the United States.

Yet they carry on. They took advantage of training. They're finding innovative ways to expand internet access. They're hosting traditional ceremonies online.

But they're going to need assistance to continue supporting students in robust ways, said Cheryl Crazy Bull, president and CEO of the American Indian College Fund. Higher education can't claim to be equity-focused without helping these institutions at the same time, she said.

"Tribal colleges educate around 10 percent of all Native American and Alaska Native students who go to college," she said. "Tribal colleges

# How Tribal Colleges Are Innovating and Adapting

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are vital to the equity issue."

Tribal colleges and universities are operated by the Native American tribes they serve. They receive funding under several pieces of federal legislation. Most tribal institutions offer primarily two-year degrees, though some also offer four-year degrees and master's programs. They teach students about Native culture and tradition, including Native languages, preserving them in the process.

Compared to their peers who attend nontribal colleges, Native American students who attend tribal colleges are more likely to graduate without debt, receive support and pursue careers that align with their interests, according to surveys. But tribal colleges lag behind in completion rates. The average graduation rate for two-year tribal colleges is just under 21 percent, and the [average graduation rate](#) for four-years is just under 25 percent.

## Little Access, New Solutions

Access to technology is one of the largest hurdles for tribal colleges, many of which are in rural areas.

Tribal members define access to the internet differently from others, Roessel said. In a city, people would say they don't have access, but they can go to a library. His students say they have access — they just have to drive 15 miles on a dirt road and hike to a higher butte to get a signal.

Many faculty members also faced a steep learning curve when they moved to online learning in the spring. Some faculty members at Little Big Horn College in Montana, which is up in its enrollment this semester, used YouTube or Facebook Live in the beginning. But they realized it wasn't private, said David Yarlott, president of the college.

Over the summer, faculty received training from the American

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We're looking at this as an opportunity to redefine how we approach education on a reservation.

**Charles M. Roessel**

President, Diné College

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Indian Higher Education Consortium, he said. But connectivity is still a problem.

The college looked at providing hotspots, but one house can have up to seven families living together, which doesn't leave much bandwidth, Yarlott said. Some internet providers have offered to help, but sometimes that's impossible. Spectrum offered to provide connections, for example, but the company doesn't service all areas in the state. Even with towers in the area, wireless internet services still can't reach the more mountainous regions, he said.

To help somewhat with access to technology, the college replaced its computers with new ones. It gave the old computers to students so it doesn't have to track them.

Other colleges are luckier. Red Lake Nation College in Minnesota already had a virtual backup system for classes that it used on days with extreme winter weather, said Dan King, the college's president. Still, the college is in a remote location near the Canadian border. So it sent students technology suitcases for the fall.

Every student received a laptop, a cellphone with a hotspot and unlimited data, and a virtual reality headset. It helps that the college is small — around 150 students, though that dropped to 122 this fall — so \$380,000 covered the bill. The Red Lake Nation tribe provided funding it received from the CARES Act, the federal stimulus package, for the cost.

Diné College is also trying something new. The reservation it serves is roughly 26,000 square miles, Roessel said, and students are driving an hour or more to campuses to use the internet from parking lots. In April, 86 percent of students did not have real access to the internet from their homes.

To solve this problem, Roessel would like to create microcampuses across the reservation and in remote areas, so students won't have to travel as far to get internet access. The college is finalizing agreements with three local areas on the reservation right now, he said. The microcampuses will have computers, broadband access and staff to ensure COVID-19 safety protocols are followed.



# How Tribal Colleges Are Innovating and Adapting

Once the Bureau of Indian Education opens up K-12 schools, the college hopes to use high school spaces for the same purpose, as well as to provide dual-credit classes. Roessel would also like to put a site at schools where students could come take classes from not only Diné, but also colleges like the University of Arizona.

Another idea is to add microcampuses in places like strip malls that also have Laundromats and grocery stores, he said. Parents could come to do errands, and their children could go get tutoring from Diné students who are in teacher education programs.

"We're looking at this as an opportunity to redefine how we approach education on a reservation," Roessel said. "It's one of the pluses that has come out of this."

## **Worried About Everything**

Tribal college students tend to be less traditional. They're often older (the average age is about 31), or parents, or low income. Funding from the CARES Act has helped some colleges support students, for now.

Staff at Little Big Horn College have a stack of requests for financial support from students, Yarlott said. The college has been providing fuel vouchers for those who have to come to the college, as well as food vouchers for groceries. It's also cutting checks to vendors for rent and utilities if students need it, he said.

At Red Lake Nation College, more than 80 percent of the students have children of their own. Now they're homeschooling, on top of taking courses and working, King said. As a result, he's seeing many students experiencing the "COVID blues" from the combination of isolation and stress.

Resources on the reservation are

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COVID-19 is not just a Wi-Fi issue  
— it's really about trying to meet the full  
needs of students.

**Charles M. Roessel**

President, Diné College

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stretched thin, so a student may have had to wait weeks to get a counseling appointment. The college used some grant funding to hire a tribal member to be a full-time psychologist, King said. The psychologist offers online counseling, as well as some face-to-face sessions if students prefer.

Emily Lockling, a 20-year-old student at Fond Du Lac College in Minnesota, said she's worried about everything: transferring to a university and paying for it, finding a job after college, continuing classes online.

The stress has bled into her studies.

"Usually when I'm a month into school, I'm still doing pretty good," Lockling said. "But I managed to fall behind on some of my classes, and I don't know how that happened. I just got so stressed that I stopped doing work for a week."

Fortunately, her professors are understanding, she said. But she worries about transferring to a four-year university next fall and whether those professors will be the same.

She also wishes her college had virtual counseling. She hasn't re-

ceived any notifications with that information.

Still, Lockling says she's lucky. She lives in a town next to the reservation with her parents, so she has internet and a laptop, though it doesn't run the map-making applications she needs for class very well. She had to buy a printer and a scanner to turn in assignments, and she bought a new computer for the fall because her old battery gave out from so much use. But, over all, she's OK, she said.

The Navajo Nation has 35 percent unemployment, Roessel said, so Diné College students faced food insecurity when the pandemic hit.

The college expanded its emergency aid program to include buying hotspots and covering childcare and other costs, and it also gave a 50 percent tuition grant to all students who enrolled this fall.

"COVID-19 is not just a Wi-Fi issue — it's really about trying to meet the full needs of students," he said.

## **Effects of Neglect**

Despite the solutions and successes so far, tribal colleges still have a long way to go regarding internet access.

## How Tribal Colleges Are Innovating and Adapting

Diné College invested \$8 million of its CARES Act funding to upgrade its campus internet. That took it from having 400 MB/s for all six campuses to 2.5 Gb/s. But the average college of similar size to Diné has around 5 Gb/s, Roessel said.

"A lot of this initial investment just gets us to the starting line, while the rest of the colleges are at the 50-yard line," he said.

Federal legislation that should provide funding for building operations and maintenance at the college has never materialized, he said. The CARES Act was used to upgrade boilers and improve airflow because of this.

"Part of the challenges we have is not just because of COVID-19. It's because of the neglect of tribal colleges," Roessel said. "So when a pandemic happens, you really see where the cracks are."

Red Lake Nation College is also concerned about finances. It's underfunded, King said, but it serves students who need support.

"Our average student comes in at about the ninth-grade level, very underprepared," he said.

The college receives about \$8,800 per student from the Bureau of Indian Education but little help from the state, King said. Federal operating funds don't cover everything they should.

Carrie Billy, president and CEO of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, said it's too soon to know how much trouble tribal colleges are in financially. It depends on how well tribal, county, state and federal governments can work together to build a solid technology infrastructure for the colleges.

So far, the CARES Act hasn't been enough. The 35 tribal colleges received \$13.9 million, half of which went to students. It's because the formula used full-time-equivalent students, not student headcount, and most tribal college students attend part-time, Billy said.

The consortium has been advocating for E-rate eligibility for tribal colleges. The E-rate Program, also called the Schools and Libraries Program, provides discounts to schools and libraries so they can get affordable internet access and telecommunications services.

Internet providers often monopolize rural America, driving up prices. It's why tribal colleges have the slowest and most expensive internet of all institutions of higher education, Billy said. E-rate eligibility would help colleges build out internet access on reservations, solving many problems.

Crazy Bull, of the American Indian College Fund, doesn't think there will be closures in the near future, but she is concerned that tribal colleges won't be able to provide robust supports.

"I do consider this a federal trust responsibility," she said, adding that states also "haven't historically stepped up and provided enough resources."

Still, college presidents are hopeful that this new wave of online learning will make their institutions stronger.

Diné College will continue upgrading its internet and technology, little by little, Roessel said.

"The Navajo Nation has been through much harder times than this," he said. "It's not about survival. This is about exceeding our expectations." ■

[Read Original Article](#) ▶▶

<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/06/tribal-colleges-are-innovating-fall-will-still-need-long-term-support>



## How Community Colleges Build Community Virtually

Colleges are using virtual events, blending modes of learning and reaching out to students one-on-one to build community in the age of COVID-19.

September 11, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/FIZKES

Community colleges are finding innovative ways to maintain or increase student engagement during a global health pandemic that has left most switching to online-only formats for the fall.

Two-year colleges serve diverse populations that include high school students in dual-enrollment courses, senior citizens, working adults and traditional-age students. While it may seem like a daunting task to build community among those varied groups of people, community college faculty often use that aspect to their advantage, said Kate Thirolf, co-editor of the Future Series on Community Colleges books and the previous vice president of instruction at Jackson College in Michigan.

"When we talk about what's happening in classrooms, I can't think of a sector that's in a better posi-

tion now," Thirolf said, referring to two-year colleges.

Community colleges may not typically have residential housing to foster community, but they tend to have smaller class sizes than some public four-year colleges and faculty who are focused solely on teaching, she said.

"What it boils down to is that community colleges know that relationships matter, and they really focus on that," she said. "Whatever the mode, they recognize that that's important."

Building community is more important now than ever, as most of students' lives have gone virtual.

Many colleges have pivoted their student services to a virtual setting. At Northern Virginia Community College, students can enter a virtual lobby on Zoom that connects them with advisers, who then con-

nect them with the services they need.

"We have students who don't know what to ask, so talking with someone is important," said Frances Villagran-Glover, vice president of student services at NOVA.

The college's student clubs have also pivoted to meeting via Zoom — and participation has increased as a result, she said.

"There are two things students don't have: time and proximity to campuses," Villagran-Glover said. NOVA's virtual student union, an online engagement hub that lets students join discussions and access resources, has also seen increased participation, from a few hundred students before COVID-19 to 32,000 now.

Students can participate in a program called Rise Up, which lets them do a short presentation for

# How Community Colleges Build Community Virtually

peers on how they've overcome challenges during the pandemic, she said. It helps their peers feel like they're not alone.

Administrators at MiraCosta College near San Diego were concerned about how their programs would shift online when the pandemic first hit. Many of their clubs and programs are aimed at more vulnerable populations, like LGBTQ students and undocumented students.

