Student Success:
Everyone's Responsibility

Introduction

Student success is a goal everyone shares, but how to achieve it?

Increasingly colleges are responding by looking at all the elements of a student's success in college, and trying to address them individually and collectively. That means not just traditional academic measures, but looking at faculty attitudes on teaching, for example. And it means not only academics, broadly defined, but financial aid and career readiness.

The articles in this compilation explore the various ways that colleges and even cities are promoting student success. There are many ideas that could be replicated elsewhere.

We welcome your comments on these articles and your ideas for future coverage.

--The Editors
editor@insidehighered.com

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Linda Ding
Director of Strategic Marketing, Laserfiche

The Downside of Reduced Student Borrowing

New research shows more student borrowing is connected to greater academic success -- at least at community colleges -- and indicates reduced borrowing could lead to higher loan defaults.

By Andrew Kreighbaum // July 12, 2019

The student debt crisis has become ubiquitous in headlines and even in the mouths of some lawmakers.

New research, though, suggests that if many students are taking out unnecessary loan debt, others aren't borrowing enough to support their pursuit of a degree.

The studies found that community college students who borrow more have stronger academic outcomes than those who took out fewer loans or reduced their borrowing. And one experiment involving Maryland community college students found that positive effects of increased borrowing carry over to students' financial well-being after college -- whether or not they actually completed the degrees.

As both federal officials and college administrators raise concerns about overborrowing, the new research points to the possible downsides of messaging that could make low-income students averse to loan debt.

Andrew Barr, an assistant professor of economics at Texas A&M University, who co-wrote the study involving Community College of Baltimore County, said the findings show more nuance is necessary in discussions of student loan debt.

"There clearly are downsides to borrowing for certain people. But there is a reason we have student loans," he said. "It allows students to finance their education. And for certain students, if you reduce the

SOURCE: GETTY IMAGES

amount they perceive they can borrow, they seem to do worse."

Barr, along with Kelli Bird, an assistant professor of education at the University of Virginia, and Ben Castleman, an associate professor of education at UVA, tracked the effects of a monthlong outreach campaign that used text messages to inform students at the Baltimore community college about their student loan debt. Students who received the texts reduced their borrowing through unsubsidized federal loans by about $200, or 7 percent, on average.

That reduced borrowing resulted in students performing worse in their courses. Those who received the texts and subsequently took out lower loan amounts were less likely to earn any credits and more likely to fail a class in the semester studied. Barr said that could be because

students cut back on costs like food or spent more time working outside class to cover additional costs after reducing their borrowing amount.

The study also notably found that students who borrowed less were 2.5 percentage points more likely to default on their loans within three years. But those who borrowed more were less likely to default whether or not they completed a degree, Barr said.

"Even for people very unlikely to get a degree, academic performance matters for their likelihood of eventual default," he said.

Higher ed researchers have found that students who leave college without a degree or credential are at the highest risk of default. But the study suggests that those with worse academic performance are at even greater risk of default. Barr said it's not clear why that's the

The Downside of Reduced Student Borrowing

case, but credit accumulation, a higher grade point average or some other factor involving academic achievement appeared to make a difference for students who borrowed more in the experiment.

The study builds on previous findings from a study by Benjamin Marx, an assistant professor of economics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Lesley Turner, an assistant professor of economics at the University of Maryland at College Park. In a separate study of community college students released earlier this year, Marx and Turner found that messaging from a college could lead students to make substantial reductions in their borrowing.

The study looked at the results when an unnamed college didn't include student loans in financial aid packages. Colleges that participate in the federal student loan program can't dictate the amount of loans available to students. But they can choose the loan amount displayed in financial aid letters.

Students who randomly received financial aid offers including student loans were 40 percent more likely to borrow than were those who got an offer with no student loan funds. And students who received award letters with student loan aid borrowed an additional $4,000 and completed 30 percent more course credits.

"It's important to avoid a knee-jerk reaction that we need to get rid of student loans," Marx said. "Lots of community colleges are dropping out of the federal loan program entirely. And there's evidence that that's harming students."