"Are there going to be students who lack technology access? Are there going to be students who feel intimidated by the structure and process? How will we account for students who stop by the office unscheduled, or those you bump into in the parking lot?" said Wendy Stewart, dean of counseling and student development.

The college responded by keeping some programs — like the Umoja group for Black students — alive during the summer, when they usually aren't active. They saw an increase in participation for many of the programs, Stewart said.

In some ways, going virtual made it easier for students to participate. There were fewer conflicts with class schedules, and students had no need to commute, Stewart said. Faculty also engaged in these programs so they could connect with students outside the classroom.

Beyond extracurricular programming, there are several ways faculty can increase engagement and foster a sense of community within their classrooms.

One way is to strategically plan synchronous instruction at points when students start to lose moti-

vation, said Scott Martin, associate professor at George Mason University and director of the Virginia Serious Game Institute, which supports start-ups founded at the university and regional economic development through serious game technology discovery.

Working asynchronously would go well for a few weeks, he said, but then he'd start to notice his students lose interest. Adding a live session at that time helped spark motivation among his students.

Faculty can also use algorithms to match students into learning teams based on their commonalities. Research shows that grouping students by hobbies or interests, rather than academic performance, works much better for building community, according to Martin. The students will start to organically act as peer mentors to help those with lower grades.

Martin hopes that the pandemic will push more faculty members to use this method of community building.

One of the more basic but also most important things faculty can do is introduce themselves on day one with, at the least, a photo and a story, said Brian Newberry, director of Jackson College Virtual. They can also create an introduction forum, where students learn more about each other using games or answering survey questions, he said.

At the start of an online course, faculty should also use "richer" media, like video and audio.

"The higher the ambiguity, the richer the media you should use," Newberry said. There's a lot of uncertainty at the start of a class, and

using media that can express more than simple text can will anchor students in the course, he said.

Under current circumstances, with a pandemic, faculty should use different tools to communicate with students, including mass texting services or phone apps.

"The technological landscape is different for those under 30 in that the primary tool for communicating digitally is the phone," he said. Older people tend to still prefer computers.

At Washtenaw Community College in Michigan, campus staff have been calling each student to check in with them and assess their needs, said Kimberly Hurns, vice president for instruction.

Reacting to what students and faculty want has led to some needed improvements, she said. For example, faculty urged the college to switch from using GoToMeeting for online courses to Zoom, as it has more interactive features. Faculty can take polls during class and break students into groups, Hurns said.

The college has also kept many of its annual events, turning them virtual instead. The turnout has been on par with previous years, she said.

"In retrospect, it shouldn't be shocking because of this generation's comfort with technology," she said.

Community colleges have an advantage right now, Hurns said, as they already know how to be responsive to students and nimble.

"In some ways I am so proud of our faculty, but when I think about it, I shouldn't be shocked, because it's what we do every day," she said. ■

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<https://insidhighered.com/news/2020/09/11/no-dorms-no-person-classes-no-problem-how-community-colleges-are-building-community>

## How Community Colleges Are Serving the Most Vulnerable

Two-year colleges worked quickly to help students get through the pandemic, pivoting to drive-through food banks and community partnerships.

September 10, 2020



SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/NORTHWALKER

Cerritos College was Sunny Saldana's life before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

The 29-year-old mother was at the two-year college's campus in Norwalk, Calif., from 8 a.m. until 7 p.m. Her job was on campus, and she would study on campus.

"My rule that I made myself was to do school at school and not take it home with me," Saldana said.

Once she got home in the evening, she had time to help her 9-year-old daughter with homework and spend time with her.

Then the pandemic hit, and suddenly the campus was closed.

"It was a shock to everyone," she said. "I remember going into my class and my teacher was like, 'I'm not gonna see you guys anymore.'"

It was hard for Saldana to bal-

ance parenting, going to college and working all from home. She quickly realized she had to become her daughter's teacher in the spring, she said. Once summer rolled around, she lost her work-study job.

By the end of the spring semester, Saldana was discouraged. But support and aid from the college in the form of emergency grants, food donations and more are what kept her on track to graduate.

"Going through this made me appreciate my school so much more," she said. "Being a community college, it feels more like a family."

Community colleges tend to serve the most vulnerable student populations, such as low-income or first-generation students. They also serve more students of color, particularly Latinx students.

People of color — in particular Black and Latinx people — are more likely to contract the coronavirus and more likely to die from it, studies show, leaving these students more vulnerable than ever.

"It's an equity issue," said Wil Del Pilar, vice president of higher education policy and practice at the Education Trust, an advocacy organization in Washington, D.C.

Research shows that public colleges spend, on average, \$1,000 less per student of color annually than they do on white students, he said. This is partly because students of color are more likely to attend community colleges, which don't get adequate support financial support from states.

On top of the historic underfunding of community colleges, people



# How Community Colleges Are Serving the Most Vulnerable

of color are also facing greater impacts from the pandemic, Del Pilar said. Unemployment rates for people of color are higher and students of color have less access to the technology and internet necessary to learn remotely.

## 'Overwhelming Need'

About 65 percent of the students served by Cerritos College are Latinx. The college has been gathering information through surveys and aid applications to determine what students need most during this time, said Dilcie Perez, vice president of student services.

More than one-quarter of their students had challenges related to technology, she said, and many had concerns about finding a quiet place to study while living at home with family members.

To address those issues, the college has given away 300 laptops and just placed an order for 200 more, Perez said. The campus gym is now a study hall for the fall, where students can sign up for two-hour increments of study time at tables placed 10 feet apart.

The college may have been better prepared for this crisis than others, Perez said. Because Cerritos has always served a more vulnerable population, it already had solutions in place, like a basic needs task force and a case manager.

Saldana had two counselors who kept her going during the spring and summer, she said.

"Sometimes you need someone to cheer you on," she said. "That support made me not want to let anybody down."

The need has greatly increased since the pandemic hit, though.

Usually, the college would have about 250 people attend events for receiving food. Once the pandemic started, 1,300 people were com-

ing to Cerritos to get boxes of food placed in their car trunks, Perez said. The college has also given out more than 500 gift cards to grocery stores since COVID-19 hit.

"At this time, it can feel overwhelming to really hear all of the needs of students," Perez said. "For us and for me, it's important that I know I might not be able to meet every need, but I can do what I can. Our goal will always be to do more and identify additional resources."

## Taking Things for Granted

Latoya Jackson was close to stopping out of Reynolds Community College in Virginia due to the pandemic, even though she is set to graduate in October. With four children at home, Jackson, 29, wasn't able to keep her job. Her computer was broken, and she had bills to pay.

"I went up there and talked with the adviser, and she gave me a rundown and told me not to quit," Jackson said. "They were very convincing to not give up."

So Jackson stuck with it. Reynolds gave her a loan so she could pay her bills, as well as a computer so she could work online. Her adviser helped her find resources in the community, like food and child-care.

Her professors also provided emotional support, Jackson said. The college and its staff ended up being the people she could count on during this time, she said.

Paula Pando, president of Reynolds, believes community colleges were built for this moment.

She has three college-aged children. All of them were able to return home in the spring to their own rooms and laptops. The house has internet and a full fridge, and both of their parents are college-educated.

"Many of the students we serve have none of the above," Pando said. "All of the things that many of us take for granted."

The college decided to not try to address every need, but rather target certain needs in a "narrow and deep" way, she said. Those included a laptop loaner program and internet expansion into parking lots for students, as well as mentoring programs for Black students.

The campus is also open four days per week to provide critical support services, like advising, financial aid and disability services, because some students need to be in-person, she said. Classrooms and the library are also now open, with limited seating options for students.

They looked to the community to fill other needs. Students are referred to a local community agency that provides food assistance. The college's foundation raised money to help students pay bills.

Pando is also looking at the enrollment data to see who's coming back. She's watching to see if the college enrolls more new students, those who would typically go to four-year colleges but have decided to stay local instead due to the pandemic.

"My focus is on the student populations who need us the most," she said. "We have to remember three things: who we are, who we serve and why we serve them. Everything else is negotiable."

## High Costs, Low Funding

Funding is always a major concern for colleges, particularly when the supports that best serve their students tend to be expensive.

One of the most powerful supports is the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, or ASAP, said

# How Community Colleges Are Serving the Most Vulnerable

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Maithreyi Gopalan, assistant professor of education at Pennsylvania State University. But even that program is at risk of being on the chopping block, according to [proposed city budget cuts](#).

"That is one of my strongest worries in this situation," Gopalan said. "Institutions should not try to take low-cost approaches right now, when we need a lot of high-touch interventions."

At Reynolds, Pando said that funding is always a concern. But her decision to eliminate executive positions when she began as president has helped boost resources for students.

"We all want more resources, and we will fight for them," she said. "But the bottom line is, we have resourc-

es — we just need to better allocate them."

Del Pilar argues that community colleges shouldn't have to continue doing more with less. At the federal level, the next stimulus bill could use student headcount instead of full-time-equivalent enrollment counts to [more adequately](#) fund two-year colleges. Doubling the federal Pell Grant maximum would also help community college students, he said.

States can do more to better fund community colleges. They could include equity measurements in funding formulas, create free college programs that use first-dollar models and make state grant aid accessible to two-year college students, Del Pilar said.

While institutions could do more for equity as well, such as extending debt forgiveness to stopped-out students, creating wraparound supports and closely analyzing data, they ultimately need more support, he said.

"We expect community colleges to be resilient instead of ensuring that we provide supports," he said. "Community colleges have been forced to have to do this because we have continuously underfunded them."

That may be because the students who tend to enroll at two-year colleges aren't seen as deserving as those who tend to enroll at state flagship institutions, Del Pilar said.

"We should be flipping the formula on its head," he said. ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/09/10/community-colleges-pivot-support-their-vulnerable-students>

# Helping Students Navigate College

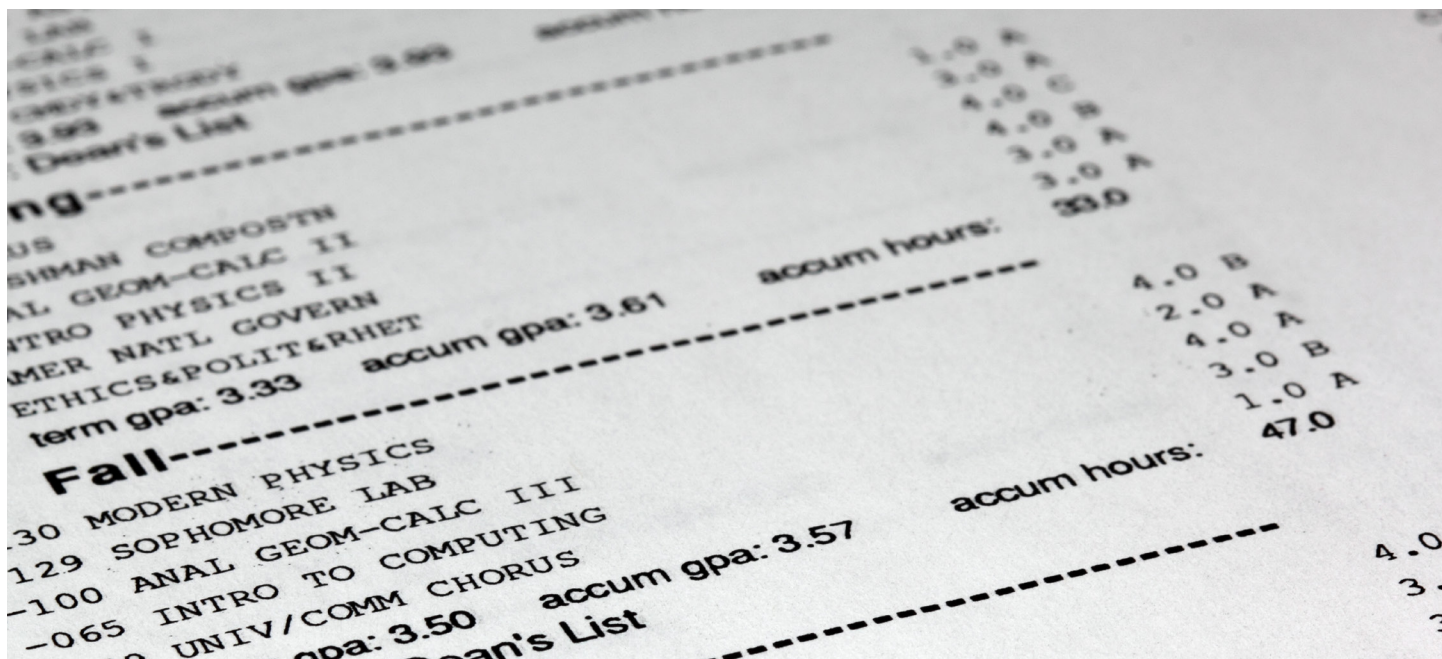
- Relatively low numbers of students report having conversations with college staff members on critical issues such as how long it would take to complete a program, how much their education would cost in total and which credits would transfer to a major at a four-year college.
- Colleges must change their behaviors in order to see students succeed at greater rates.
- Transfer students are an increasingly sought-after population for four-year colleges to enroll, opening up opportunities and pitfalls for students enrolled at community colleges.
- Improving transfer agreements between institutions will help colleges, universities and students alike during and after the pandemic.
- Articulation agreements can remove barriers and support student success.
- Colleges need to fix reciprocity issues that can force students to retake classes or graduate with more credits than they would need if they'd been enrolled at only one institution.
- Academic program maps can increase retention and cut the number of excess credits students take.
- Advisers should talk with students about their interests to develop a path that will lead them to a career they want, rather than pushing them toward a path the adviser thinks is best.
- Expected state budget cuts threaten higher education systems and access programs like College Promise programs.
- Proposed changes to ration financial aid dollars at the college or state level need to be evaluated thoroughly to determine if they have the effect of excluding already disadvantaged students.
- Changes to programs that promise aid for students to attend college can have long-term effects like eroding public trust.



## COVID Threatens Student Transfer

The COVID-19 pandemic has created uncertainty about what will happen next. Experts say colleges need to improve transfer relationships now to stay afloat in this crisis.

September 25, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/THREESPEEDJONES

Colleges were placing more emphasis on transfer partnerships long before the COVID-19 pandemic began this past spring.

The high school population is decreasing in most parts of the country, leaving many four-year institutions with gaps in enrollment. Some experts say those colleges need transfer students from two-year colleges to survive. Community colleges, in turn, need to work with four-year colleges to prevent poaching of their students and to help students achieve their goals. Eighty percent of community college students intend to earn a bachelor's degree, but only about 17 percent do so within six years, according to data from the Community College Research Center at

Teachers College, Columbia University.

The pandemic and ensuing recession leave higher education with more questions than answers on the transfer front. On the one hand, experts say, colleges need to work together to survive. On the other hand, some smaller four-year colleges are just struggling to survive, which could breed more competition than collaboration.

### 'A Heightened Concern'

This also is not a great time to stand up new programs. Many states have severely cut higher education budgets, and these partnerships take both time and resources to build.

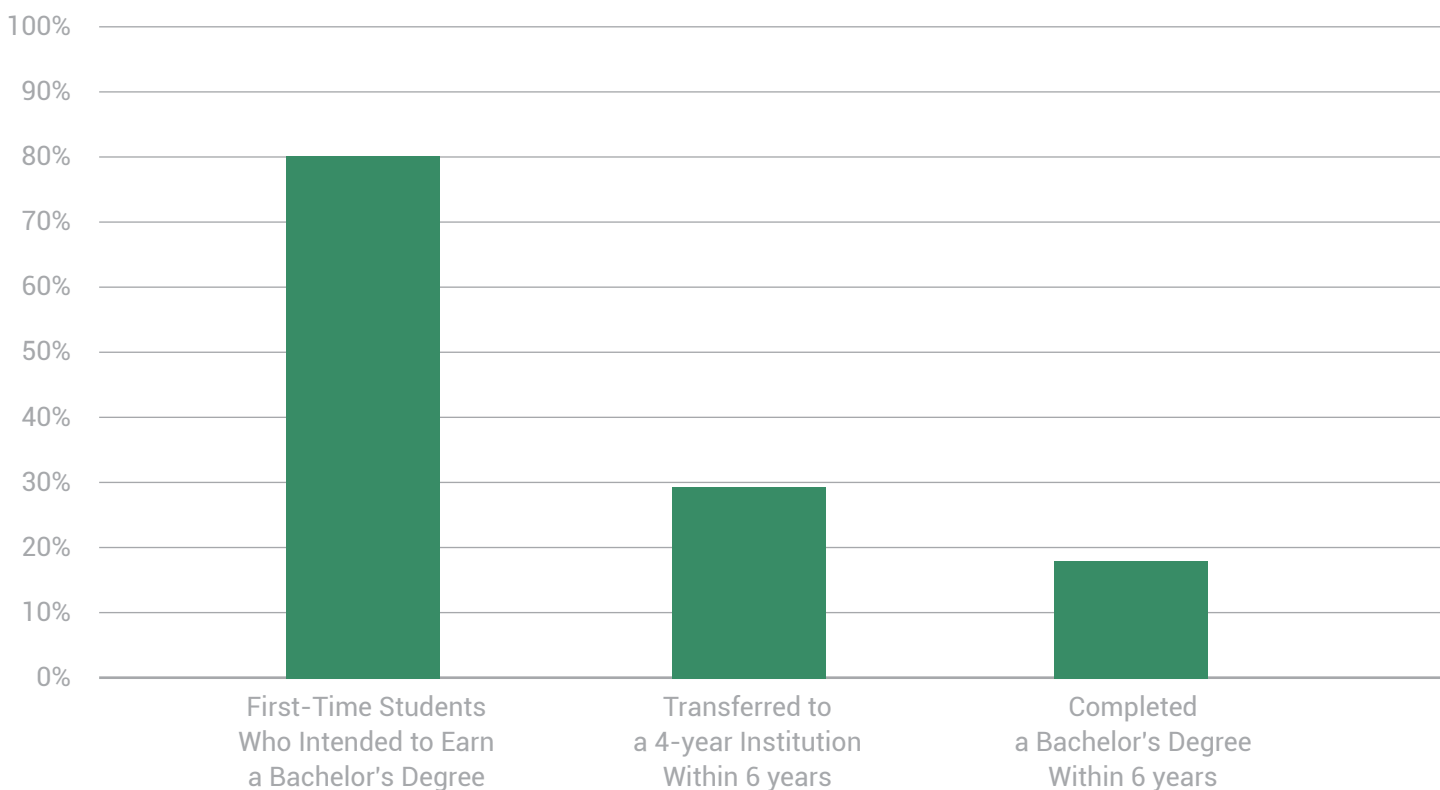
Delaware County Community College in Pennsylvania has been

building its transfer partnerships since 2006. The result proves it was worth it. The college has partnerships with the state's public universities, as well as most of the private universities within a 40-minute drive from the college, said Nora Manz, director of advising, transfer and articulations.

The college has seamless transfer with state colleges and guaranteed admission programs with several four-year colleges. It also has guides that explain for students how things articulate from the community college program to the four-year college program, Manz said.

When Manz started at Delaware in 2006, the college didn't have a separate transfer office. She want-

## Degree Intentions and Outcomes, 2013 Entering Community College Cohort



SOURCE: COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH CENTER USING NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE RESEARCH CENTER DATA

ed to grow its relationships with other colleges to give students more options for transfer.

"One of the keys to student success is fit," she said. "What I was looking to do was provide opportunities to students across a variety of different types of schools."

Most of the work was networking. Manz attended workshops and conferences and started a committee to build bridges with local colleges. Over time, she built trust with other colleges — trust that the community college was preparing students to transfer, and trust that the four-year colleges wouldn't poach students before they earned their associate degrees. Only 38 percent of transfer students earned a degree before they trans-

ferred, according to CCRC data.

It's unknown what will happen with transfer students in the next year or so, she said. But Manz isn't worried about increased competition from local partners for first-time students. There's even a slight advantage. With virtual admissions and enrollment events, Manz and her team can keep an eye out for what colleges are telling students. Delaware can touch base with colleges if they don't hear them encouraging their agreements.

"Students really look to community college advisers to help them understand the transfer process," she said. "It kind of goes both ways. If you're a good partner, we'll promote you. If you poach our students, then maybe we won't share

as much information."

For colleges that don't have those relationships, Manz said, there's probably a greater chance of poaching because of the climate.

"On the surface, it's possible to create a relationship," she said. "But, to be honest, I wonder how you would have the time to do this."

Colleges need to align their curricula and involve relevant stakeholders, like faculty. That process alone can take months, she said. And many faculty are busy teaching in a new format due to the pandemic, or burned out from the quick pivot in the spring.

"Poaching's not new, but we're in an increased climate where I think that's a concern for two-year institutions, a heightened concern," said

Janet Marling, executive director of the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students at the University of North Georgia. "Forming partnerships is really an intricate process. Right now, institutions are really focusing on survival."

Marling hopes that more colleges will create partnerships to help students transfer. But there are several factors that could lead universities to recruit community college students before they've completed their two-year degrees.

Transfer students are an increasingly desirable population, Marling said, especially given the already-present concerns about the high school population and new concerns about whether students are going to take time off due to the pandemic.

An extra complication is [last year's changes](#) to the National Association for College Admission Counseling's Code of Ethics and Professional Practice. The change stripped provisions that barred colleges from recruiting students who had already applied under early decision to or enrolled at a different institution.

"That opens up the market more and increases competition," Marling said. "Because of the recession and because institutions are struggling to stay open, at this point in time, I suspect the default action will be getting enrollment."