Some community colleges have incentives not to participate in the federal loan program. Consistently

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high default rates on student loans can lead an institution to lose access to any federal student aid, although very few institutions have suffered that consequence for loan outcomes.

Nine percent of community college students in the U.S. attend institutions that have opted out of the federal loan program, the Institute for College Access and Success found in 2016. Some public four-year institutions have also pursued policies to encourage students to limit their borrowing levels.

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos has warned that outstanding student loan debt has created a looming "crisis" for higher education. And top department officials have pushed for tools that would allow colleges to restrict improper spending by student aid recipients.

Matt Chingos, director of the Urban Institute's Center on Education Data and Policy, said there are clearly people who are borrowing too much -- usually those pursuing a credential with little economic value. While researchers have raised questions about whether others aren't borrowing enough, he said until recently there wasn't good evidence showing the effects of underborrowing by college students.

"What these papers give us is

some solid evidence, at least with the two community colleges studied, that borrowing too little is a real thing and that people benefit from borrowing more," he said.

Chingos said it's important to note that those findings don't say anything about whether it would be preferable to give low-income students a larger Pell Grant or to make college free instead of offering loans. But given current higher ed policy, he said, the studies indicate borrowing can lead to more academic success.

Mark Huelsman, associate director of policy and research at the progressive think tank Demos, said the studies make clear that taking away one financing tool for college will have a negative impact on students. But those concerned with the effects of student loans don't want to see reduced borrowing with no other financial backstop for students, he said.

"If a student, today, is on the margins of dropping out or working too many hours, I would advise them to use the tools at their disposal, including loans," he said. "But from a policy perspective, it makes little sense why we're asking community college students to borrow in the first place rather than meeting their financial need at the outset." ∎

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Is Students' Early Career Success Their Professors' Problem?

A new paper asserts the faculty's obligation to embrace "career-relevant instruction." What exactly does that mean, for professors and students?

By Doug Lederman // February 26, 2020

The preface to a new white paper from the American Council on Education opens with what its co-author, Steven C. Taylor, concedes is an anecdote that may or may not be representative of college and university faculty members. Taylor encounters a tenure-track professor at an academic meeting who, to the suggestion that instructors should embed career-relevant information in their curricula and teaching, says that's the career center's job, not the faculty's.

The paper, the latest in a series on teaching from ACE, the largest association of campus administrators, focuses on the ways that colleges and universities should encourage and support their faculty members to connect "learning and work through career-relevant instruction," as its subtitle states.

Among other things, the paper discusses numerous steps institutional leaders can take to encourage faculty experimentation, get professors thinking beyond their own discipline and better connect instructors to student success professionals, so professors understand their key role in helping students think about their workplace possibilities. Faculty members are, after all, the "greatest single influence on students," the authors write. (Taylor is founder and managing director of ED2WORK, a strategy and research consultancy; his co-author is Catherine Haras, senior director of the Center for Effective Teaching and Learning at California State University at Los Angeles.)

What interested me most about the paper were some questions suggested by the opening anecdote.

■ Do faculty members have a role in preparing their graduates for early workplace success? Do they have an obligation to do so?

■ If so, is that true for all instructors, or only some? At all institutions, or only some? In all disciplines, or only some?

■ And if professors are responsible for preparing students for the workplace, should they try to better connect the skills, knowledge and habits of mind they want students to develop in the classroom to some potential application in their work lives?