Community colleges have reason to be concerned, she said, especially as data show there wasn't a [significant bump](#) in summer enrollment as some anticipated, but rather a substantial decrease.

"We've already seen some bad actors emerging," she said. "Others will tell you it's important for students to have choice. However, in my experience, this was not

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The last affordable route to a bachelor's degree is the community college.

**John Mullane**

President and founder, College Transfer Solutions

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a problem that we were needing to solve.”

### **'Last Affordable Route'**

David Hawkins, executive director for educational content and policy at NACAC, thinks the relationships between two- and four-year colleges will likely strengthen at an accelerated pace during this time.

"While colleges over all do have to compete with each other for enrollments at a certain level, in recent years we have seen a lot more growth in the area of partnerships, particularly between two- and four-year colleges, that have helped solve enrollment problems on both ends," Hawkins said.

At the same time, he anticipates more competition, but likely not between two- and four-year colleges.

"Oftentimes, when there are economic hard times, ethics can be the first thing to go," he said, but he added, "That dynamic is not quite the same between two- and four-year colleges."

Four-year colleges are dependent on community colleges to some degree, he said.

"The four-year colleges' incen-

tives to work in collaboration with two-year colleges are greater than their incentive to poach two-year students," he said. "Those relationships are more important in the long term than any short-term bump from poaching."

Students' finances could force more collaboration between colleges as well, said John Mullane, president and founder of College Transfer Solutions, a company that provides research, consulting and policy advocacy for transfer issues to colleges and universities.

"The last affordable route to a bachelor's degree is the community college," Mullane said. "More students will end up starting at a community college."

This could force four-year colleges to collaborate with two-year colleges, he said. He's hopeful that the current crisis will force institutions to make more progress on solving problems within transfer. Students often end up with excess credits because four-year colleges won't put their credits toward degree or major requirements, forcing students to retake courses at the four-year college in some cases.

# COVID Threatens Student Transfer

"If this problem doesn't get fixed now, it might not ever get fixed," he said. "Colleges that do best with transfers will be the ones to thrive."

Mullane also advocates for lawmakers to improve transfer pathways at the state level. Some states have legislation that mandates pathways for all public institutions, but not all. And few states fully enforce transfer credit statutes, he said.

Florida is one of those states that has statewide articulation between two- and four-year colleges written into state law, said Maura Flaschner, executive director of undergraduate admissions at Florida Atlantic University.

This helps the university work with community colleges — or state colleges, as they are called in Florida — but their work doesn't stop there. The university has also created enhanced two-plus-two agreements with some of its local state colleges, called the Link Program. Students receive advising from the university while they are still at the state college, as well as access to some university events and supports, said Jessica Lopez-Velez, director of transfer recruitment and the Link Program.

"Articulation agreements are in place to remove barriers and sup-

port student success," Flaschner said. "I would think that peers nationwide would be looking at such efforts."

Colleges will have to rely on these relationships more than ever now, Lopez-Velez said.

## Incentives for Privates

Private four-year colleges with traditional students will also feel pressure to work more closely with community colleges, said Meagan Wilson, a senior analyst at Ithaca S+R, which provides advice and support to help institutions fulfill their missions.

"They were already seeing a pretty bad enrollment decline before COVID-19," Wilson said.

These colleges traditionally recruit high school seniors, but to survive they will increasingly have to look elsewhere. Community college transfer students could be one solution, as only one in five right now transfer to private colleges.

But they'll be competing against public state systems, many of which have some degree of articulation agreements, she said.

The most successful cases so far have been with private colleges that came together as a consortium to create transfer agreements, such as the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities

consortium, which has 30 private colleges in a transfer agreement with the North Carolina Community Colleges system.

Private colleges can compete with public four-year colleges by accepting more transfer credits and creating better pathways, Mullane said. Right now, transfer students on average lose about 40 percent of their credits when they enroll at a private college, compared to only 20 percent when they enroll at a public college, he said.

Private nonselective institutions are "fighting for their lives," said Davis Jenkins, a senior research scholar at CCRC. He predicts this will lead them to be more cooperative with community colleges, especially because they know those students likely wouldn't ever come to them directly.

It's unclear whether a bump in transfer student enrollment will save any four-year college's enrollment, though. Community college enrollment hasn't experienced the expected bump from the recession, indicating that the crisis is hitting the most vulnerable students the hardest.

"If privates were relying on these transfer students, they might need to be worried about enrollment," Wilson said. ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/09/25/will-pandemic-lead-more-competition-transfer-students-or-stronger-partnerships>



## Guided Pathways Show Progress

Colleges need to engage faculty and incorporate experiential learning to continue improving guided pathways programs, report finds.

September 15, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/MARTINEDOUJET

A college reform movement is gaining speed, but there's still plenty of work to be done.

The Center for Community College Student Engagement released a report that shows guided pathways programs are improving some student experiences. The [report](#) also identifies challenges that colleges face when using guided pathways, such as faculty engagement.

Guided pathways is a reform movement that aims to improve college completion and student success by redesigning students' journeys through college. Community colleges have been adopting this program to help students choose a program of study and create a plan to either transfer to a four-year college or get a good job with a two-year degree. Pathways programs often include the use of

"metamajors," which let students choose a broader path of study so they can explore career options, and intensive advising to help students create these plans.

As of spring 2018, [more than 250 community colleges](#) had committed to using a guided pathways approach, according to the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University.

The new report provides a baseline level of data on how students nationwide are experiencing this program, said Linda García, executive director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement.

"Even though it's a first look, we are seeing some momentum building," García said. "There's promise."

The institutions included in the report know there's more work to

be done, but it's a marathon, she added. The report can show the colleges how far they've come and what aspects they need to focus on improving now.

"When people train for a marathon, they need cheerleaders," she said.

The findings show the framework for guided pathways is working, said Martha Parham, senior vice president of public relations for the American Association of Community Colleges.

"Guided Pathways is a framework that incorporates what has been learned about effective educational practice; still, it demands continuous evaluation to ensure that supports implemented are yielding positive outcomes," Parham wrote in an email. "While implementing any large-scale change is challenging, the Guided

## Guided Pathways Show Progress

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Pathways work requires significant changes in institutional culture, as well as in policies, practices, and the structures that support them.”

The work won't be completed overnight, she said, but reports like this one will help colleges continue to assess their programs and improve upon the frameworks.

Research shows that the practices used in guided pathways programs can lead to better outcomes for students. Students who enter a specific program earlier on in their time at a community college are more like to transfer to a four-year college or complete a degree. Florida State University's use of academic program maps increased retention and decreased the number of excess credits students took. Queensborough Community College in New York adopted met-majors and saw an increase in its three-year graduation rate.

The principles of the program are simple and necessary, not only to help students succeed, but to help colleges survive, said Davis Jenkins, senior research scholar at the Community College Research Center.

Community colleges have a duty to prepare students for good jobs or to transfer to a four-year college with junior standing as tuition costs continue to rise, he said. Right now, 40 percent of community college students drop out after the first few terms because the process to get started is confusing and many are forced to take developmental education courses. If they aren't taking an interesting course in their first year, they're likely to leave, he said.

“You have to help every student explore their options and develop a plan,” Jenkins said. “It's unethical to not have them on a plan when you're charging that much money.”

The Center for Community Col-

lege Student Engagement does annual surveys of institutions and students on engagement, and it adds new items targeting different issues each year. The guided pathways questions were added to the center's 2018 Survey of Entering Student Engagement, which received about 49,000 responses from entering students across 117 colleges, and the 2019 Community College Survey of Student Engagement, which received about 77,000 responses from returning students across 166 colleges. The results were aggregated at the institutional level in the report. The report also includes the results in the top quartile, which colleges can use as a benchmark, García said.

About 7,500 faculty also responded to a faculty-specific survey, which included some questions on guided pathways.

The findings are grouped under pillars for guided pathways programs: help students get on a path, help students stay on their path and ensure students are learning.

For the first pillar, 44 percent of entering students said their main source of academic advising was friends or family, and 43 percent said instructors or college staff were their main source of advising. Nearly 70 percent of entering students said they were required to meet with an academic adviser before registering for courses. About three-quarters of entering students had picked a career to pursue before registering, but only 20 percent said a college staff member had helped them pick a program or major, and less than half had talked with college staff about what jobs their major could lead to.

The data show that colleges could improve with specific guidance on completion. Just under half of entering students said college

staff had talked with them about how long it would take to complete their program. Less than one-third of students said college staff had talked with them about what the total cost of their education would be. Thirty-two percent of students said they had not talked with a staff member about which of their credits would transfer toward their major at a four-year college.

Many colleges appear to be focusing more on advising, García said. The next pillar, keeping students on their paths, shows that 76 percent of returning students had met with an academic adviser at least once during the term, and 59 percent said they had reviewed their progress on their academic plan each time they met with their adviser. Nearly 80 percent of those students also said that the courses they need to take have been available.

The final pillar covered in the report looks at ensuring students are learning. More than half of returning students said their adviser had required them to participate in study groups, and 67 percent said they had worked with classmates on assignments outside class. Nearly 60 percent said they had talked with their instructors about readings or ideas outside class, as well.

However, only 21 percent of students said they had participated in experiential learning, like an internship or co-op experience.

This should be a key focus for the future, said Jenkins.

“Generally, to get a good job, you need some kind of experience,” Jenkins said. “It's probably the least developed area of guided pathways, but a key next frontier.”

The faculty survey revealed where there could be some improvements, García said. Nearly 60 percent of faculty who reported their colleges



## Guided Pathways Show Progress

were using guided pathways principles said they believe it will improve student outcomes. But colleges need to engage their faculty more in this work, results show.

Of those faculty members who reported their colleges are using guided pathways, 36 percent said they are not involved in the program at all, and about half said they need more professional development on this issue. A little less than half of those faculty also said they know very little or nothing about the program.

"Students connect in the classroom first," García said. "It's so critical to include faculty in the process of guided pathways."

The results are still promising, she said, as the survey shows faculty members want to be involved with guided pathways programs. Colleges need to find ways to include adjuncts, who often teach the majority of classes but can have high turnover rates, García said.

Faculty can also feel fatigued by initiatives, but García tells them to think of guided pathways as an umbrella for everything they're doing.

Despite the challenges, campuses are seeing progress, said Tia Brown McNair, vice president for diversity, equity and student success at the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

"We all know that institutional change, especially a cultural change,

takes time," McNair said. "But the idea of the guided pathways model is one that research has shown is a promising and sustainable practice that we need to support."

Colleges should be asking questions about how they can improve in these areas, but it's also important to acknowledge the promise of the framework, she said.

"What we've learned from previous evaluation reports is that doing the work on the fourth pillar to ensure students are learning has had additional challenges in moving forward, and is not moving at same pace as the first three pillars," she said.

Most of the member colleges in the Achieving the Dream network, which serves community colleges, are engaged in guided pathways work, said Karen Stout, president and CEO of the organization. This report provides benchmarks, but there are still some points that Stout worries about.

"Generally, the report places a lot of emphasis on changing student behaviors," she said. "We're hoping that colleges are also changing their behaviors. That's the only way to see significant gains."

For example, while the number of students meeting with advisers is pretty good, colleges should be thinking about what students are not meeting with their advisers and how that should be fixed, she said.

Institutions should also be using guided pathways as a framework for change, but not a silver bullet, Stout said. There are some fundamentals that need to be in place before the program can succeed. Some colleges still don't have the capacity to collect data, she said.

Some colleges do the organizing work — like creating metamajors — without focusing on the fourth pillar of ensuring students are learning.

"So what you get is almost a unitary focus on program maps instead of transformational learning experience," she added.

Colleges should be re-evaluating their business practices as well as creating metamajors, she said.

"A clearly defined program map or an advising appointment doesn't change the placement structure," she said, referring to how students of color are disproportionately placed in remedial courses that can set them behind on their path.

Colleges should reflect on their practices and collect their own data and data from student focus groups to determine how the redesign process is going, Jenkins said.

"A lot of colleges think that guided pathways is basically mapping out programs and putting them on websites and organizing them into metamajors," he said. "That might provide better information, but it doesn't change the student experience." ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/09/15/progress-guided-pathways-promising-still-much-do-report-says>

## College Promise Programs Wrestle With Pandemic Realities

As states begin slashing budgets, some free college programs are feeling the sting.

October 8, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/KAMELEON007

College promise programs have increased in popularity in recent years. Now, amid a pandemic and a recession, they might be on the chopping block.

Higher education groups are asking for at least \$120 billion in future COVID-19 relief packages from Congress. Some states are making, or at least predicting, budget cuts in the billions, some of which will have to come from higher education systems.

Some experts predict that college promise programs, which commit to helping students cover the cost of college, will likely be OK. Student financial aid funding tends to not get hit as hard as state appropriations for higher education during recessions, and also tends to recover more quickly, said Robert Kelchen, associate professor of higher education at Seton Hall University.

While this funding tends to be more resilient during economic downturns, this is a different situation than the Great Recession, said Jennifer Mishory, senior fellow at the Century Foundation. Some programs have already received cuts.

"We don't really know how those challenges are going to play out," Mishory said.

### Cuts and Limitations

Some states have already made cuts that have had immediate impacts.

The Oregon Legislature cut its promise program by \$3.6 million. The program, which covers community college tuition costs for recent high school graduates after other grants are applied, had received a two-year appropriation of \$40 million and had less than \$20 million left for this budget year.

"Proportionately, the cut was very significant," said Juan Baez-

Arevalo, director of the Office of Student Access and Completion for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission in the state.

The cut also came after awards were sent out. The state held a special legislative session on Aug. 10. The commission had predicted it would have about \$19 million, so when the cuts came, it had to revoke awards from some students, Baez-Arevalo said.

About 1,000 students lost their awards. All of them had expected family contributions of more than \$22,000, he said.

The timing is unfortunate, he said, but the Oregon Promise program is relatively narrow. It only serves students who are not adult learners who attend community colleges. The Oregon Opportunity Grant, the state's major financial aid program, was unscathed by the cuts, he said. Students with high

## College Promise Programs Wrestle With Pandemic Realities

financial needs would first get the grant funding, and then the promise program funds would cover the leftover costs.

Much is unknown about the future for the program, though. The state Legislature will convene this coming spring, Baez-Arevalo said.

"We don't have any speculations at this point in time," he said. "One thing I can say is that college affordability and state investment in financial aid continues to be a very high priority for our commission and the legislators in the state."

The promise program has placed income limits on the awards in the past when state funding was tight, he said.

"If there are any permanent limits or changes in the future, it will probably be focused on prioritizing the highest-need students," he said.

The Excelsior Scholarship in New York could also be at risk. The state program aimed at helping lower- and middle-income students attend four-year programs at State University of New York and City University of New York institutions tuition-free is releasing the full financial awards for this fall, according to Angela Liotta, public information officer for New York State Higher Education Services Corporation. But the state is relying on federal aid to help with the future.

New York is facing a \$62 billion loss over the next four years due to the coronavirus pandemic, Liotta said in an email. Without multiyear federal funding to help with this loss, the scholarship could be reduced or limited to current recipients, she said.

"We hope students and their families will join us in calling on the federal government to act as the level of funding the federal govern-

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Losing that funding at a time when so many students are facing precarity will set back the state's goals.

Eli Dvorkin

Editorial and policy director, Center for an Urban Future

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ment sends to states will ultimately determine the size of the New York State budget and the level of funding available for financial aid programs," she wrote.

The consequences of cuts could be severe, said Eli Dvorkin, editorial and policy director at the Center for an Urban Future, which has studied and criticized the Excelsior Scholarship in the past. While the program isn't designed to focus on the state's neediest students, cuts to the program will still hurt.

"For many students, the benefit has helped with the indirect costs of college that restrict students from getting a degree and have, in some cases, risen in pandemic," Dvorkin said. "Losing that funding at a time when so many students are facing precarity will set back the state's goals."

The state needs to preserve these types of programs, though, he said, because they can expand economic mobility in times of crisis. The fact that programs like Excelsior are potentially on the chopping block should frighten New Yorkers, he said.

"I would say the top priorities

should be public health and the sorts of programs that help New Yorkers access job opportunities that are poised to grow," Dvorkin said. "I don't think it's clear right now that the state views it that way."

Nearby, New Jersey's Garden State Guarantee, [just announced in February](#) and intended to build on other grants so students could attend four-year colleges tuition-free for up to two years, was withdrawn in May and removed from the governor's revised budget proposal, according to Nicole Kirgan, director of communications at the state's Office of the Secretary of Higher Education.

Maryland expanded eligibility for its Community College Promise Scholarship. But it ran out of funds for the students who applied, said Jim Fielder, secretary of higher education for the state.

During its first year, the program received \$15 million from the state Legislature but only awarded \$4.2 million to students. To broaden the number of students who applied for the program, the state removed the program's age restric-

# College Promise Programs Wrestle With Pandemic Realities

tions, so adult learners could apply, as well as the work agreement, which required students to pay taxes in the subsequent year after they received the award, Fielder said.

The Legislature appropriated less money — \$11.5 million — in the second year. Then the pandemic hit, and the state reduced the amount again to \$8 million, he said.

All of the \$8 million has been awarded to students. The number of awards for this academic year more than doubled over last year's — but there are still more than 2,880 students on the waiting list.

The state gave out awards based on need, Fielder said. He's confident that the funding will be increased in the future, as the state's budget recovers from this recession.

"We have a goal that 55 percent of citizens over 25 will have a higher education degree or certificate by 2025," he said. "The governor is focused on the fact that higher education is a key to upskilling the workforce."

## Different Funding Models

Leaders in some states are confident that their programs will be able to weather this storm.

The Tennessee Promise Scholarship hasn't had any cuts so far, said Mike Krause, executive director of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation.

Krause credits the program's funding structure. It receives funding through the state's lottery program, which is put into an endowment that is now at \$600 million. Most of that is invested in the stock market, which did experience some turbulence earlier this year, but Tennessee's funds have fully recovered, Krause said.

The state is now launching a re-

newed marketing campaign for the program to ensure students know about the aid.

Krause has contingency plans for shortfalls, but the program isn't in that vicinity right now, he said. Its yearly budget estimates end up within \$1,000 of the actual total budget numbers.

"There is inherent volatility in those programs but we also understand what the limits of those volatilities are," he said, referring to the lottery and the endowment.

The program is doing better than has enrollment. Total enrollment is up 6 percent over all, according to Steven Gentile, chief policy officer at the commission. Program renewals also have increased by 30 percent over last year.

"When you offer a program built on the notion of free tuition, what you're really trying to do is build trust with students," Krause said. "If the program isn't strong enough to survive economic shifts and market volatility, it won't work."

The Detroit Promise in Michigan is also doing well. That program uses fundraising and just started receiving funds from tax recaptures this year.

"We are in pretty good shape because of the way we fundraise," said Justin Remington, director of operations at the Michigan Education Excellence Foundation, which funds the program. The foundation uses multiyear fundraising with several sectors to reduce financial risk.

The last-dollar program that helps students who attend high schools in Detroit pursue two- or four-year degrees at participating institutions should be fine for this academic year, and likely the next. But after that, it's a mystery, Remington said. The foundation is

working with the city and state to determine the numbers for the tax recapture.

There aren't any contingency plans yet, said Greg Handel, vice president for education and talent at the Detroit Regional Chamber, which administers the program.

"It's difficult, with so much uncertainty, to plan for more uncertainty," he said. "Our focus is ensuring that students who are eligible are actually taking advantage of the program."

That's also been made difficult, as the program doesn't have direct access to high school students right now. Most are learning online, Handel said, so they are trying to find ways to reach students in this virtual setting.

## Building Trust

Some other programs funded through state legislatures are doing OK, too.

The Community College of Rhode Island expects cuts to the operating budget, but hopefully not to the Rhode Island Promise program, which covers last-dollar tuition costs at the college for recent high school graduates.

"The governor has made her strong support of the program apparent by making it central to her financial year 2021 budget she released to the Legislature in January," said Meghan Hughes, president of the college.

The program has performed well during its pilot years, too, she said.

The 21st Century Scholars program in Indiana has also escaped cuts. Teresa Lubbers, the state's commissioner for higher education, credits the program's 30-year tenure that's proved its worth. Students enroll in the program in the seventh or eighth grade and have an 86 percent college-going rate,



## College Promise Programs Wrestle With Pandemic Realities

compared to 61 percent for students not enrolled in the program. They also graduate at higher rates, Lubbers said.

"Our history is an advantage. We've been able to point to a pattern of success," she said. "I'd be hard-pressed to say there are any people who are talking about education in the state who aren't familiar with the program. They know it would be very risky to walk away from such a successful program."

Many experts expect more programs to announce cuts or caps due to the recession. Different funding strategies may fare better than others.

The pandemic throws a wrench in things, though.

"There are steady streams of revenue for states that are not currently steady streams because we are in a pandemic," said Dominique Baker, assistant professor of education policy at Southern Methodist University.

Federal intervention will be key to states', and higher education's, recovery, she said.

Equity is at stake, she said. Promise programs could add administrative burdens, like extra paperwork or higher grade point average requirements, to reduce the number of students they serve, she said.

They also could switch to a first-

come, first-served model, which inherently benefits higher-income students who know how to play the game, Kelchen said.

Programs that exclusively serve students attending community colleges may do better than others, as they cost less to run and sometimes get assistance from local governments as well, he said.

And while it's possible programs could be ended entirely, it's not very likely given their political popularity.

"Governors are proud of starting these programs," he said. "For example, as long as Andrew Cuomo is governor of New York, there will be an Excelsior Scholarship."