These sorts of questions are particularly live at the moment because of underlying assumptions that people in and around higher education are making with increasing frequency:
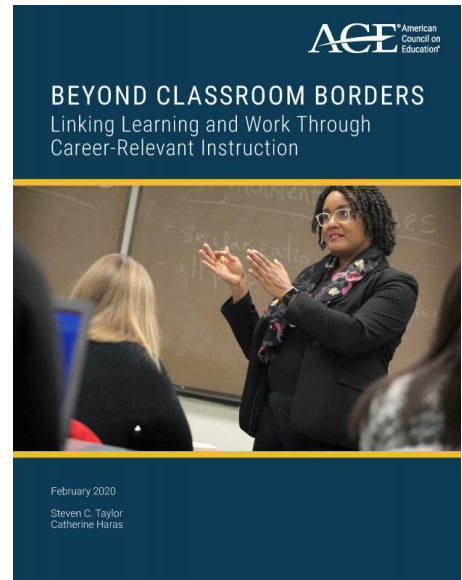
■ Employers are increasingly doubting whether graduates are emerging from colleges and universities with the skills, knowledge and habits of mind the employers want to see.

■ College curricula are not sufficiently focused on delivering the kind of learning that would better prepare students for what they will do after college.

■ And, as reflected in Taylor's anecdote, many traditional college and university faculty members don't see preparing students for work as their job and aren't willing to adapt in that direction.

Let's explore those assertions and the questions they raise.

The ACE paper undoubtedly em-braces some of the assumptions above, noting in its introduction that "employers now place increasing pressure on colleges and universities to more clearly align credentials with industry and workplace-specific competencies and skills … referred to collectively as 'career-relevant skills.' "

It notes that "many in the academy" view the push for career relevancy as a "shift away from the liberal arts to vocational and technical education, and thus a reductive view of the rich possibilities of college."

The authors insist, however, that a careful reading of the "career-relevant" skills that employers (and the authors) say they want to see in students (think of the Association of American Colleges and Universities' essential learning outcomes as one example) are "not just skills; they also include habits of mind and social abilities," such as "adaptability, communication, creativity, critical thinking and reasoning, ethical de-

cision making, leadership, problem identification and problem solving, and teamwork."

"Broadly speaking, these sets of skills cut across any single discipline and can be developed through intentional curricular experiences, regardless of the content being taught," they continue. "Many of these are already being taught in the classroom -- but there may be a lack of awareness by students as to how these skills, as they are currently being taught, relate to community and workplace settings."

Many a faculty member -- even some of those who, as described above, see the focus on career relevancy as in conflict with the values of liberal education -- could embrace a lot of what the authors of the ACE paper say.

But many of them would probably also be put off by the repeated use (in the paper's title and in numerous key sections) of "career-relevant instruction" as being what they should focus on.

When pressed in interviews, though, Taylor and Haras go out of their way to say that they don't "advocate that faculty need to make every aspect of their instruction relevant to a career," as Taylor puts it. "It's not that if you're teaching history, you've got to make that history course relevant to a particular experience that somebody might encounter in the workplace."

At numerous points throughout the paper, Taylor notes, the authors refer not just to preparing students for careers, but for "career and life." The conclusion, for instance, states that "faculty have a role in contributing to the public good by developing high-quality, relevant curricula that equip students with *broad life and career skills*, as well as discipline-specific knowledge that prepares them to contribute meaning-

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> ### What we're really talking about is how you can bring the outside world into the curriculum. Even small anecdotes that might apply to students outside the academic setting.
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fully as civically engaged citizens *in their communities and the workplace*" (emphasis added).

"What we're really talking about is how you can bring the outside world into the curriculum," Taylor says. "Even small anecdotes that might apply to students outside the academic setting."

A statistics professor might use this particular societal moment, for instance, to include in her lesson a presidential poll in which one candidate has 21 percent of the vote and the next candidate has 20 percent -- but the margin of error is four percentage points, raising doubts about who's really running ahead.

"Helping them start to unpack that is a simple way a professor can bring the outside world into the classroom," he says.

Haras, the Cal State librarian-turned-learning center director, says many faculty members she encounters "feel that they lose part of themselves if they start talking about professional work or jobs" for their students.

She doesn't "think every faculty member is responsible for something called career-relevant instruction," she says.

But "if you look at the faculty who are doing a really good job of teaching," Haras adds, "they are inculcating habits of mind, teaching students skills and relating those skills in very explicit ways to their students.

That's a pathway that for many students creates a pre-professional identity. It's a natural pathway into career relevancy."