Programs that aren't protected by their funding model will have to rely on federal assistance, Kelchen said. But it's likely that relief won't come until after the election. And if there's a change in administration, relief likely wouldn't come until the new year, he said, which could leave many promise programs' budgets for next year in limbo.

Martha Kanter, CEO of College Promise, a nonprofit advocacy group for free college programs, hopes this won't slow the movement down.

"The promise programs that I'm seeing around the country are continuing to struggle through the pandemic, but I haven't seen a real retrenchment," she said. "I've seen

smarter ways to try to stabilize, to look for fundraising or donors."

Programs that use endowments will be more stable, she said, as well as those that use private and public partnerships. But many states are still figuring out the best solutions for funding these programs.

"I would hope that when a state or a local community made a promise, that they had thought through ways of sustaining those programs," she said. "This is about our integrity. This is about what we're saying to students."

Clear messaging is one of the biggest positives for these programs. If that messaging changes over time, it could create confusion, Mishory from the Century Foundation said. It can impact students who don't know what aid is available but who thought a promise program could work for them, only to find out the eligibility requirements changed.

Many of these programs come down to building trust, Baker said.

"I become really concerned when we tell students that if they do X, Y and Z, we'll help them. And then, because of these exigent circumstances, we have to make changes to that," she said. "That erodes trust in government. This is a time when higher education and states can ill afford to erode trust." ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/08/college-promise-programs-face-cuts-uncertainty-and-changes>

# Planning and Governance

- Leaders have to plan for a way forward under the new normal of a pandemic lasting for quite some time.
- Local health conditions, student demographics and how many classes need in-person instruction play a key role in leaders' decisions about in-person versus online classes.
- Pre-existing experience with online instruction helped institutions that needed to ramp up virtual learning amid the pandemic.
- Outside expertise can support planning and decision making, whether that be doctors at medical schools or local public health officials.
- Leaders didn't regret planning and making early decisions about class delivery during the pandemic.
- A relative lack of resources can constrain the available options for community college leaders.
- Institutions that hold a mix of in-person, hybrid and online classes need to make very clear what each class's modality is for students who are registering.
- Administrators should listen to students' current desires and fears when pondering whether to reopen campuses. Ignoring students' input can erode trust.
- Faculty and students appreciate reopening plans that let individuals decide whether they want to return to campus, versus plans that force people to return even if they feel unsafe.
- Transparency about decision making and key metrics is critical.
- Data indicate political leanings in state government can influence college planning, suggesting college leaders need to keep their priorities in mind and plan for managing up as well as down.

## Community Colleges Don't Regret Early Decision for Online Semester

The need for safety, training and planning drove these community college leaders to choose online learning for the fall.

October 5, 2020



A faculty member teaches students spaced out in a classroom at Albany Tech.

SOURCE: ALBANY TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Albany Technical College in Georgia made the call in May to offer instruction mostly online in the fall semester.

It differed from the plans many other institutions in the state made. About 38 colleges, both two- and four-years, planned to be fully or primarily in-person for the fall, according to data from the College Crisis Initiative at Davidson College, compared to 23 that planned to be fully or primarily online.

Nationwide, most community colleges are offering instruction primarily online. But technical colleges offer more programs that require some level of in-person training and labs. Most have reduced the capacity of their labs by 50 percent so they can provide distance between students, according

to the American Technical Education Association.

Anthony Parker, president of Albany Tech, had a few other factors to consider beyond requirements and recommendations for social distancing, he said. The local community was harder hit by the COVID-19 pandemic than others in southwest Georgia.

"With so many people sick, and a few people actually passing away that we knew, we wanted to be as safe as we could when we reopened," Parker said.

He also knew the college had to make its decision early so it could prepare the campus for the technical instruction that needed to be in-person. The college set up precautions, like temperature testing when people arrive on campus and

markers for where people can sit or stand in line, as well as special schedules that separate lab groups into three sections each day.

### 'Greatest Degree of Care'

About 26 of the college's 60 programs can be offered completely online, and the others are using a hybrid model that has students come in small groups for lab work and complete the rest of the work online.

"I'm proud of how our team accepted this challenge," Parker said. "I'm very pleased at how we worked to protect each other."

It helped that every faculty member has been required to deliver something online since early 2018, he said. For example, a welding professor may have taught the safety portion of the course online.

# Community Colleges Don't Regret Early Decision For Online Semester

The college also didn't hold regular courses over the summer and instead let students make up lab work and gave time for faculty to develop their hybrid courses. Faculty were also invited to help the college redesign classrooms so they would feel safe upon returning.

"The summer is usually a robust term," Parker said. "But we were a hot spot in the spring, and we wanted to make sure we didn't contribute" to the COVID-19 transmission rate.

The college was able to use funding from the federal stimulus package, the CARES Act, of which it received about \$2 million, to improve distance learning and hire lab assistants to help teach in a hybrid model. The college is also providing personal computer sticks to students. The sticks, which are inserted into monitors or TVs, provide internet access so students can check their online homework. The college waived application fees for students enrolling in non-health care programs and is maintaining a limited capacity for its library and computer labs.

Parker anticipated a drop in enrollment, but so far more students have been enrolling full-time, likely to make up for the lost summer, he said.

Albany Tech plans to continue using this model – hybrid courses with limited lab capacity – in the spring.

"If things change, we can adjust," Parker said. "You plan with the greatest degree of care that you can."

While data have shown that [state politics seemed to influence](#) reopening decisions for the fall, Parker, who has been president of the college for 25 years, said that wasn't

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You plan  
with the greatest degree  
of care that you can.

**Anthony Parker**

President, Albany Technical College

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a factor in his decision making.

"I'm not sure if there was pressure and I just didn't realize it, but I didn't feel any," he said. "To see people that I knew personally pass away from the disease made me need to make sure that we had done everything that we could possibly do."

The fall also isn't a diminished semester, he said. The college is offering the same courses, just with a different delivery method.

That doesn't mean the campus is free of the novel coronavirus. One faculty member and one student in two different programs have tested positive so far, out of the about 5,500 students enrolled at the college.

Both of the programs were closed and held online for 10 class days so the labs could be deep-cleaned, Parker said. Both of the people who had the virus recovered.

There are several reasons this has been an easier process for Albany Tech, though. All of the students are commuters, and the average age of students is 27.

"In many cases, they are making an attempt to change the trajectory of their life," Parker said. "They tend

to take issues seriously."

It's a different environment than the one at four-year colleges, some of which are experiencing high transmission rates. Parker can't critique those decisions because they're different, but he hopes that everyone takes the virus seriously.

"We have a basketball team. Even before the conference decided to cancel, we decided to forfeit all the games if any were scheduled in the fall and just play after January," he said. "I just thought it was the right thing to do. But I didn't have to take into consideration what would happen if we weren't eligible for March Madness."

### **'Inevitable'**

Dallas College also decided in May to have a mostly remote fall semester.

"Everybody reacted to it. Some were surprised, some questioned me, some were a little critical of it at the time," said Joe May, chancellor of Dallas College, formerly known as the Dallas Community College District. "Quite honestly, it was simply looking at the math, considering the science. Honestly, it wasn't that hard of a decision."



# Community Colleges Don't Regret Early Decision For Online Semester

Last fall, about 28 percent of the college district's courses were offered online. This fall, only about 4 percent of their courses were offered in a face-to-face format.

There were several advantages to Dallas's approach, May said. Students and faculty members were able to prepare for what courses were being offered and in what formats. Faculty received training. The college set up remote supports for students and outsourced some services, like outreach.

There was some pushback initially, he said. Some people thought the colleges could will themselves to return to in-person instruction, and it would work out.

"I didn't buy that theory," May said.

May read *The Great Influenza* by John Barry and asked his leadership team to do the same. The college built relationships with people at medical schools and talked with the county director of public health.

"I wanted our folks to understand that this was serious, that this impacts lives and that we would take it seriously and that we would listen to the experts in this space," he said, later adding, "I would say for some of my colleagues, it took them longer to come to the conclusion that it's incompatible to have students back on campus for services and keep them safe. It's just them finally choosing what we saw as inevitable."

May was concerned about equity when making the decision, though. Students at the colleges use many services, like food pantries, and take advantage of the campuses' free Wi-Fi to do work. Some nearby neighborhoods don't have great access to high-speed internet, he said. But the college's ZIP code also has a disproportionately high

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## Curtailing the spread of infection has to be the priority.

Elena Bubnova

Associate vice president for research, marketing and web services,  
Truckee Meadows Community College

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number of COVID-19 cases.

"We tried to balance that to the best of our ability by opening up certain parts of our campuses so that students can come on a limited basis and access the library and computer labs," he said. The college has also distributed \$1 million in emergency aid.

The decision did come with a cost. The college ordered 1,000 hotspots, as well as laptops, for students when it made the decision. May isn't optimistic that it will receive funding from the state or federal governments to make up for the loss.

"There are not the resources to cover the loss if we really focus on taking care of students," he said. "That just comes with the territory as we deal with this."

### No Right or Wrong Way

Truckee Meadows Community College's decision to be mostly online this fall unfurled gradually, said Elena Bubnova, associate vice president for research, marketing and web services for the college in Reno, Nev. But the college built a schedule with enough flexibility to convert to remote learning if need-

ed earlier on in the summer.

Ultimately, the college decided to be mostly online due to the number of cases in its community. A large factor was the state of Nevada deciding to not move into the next stage of reopening in July.

"Anything that has to do with safety and health of students, faculty, staff and the community at large during this unprecedented public health crisis is the right call," Bubnova said. "Curtailing the spread of infection has to be the priority."

The college redid its class schedule and provided extra training to faculty for its learning management system. It's also rethinking how it offers wraparound supports for students and how to improve engagement for students learning online, she said. So far, there have been four positive cases of COVID-19 across 10,000 full-time students. One case was a student who had recently been in a class, Bubnova said, so the college quarantined the class for two weeks.

Experts say the colleges that decided and planned early on made the right call.

# Community Colleges Don't Regret Early Decision For Online Semester

"Community colleges don't have the resources to prepare both ways for in-person and fully online," said Robert Kelchen, associate professor of higher education at Seton Hall University.

They had time to train faculty and staff, as well as address equity concerns, like lack of technology or internet, he said.

It also cut down on the uncertainty for those in the college community, said Xiaodan Hu, assistant professor of higher education at Northern Illinois University. Students had more time to make housing arrangements, if necessary, and the college had time to invest in technologies like Zoom lobbies or kiosks for student services.

The late summer and early fall also brought several natural disasters, such as tornadoes in the Midwest, Hu said. Colleges still making plans were left without power or in-

ternet shortly before classes were scheduled to start.

In some ways, it was easier for community colleges than for four-year colleges to make this call, Kelchen said. Community Colleges are not as reliant on housing and dining revenue as four-year colleges, and their student populations tend to be locals who likely wouldn't go elsewhere for college.

But they're also more reliant on external factors, Hu said. They may have had to wait for K-12 schools to decide their fall plans or for accrediting boards for programs like nursing to approve online learning plans.

The need to consider so many factors means there is no right or wrong decision for community colleges, said Audrey Jaeger, executive director of the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research at North Carolina

State University and an alumni distinguished graduate professor.

"The difficulty for administrators at any large organization is incredibly complex, and I think the community colleges are even more complex because of the diverse populations they're serving," Jaeger said.

Most of these colleges' decisions were closely tied to the events and needs of their communities, she said.

Online is not always the safest, best option for colleges, Kelchen said, but it takes resources to make in-person learning truly safe during this time.

"But if colleges know they can't afford to do rigorous testing of a sizable percentage of their campus communities, it's hard to make the case to be in-person," he said. "Community colleges can't afford that type of a testing regimen." ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/05/community-colleges-decided-early-go-online-fall-dont-regret-it>

## A Community College Reopens. At What Cost?

Miami Dade College is worrying some faculty and students with its decision to reopen.

October 14, 2020



Students socially distance in class at Miami Dade College's Hialeah campus.

SOURCE: MIAMI DADE COLLEGE

Miami Dade College is one of the most respected — and largest — colleges in the country. Founded as a community college, it continues to offer those programs and now also offers a range of four-year programs. It's a commuter college, so it doesn't rely heavily on revenue from room and board fees. And it's located in Miami-Dade County in Florida, a county that's been a hot spot within a state that's also been a hot spot for COVID-19 until recently.

So why is the college reopening for in-person classes?

This is what the faculty union wants to know. What the students who created and signed petitions to stop the reopening of campus and the county itself want to know.

And what public health experts want to know.

### Flexibility for Students

Lenore Rodicio, executive vice president and provost for the college, repeatedly emphasized flexibility as a main driver for reopening campuses starting Sept. 28 for in-person classes.

"We recognize that our students all have different preferences for how to learn," Rodicio said, referring to several surveys Miami Dade has conducted.

The college in late August surveyed the 15 percent of students who chose not to enroll for the fall semester. One of the questions asked the students what learning modality they preferred. About 73 percent, or 1,762, said they pre-

ferred face-to-face instruction.

A more recent survey asked the same students what learning issues have been a challenge since the transition to remote learning, and 51 percent said a preference for face-to-face instruction.

The college, which serves more than 100,000 students and more minority students than any other institution in the country, suffered a sharp enrollment decline this fall due to the coronavirus pandemic. As of Oct. 8, enrollment was down 14 percent compared to last fall.

There has been an uptick of students enrolling for the college's second eight-week term, though, Rodicio said.

About 6,000 people are coming to Miami Dade's eight campuses

## A Community College Reopens. At What Cost?

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each day, though the breakdown of staff versus faculty versus students is unknown, she said. The college requires everyone to wear face masks, has set up hand-sanitizing stations and is screening temperatures at campus entrances. The college isn't doing its own testing, but it is providing referrals to community sites if students arrive at campus with a high temperature or symptoms. Students, faculty and staff are instructed to report positive cases on the college's website.

Between Sept. 21 and Oct. 1, a total of 39 students reported testing positive for COVID-19.

Students have the flexibility to return if they prefer in-person instruction, but they can also remain remote, Rodicio said. There are about 35 percent more online classes this semester than in the spring.

The college serves many Latinx and low-income students, two of the populations already hard hit by the pandemic. But Rodicio said those students are having the hardest time learning online.

"A lot of it has to do with the inability to have technology at home," she said. "There's a number of different challenges."

Second-language learners have also said it's difficult to learn a language in an online format, she said.

"We're not in an ideal situation right now," Rodicio said. "This is the most viable way for us to offer that brick-and-mortar experience for those who want it and allow for people to remain remote."

Faculty members, however, don't have the same flexibility as students. Faculty members with pre-existing conditions, or those who care for someone with a pre-existing condition, can get per-

mission to teach remotely with a doctor's note. That provision was solidified in a memorandum of understanding for which the faculty union bargained. More than 600, out of a total 700 full-time and thousands of part-time faculty members, are still working remotely, Rodicio said.

### Limited Options

Some students have voiced opposition to the decision to resume in-person courses. An [online petition](#) calling on Miami Dade not to reopen garnered more than 18,000 signatures, many from students.

Matt Jiménez, a sophomore studying business administration, reached out to the college's administration directly with his concerns. He felt ignored by the response.

"They were like, 'Oh wow, this is so cool, you made a petition' but then ignored me anyway," he said.

*Inside Higher Ed* reviewed the responses from the administration. Rodicio wrote that there are other students who want to study in person, and that Jiménez can work with the Honors College to ensure he can stay remote for his classes. Eric Hoffman, the Honors College dean, wrote that he appreciated Jiménez's concerns and referred him to the campus director for help with scheduling.

But Jiménez and his friends have encountered issues trying to change their schedules so they could keep learning remotely.

"The issue is, for many classes that are not that popular, there are very limited options," he said. There is often only one honors course offered, for example, so it's by luck that the professor kept it virtual, he said.

Jiménez also worries because he has friends who are going out every weekend. Most of the peo-

ple he knows aren't taking the virus seriously, he said. They do want to return to in-person classes, but he doesn't think that's a good reason to reopen.

"I don't think people should prioritize flexibility over safety," he said, adding later, "I don't think this is a question of what people want."

Dexter Rabin, a sophomore psychology major at the college, thinks it's too early to return to campus. Rabin is also president of the Florida College System Student Government Association, though he didn't speak on behalf of the association.

"When I heard that we were going back to campus, me and a lot of other students I know were worried about what the procedures would be," he said. "I'm worried about going back to campus. I haven't been back yet because my family is asthmatic."

Still, Rabin doesn't think it's wrong for the college to try to open up. But he believes students and professors should have the option to not go to campus.

"It's a very few number of people who want to go back," he said, adding that "everybody wants to [go] back under normal circumstances."

But not when they have to wear masks, stay six feet apart and worry.

Laura Santos, co-editor in chief of *Urbana Magazine*, the college's literary magazine, also thinks reopening was a poor decision.

She is enrolled at the Eduardo J. Padrón campus in Little Havana. It's very small, she said. Most classes are on higher floors in the buildings, and there are only three elevators — not large enough to truly socially distance — in the buildings. The sidewalks and hall-



## A Community College Reopens. At What Cost?

ways are also narrow, she said.

If she attended class in person, she'd have to arrive at least 20 minutes early to wait for an empty elevator, she said.

Rodicio has said that only two people can take an elevator at any time.

Santos isn't going back to campus this semester, but some of her friends have had to do so. They've told her that the stickers indicating where people should sit or stand are already falling apart.

But she's not surprised, she said. She expected Miami Dade to reopen due to Governor Ron DeSantis's push for reopening and President Donald Trump's July threats to cut funding if schools don't reopen.

"No one wants their funding to be cut, even if they're putting students at stake," Santos said. "At the end, if you get sick, the college doesn't have to pay for the hospital bill."

Santos understands the argument for providing flexibility. But it's not actually happening, she said. She had to drop a chemistry class because the professor wasn't going to let people attend remotely.

Thankfully, he gave enough hints that she dropped it before the drop with refund date passed. The college officially announced it was reopening after that date passed.

"It's very enraging," she said. Students who dropped classes after that wouldn't get a refund (about \$360 for a three-credit course) and would have to take withdrawal grades.

"A lot of people are trapped in their classes right now," she said. "Many didn't notice whether their class was blended or not [when they registered]."

Most of her friends who have returned are very worried, she said.



Source: Miami Dade College

But many couldn't afford to withdraw. Santos also has heard that some students have found ways to bypass temperature checks by entering through areas that aren't supervised.

Santos also thinks the college is being insensitive.

"It's hypocritical, because they're saying students want to go back, but when there are a lot of students saying no, they don't listen to that part," she said. "I would love to go back, but I also would love not to get coronavirus."

The college needs to think about its students, many of whom may not have health insurance because they aren't employed or they are undocumented. Immigrant families also tend to live in intergenerational households, she said, which puts more people at risk.

"Is it for the sake of learning? Because there is a way to bring learning to the virtual world," Santos said. "You cannot tell me that it doesn't exist, that you cannot provide a similar experience that is en-

riching at the same time. They just don't want to waste money on it."

### 'Recipe for Disaster'

Reshma Ramachandran's mom is a professor at Miami Dade, and she's worried.

Ramachandran is a medical doctor and a National Clinician Scholars Program fellow at the Yale University School of Medicine. Her mom was just recently notified that one of her students reported as testing positive for COVID-19, she said. The email alert, according to Ramachandran, did not include any information about what protocols her mom should take.

Ramachandran's mother declined to talk with *Inside Higher Ed* out of fear for her job security.

Ramachandran is concerned that the college is not doing enough to keep people safe. The local virus prevalence is likely going to increase, she said, as restrictions in Miami and Florida have recently loosened. The college's website offers little detail about protocols, she said, and there's no mandatory

## A Community College Reopens. At What Cost?

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testing. Temperature and symptom checks aren't good indicators of whether someone has COVID-19, as many people who get the virus are asymptomatic, she said. It's also not likely that self-reporting will capture everyone who gets sick.

The college has said it has put in place all safety recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Her mom has been buying her own personal protective equipment, like masks, for about \$20 per week, she said. Ramachandran has sent her an N-95 mask, a gown and goggles.

"On top of that, it's a commuter school," she said. "The possibility that someone is infectious, going to school and then going back to the community is just very troubling."

Her mom teaches students who work at hospitals, which Ramachandran said is a "recipe for disaster."

Her mom also lives with her dad, who is over 65 — a population that has a higher fatality rate for COVID-19. But her mom was unable to get an exception to teach remotely, as she does not have a pre-existing condition.

"I worry that it's just a matter of time," Ramachandran said. "We're putting a lot of people at risk by opening like this."

Miami Dade's reopening plan has a lot of the basics — social distancing, cleaning protocols, a contact tracing protocol map, rotating cohorts of students coming in person so they can distance in a classroom — but it's missing two big pieces, according to experts: testing and transparency.

"At least random testing would be very important," said Jay Wolfson,

distinguished service professor of public health, medicine and pharmacy at the University of South Florida. Wolfson is also associate vice president for health law, policy and safety, and senior associate dean for health policy and practice at the Morsani College of Medicine at USF.

"[Testing] is the canary in the coal mine, and you have to have several canaries depending on how deep you're digging," Wolfson said. "Universities and colleges are ideal locations for rapid testing on random or selective people."

About 40 percent of people who test positive for coronavirus don't have symptoms. Colleges need nearly real-time data to make decisions, he said.

"We explored the acquisition [of] rapid testing on-site over the summer so that we would have a location in the north and south ends of the county, at our North and Kendall campuses," said Juan Mendieta, director of communications for the college. "However, we did not find the right fit based on cost, process and speed. We do have places students and employees can be referred, and many testing sites remain open and operational in Miami-Dade County."