What Is the Goal?

If the ACE paper and its authors *aren't* expecting every professor to see him- or herself as responsible for making their teaching or subject matter directly "career relevant" to students, what is the paper's goal?

Professors should be thinking about what it is that their discipline uniquely (or at least distinctly) does. "Each of these meta-disciplines -- humanities, arts, sciences, social sciences -- all make really specific contributions," says Haras. "Theologians contribute something that chemists cannot. If you're a professor, think about what your discipline does. What would it mean if psychology was missing from the umbrella [of disciplinary offerings]? That should help you come to a surer place about what to do in your curriculum" to make sure it reflects and delivers the discipline's particular brand of learning.

And while this sort of analysis might lead instructors to inject new concepts or approaches into their curriculum or classroom, Haras says, it may be just as much about highlighting learning that is already going on there.

"A lot of my work in the teaching and learning center" involves getting professors to think "about what

Is Students' Early Career Success Their Professors' Problem?

are we already doing and do we have a name for it." Students may need greater visibility into the skills and knowledge and habits of mind that they are already developing, she says, but they don't recognize it (and may not reveal it to employers) because it hasn't been called out during the course of their learning.

"I don't think I have a responsibility to help someone get their first job, at all," Johann Neem responds when I ask for his thoughts on the ACE paper. Neem is a professor of history at Western Washington University and author of *What's the Point of College?* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), a collection of essays on the value of higher education and a stirring defense of the humanities and liberal arts.

"An accounting professor probably has some obligation to prepare people for a job," he adds. "But most chemistry majors aren't going to become chemists. Faculty members in the arts and sciences' primary responsibility is to cultivate the knowledge, the virtues, the habits of mind and skills associated with being an intellectual."

That statement -- and his view that the anecdote at the start of the ACE paper is a "straw man" that underestimates the extent to which many faculty members are already embracing active learning and bringing the real world into their classrooms -- might suggest that Neem would find little common ground with the authors.

Common Ground

But as we talk, some consensus starts to appear.

"So you as a professor have no responsibility for how your students fare in the world of work?" I ask him.

Neem notes that he's on a committee at Western Washington aimed at helping students develop pathways to their first job. "So I'm not saying at all that there should be no support for students to get that first job," he says.

"What I don't want is to orient the history major to focus on transferable skills for a job," he says. One section in the paper emphasizes helping students become "adaptive" in their thinking. "I don't think I should be remaking my course on the American revolution to teach adaptivity, for instance -- that's a narrowing that will make the historian less ready economically, not more so. The richness of that [classroom] experience is that students learn to think like intellectuals -- I don't want to risk reducing that to a set of narrowly described skills."

Any such narrowing would hurt students, not help them, Neem says. But the authors' argument can also be read as a broadening of what

Johann Neem

happens in the classroom -- and that, Neem says, thoughtful humanists like him very much embrace themselves.

"The way I think we can prepare our students for a career is to help them understand what they're doing and why it enables them to have insight, to have purchase on certain questions, that people in other fields and disciplines don't have," Neem says.

"The authors are right that students sometimes don't register that what they're learning has great practical value, and that they have the capacity to make sense of issues that any organization or any society faces," he adds. "We probably need to articulate that more for students, because the more you articulate to students, the more aware their own brains are at registering."

And as Taylor and Haras acknowledge, Neem thinks it's important to widen the lens so that "career relevant" in the title of the ACE paper becomes "life and career relevant."

"Being an intellectual as a humanist or scientist or mathematician or a philosopher comes with the capacity to do certain things," he says. "How we articulate those things that a humanist can do or a scientist can do that bring value to the world is absolutely part of our job.

"As students come to appreciate what they can do as humanists or scientists, they will see that the knowledge they have gained, the methods and habits of mind they have developed, are things that will help them contribute to society, both in the economy and as citizens." ∎

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The Impact of Faculty Attitudes About Intelligence

Students have better educational outcomes in courses taught by those who have "growth mind-sets" than those who believe intelligence is fixed. For minority students, achievement gaps are cut in half.

By Scott Jaschik // February 18, 2018

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM // NATALI_MIS

A new study suggests that faculty members' attitudes about intelligence can have a major impact on the success of students in science, mathematics and technology courses. Students see more achievement when their instructors believe in a "growth mind-set" about intelligence than they do learning from those who believe intelligence is fixed. The impact was found across all student groups but was most pronounced among minority students.

The study -- by brain science scholars at Indiana University at Bloomington -- was published in the journal *Science Advances* and presented last week at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The researchers collected data on 150 faculty members in a range of STEM disciplines and 15,000 students over two years at a large public research university that is not identi-fied. Faculty members were asked to respond to a general statement about intelligence along the lines of "To be honest, students have a certain amount of intelligence, and they really can't do much to change it."
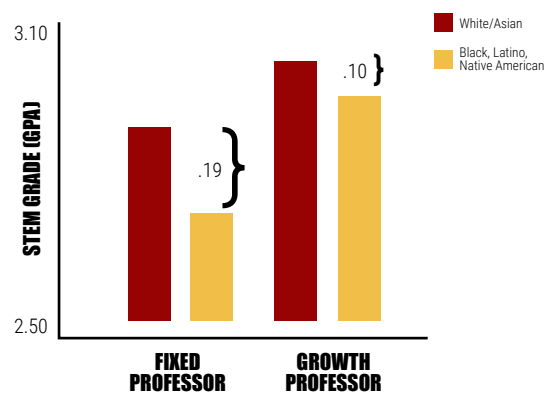
The study then looked at student performance in courses taught by those who agreed with that per-spective and those who did not.

Students from all groups earned higher grades with faculty members who thought it was possible for people to experience intelligence growth. But the impact was particularly notable for black, Latino and Native American students (see bar chart below).

The findings:

While all students perform better when STEM professors endorse a growth mindset belief, the racial acheivement gap is almost halved when professors endorse a growth-mindset belief.

Legend: White/Asian · Black, Latino, Native American

Y-axis: STEM GRADE (GPA), from 2.50 to 3.10

FIXED PROFESSOR: gap .19
GROWTH PROFESSOR: gap .10

The Impact of Faculty Attitudes About Intelligence

The article argues that the faculty attitudes about intelligence carry over into the messages faculty members send to students, with those who believe in fixed intelligence suggesting to students that only the "innately gifted" are likely to succeed. Those who believe in intelligence growth are more likely, the article says, to share techniques with students on how they can become better learners.

Students with the latter group of faculty members are more likely to report that they are motivated to do their best work, and to recommend the course to others.

The researchers wanted to find out for the study whether some types of professors were more likely than others to hold fixed views of intelligence. But here the study didn't find patterns, even after looking for them within STEM disciplines and comparing professors by gender, race, generation or years of teaching experience.

Some studies have found that underrepresented minority students do better in courses taught by "same-race role models." But this study did not find that impact, even though it found a substantial impact on minority student performance based on attitudes about intelligence.

The paper acknowledges that there could be another factor at play. "It is possible that faculty who endorse fixed mind-set beliefs create more demanding courses -- requiring students to spend more time studying and preparing for their course," the paper says. "If this is true, then differences in students' performance and psychological experiences might be explained by the

> **Rather than putting the burden on students and rigid structural factors, our work shines a spotlight on faculty and how their beliefs relate to the underperformance of stigmatized students in their STEM classes.**

demands of these courses (instead of professors' mind-set beliefs)."

But the paper said that the researchers could not measure this. But they could identify the use -- by faculty members not holding to the view of fixed intelligence -- of a range of pedagogical techniques linked to improved learning by students in all groups.

Why would this divide based on views of intelligence have more of an impact on underrepresented minority students?