The other issue is reporting the number of cases. The college doesn't have a dashboard or report of cases on its website. It collects the information and provides it upon request. The union fought to have it publicized but had to compromise with receiving regular reports.

Rodicio said the information is already public and they didn't feel it was a good use of time, technology and expense. Mendieta added that, because Miami Dade is a commuter school, it's not necessary.

Wolfson disagrees.

"One of the tremendous issues we face in management of this disease is public trust and transparency," he said. "People have a right to know about the environments they are going into for long periods of time so they can protect themselves better. Without that transparency and without routine publication of data, the presumption is that we don't have a problem. That's not fair to students, to faculty or to the community.

"This is a community issue — it is not a private issue that is subject to the decision of some administrators to release information, especially in a public university and public system," he continued.

### 'Scary for All of Us'

Some faculty don't feel that going onto campus to teach is any better than teaching remotely right now.

Only one or two students are showing up for in-person classes in some cases, said Elizabeth Ramsay, president of the faculty union. Faculty then have to split their attention between those attending remotely and those in the room.

Ramsay believes the motive for Miami Dade's decision is political.

"Our governor is closely aligned with the president," she said. "He has ordered the reopening of the state ... They're trying to force people back into these really hazardous situations."

The college has always been a jewel to its community, Ramsay said, but for the first time, it may be a bad actor.

"We teach science, but apparently our governor and our president didn't take those classes," she said.

Brooke Bovee, assistant professor of English at Miami Dade's North campus, opposes the deci-

## A Community College Reopens. At What Cost?

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sion to reopen because she thinks it's too soon.

She's going onto campus two days per week to teach. The largest number of students who have shown up physically so far has been two. Less than half of her students are eligible to come in, anyway, because they have to use rotational schedules due to the size of the classroom.

"One of the real challenging parts is when there are students in the physical classroom and the rest of them are at home," she said. "It's

teaching two classes at the same time."

In the classroom, a camera hangs from the ceiling and makes her a tiny figure, she said. At home, she can be close to her laptop webcam, which also has a better microphone, and make eye contact with students.

Bovee would prefer the college listen to the science, keep students home for now and spend money on better supporting them for online learning. The college is offering emergency aid to students, as well as other scholarships, during

this time.

"I was really proud of the college in the spring when we went remote," she said. "They prioritized getting students laptops, Wi-Fi and connected them to resources like food drives."

She's proud to work at the college, as are many of her colleagues, because of the good work they do in helping more vulnerable students succeed.

"This decision, I feel, is worrisome," she said. "It's scary for all of us." ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/14/miami-dade-college-reopens-despite-student-and-faculty-protests>

## Politics Influences Fall Plans

Analysis finds a college's fall reopening decision is tied to the partisan tilt of its state, even if political pressure may not be direct.

September 3, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/ABLOKHIN

Colleges and universities looked at several factors when determining whether to reopen their campuses to students for the fall, including local COVID-19 case numbers, campuses' ability to physically distance students and what students said they wanted in surveys.

But another factor seems to have played a major role in the decision-making process, one that is not being touted in news releases or letters to the community: colleges' decisions appear to be closely tied to whether the state they are in is red or blue.

Data from the College Crisis Initiative at Davidson College was able to predict the likelihood of whether

an institution planned to be in-person or predominantly in-person for the fall term based on the political leanings of the state.

"In an ideal world, perhaps it shouldn't matter whether there's a D or an R after your governor's name," said John Barnshaw, vice president of research and data at Ad Astra, which provides scheduling software and consulting services to institutions of higher education. The company also partnered with Davidson College for its data project by sending out surveys to its members. "But it seems to matter, for better or for worse."

The influence may not be overt, though. A separate survey that Ad

Astra sent out to institutions asked about the largest influences on fall plans. The 57 institutions that responded cited state health departments as the largest influence, and No. 3 was the governor.

"Does that mean that she or he directly reached out to a registrar or a chief academic office and said, 'I want you open'? Probably not," Barnshaw said. But most governors have communicated their preferences for reopening.

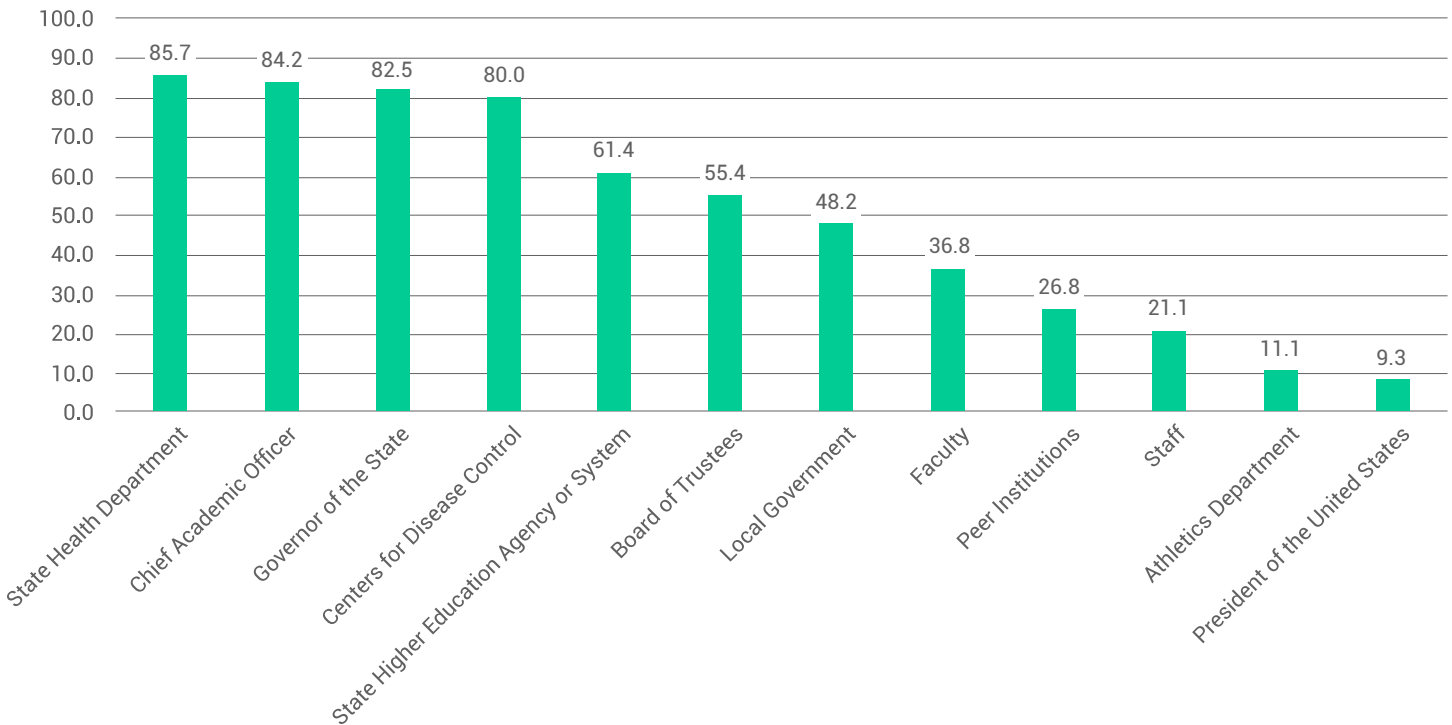
"Systems and institutions are looking at that," he said. "It does have an influence, but it's not necessarily direct."

That's also what Alisa Fryar, professor of higher education and



## Stakeholder Influence on Fall Plans

Percent Reporting High Influence



Source: Survey data from Ad Astra

administration at the University of Oklahoma, thinks could be the case.

Fryar hasn't seen a lot of pressure from elected officials, but she thinks other state-level decisions, like mask mandates, could be cues for college leaders.

"There are a lot of things about relationships between public institutions and political leaders and pressures that are not totally explicit and not completely happening in a public space," she said. "A lot of the time, I think it's a complicated dance where institutional leaders are trying to guess at how their decisions are going to be interpreted and whether they will be rewarded or penalized for those decisions."

The Trump administration has overtly pressured higher education, though. Lobbyists have been concerned that additional federal aid for colleges could be tied to reopening, and officials in the administration have pushed states to reopen campuses, even as cases climb.

Any local or state political influence appears to be a different story. Faculty, board members and administrators at several colleges and university systems told *Inside Higher Ed* that they didn't believe politics was a large factor in the decision-making process for fall. But the data show some influence, although it may be subtle.

Barnshaw and Chris Marsicano of Davidson College analyzed the data on 3,500 institutions and

joined them with data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Integrated Post-secondary Education Data System to find what influenced colleges' decision-making. He looked at the potential influence of other factors on colleges' decisions, but none seemed to match the significance of political control of the state.

If the state was carried by President Trump in the 2016 election, colleges in that state are significantly more likely to have planned more in-person instruction in the fall. This is also true for states with Republican governors and Republican control of legislatures. Colleges in states with a trifecta of a governor, state senate and house all under control of the Republican

## Politics Influences Fall Plans

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Party are even more likely to be in person.

The inverse also is true — colleges in states with Democratic governors or legislative control are more likely to offer remote instruction.

Another significant factor is the size of the institution. The larger the college, the more likely it is to be online.

Barnshaw also looked at the number of COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people in the state. This factor wasn't significant in most models. Colleges in states with very high case numbers were more likely to be online, he said, but that factor did not reduce the influence of the state's politics.

Institutional accreditation and the specific accreditor, as well as the type of governing board for the state higher education system, were also not significant in most models.

The findings are representative of the politically partisan times that

society faces, Barnshaw said.

"For our part, Ad Astra works with more than 500 colleges and universities in deep red states, purple states and deep blue states," he added in a statement. "Our goal remains the same: what can we do better [to] understand the conditions on the ground in each state, and once we have that understanding, how can we help those institutions? I'm proud that when the semester began (August 15), the institutions that partnered with Ad Astra were 15 percent more likely to have a plan and be ready to announce that plan than all other institutions in higher education."

Public education is inherently a political endeavor, said Robert Anderson, president of the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. Colleges have to interact with state legislative committees and the governor's staff.

But that doesn't mean colleges are making plans based on politics,

he said. While Anderson was not surprised by Ad Astra's findings, he cited some gray areas in interpreting them.

"What I'm hearing is the concern from states that this pandemic could last for some time," he said. "We have to try to prepare for what is the new normal."

If colleges don't have the resources or infrastructure to do online instruction well, they need to think about how to best move forward with in-person instruction, he said. Many students are saying they want an on-campus experience. Equity concerns also are a factor, as some students don't have access to technology that's sufficient for online learning.

On top of that are budget issues, like how to pay for residence halls if they aren't being used, he said.

"To expect this quick pivot to online delivery isn't very realistic, particularly in a time of budget cuts," said Anderson. ■

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