"Faculty beliefs about which students 'have' ability in STEM might constitute a greater barrier for [underrepresented minority] students because fixed mind-set beliefs may make group ability stereotypes salient, creating a context of stereotype threat," the paper says. "Recent research suggests that when stigmatized students expect to be stereotyped by fixed mind-set institutions, they experience less belonging, less trust and more anxiety and become less interested (27, 28), suggesting that fixed mind-set faculty might also engender these adverse outcomes among students."

Taken as a whole, the paper argues that its findings may suggest a different approach to those seeking to promote more success of all students, and especially of minority students, in STEM.

"Millions of dollars in federal funding have been earmarked for student-centered initiatives and interventions that combat inequality in higher education and expand the STEM pipeline. Rather than putting the burden on students and rigid structural factors, our work shines a spotlight on faculty and how their beliefs relate to the underperformance of stigmatized students in their STEM classes," the paper says. "Faculty-centered interventions may have the unprecedented potential to change STEM culture from a fixed mind-set culture of genius to a growth mind-set culture of development while narrowing STEM racial achievement gaps at scale."

The principal investigator on the project is Mary Murphy, a professor of psychological and brain sciences at Indiana. The other authors are Elizabeth Canning, a postdoctoral researcher in Murphy's lab; Dorainne Green, a postdoctoral researcher at IU; and Katherine Muenks, who was a postdoctoral researcher at IU at the time of the study. ∎

A Second Chance at Detroit Colleges

Wayne State University and other colleges in the region are seeking to boost graduation rates by forgiving outstanding balances of students who left without earning a degree.

By Andrew Kreighbaum // October 7, 2019

Dana Paglia's path to graduation at Wayne State University has been a circuitous one.

Paglia put her degree on hold in the winter semester of 2012 because her father was terminally ill. When she tried to re-enroll a year later, she was blocked by the university because of an outstanding $1,300 balance from her last semester there.

Not only was Paglia -- who was just 15 credits short of graduating -- stopped from taking more classes, the balance meant the university wouldn't release her transcript to send to other colleges.

She eventually took culinary classes at a local community college and worked for several years on food trucks in the Detroit area.

"It was fun and different," Paglia said of the detour in the culinary industry. But it was not what she envisioned when she started at Wayne State, where she had hoped to pursue a career in advocacy.

"Working 80 hours a week to make $12 an hour is not exactly what I wanted, especially since I was so close to having a whole other career I was planning for myself," she said.

Things changed quickly last fall when she got a call from Wayne State offering her a chance to wipe out her debt and re-enroll at the college. After posting improvements on low graduation rates at the university, college officials set their sights on former students like Paglia who left campus without a degree. By January of this year, she was back in classes to complete the anthropology degree she began several

SOURCE: WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
Old Main building on Wayne State campus

years earlier.

"When I got the call, it was a too-good-to-be-true type of situation," she said.

Paglia was one of the first students to enroll in the Warrior Way Back program, an initiative Wayne State launched last year that has become a model for higher ed institutions in the Detroit metro area and is drawing attention from well outside the Midwest region. The program offers incremental amounts of debt forgiveness to students who left without graduating if they re-enroll and make progress toward earning a degree.

Warrior Way Back reflects the growing concern of many higher ed officials and policy makers with the number of students who leave college without a degree. Nearly 700,000 people in the Detroit metro area have attended college but have not graduated. People who left college without finishing are more likely to have difficulty paying off their student loans or to default on their student loans, according to higher education experts. The large number of noncompleters is also an indication of how institutions such as Wayne State have fallen short in serving many students even as those institutions have made marked improvements in retention and graduation rates.

Dawn Medley, Wayne State's associate vice president for enrollment management, said she got the idea for Warrior Way Back after listening to a radio story about a Detroit initiative to forgive parking

fines of residents.

"We had been talking about re-engaging adult students. A lot of students are hindered not just by student loan debt. They were hindered because they also owed us [a balance]," she said. "What if we could set it aside like a parking fine?"

Colleges can't forgive students' federal or private loans. But small balances students owe to their institutions can often make or break their ability to complete college, especially if they've exhausted financial aid options such as federal grants and loans.

"When they came to us originally, we said based on their admission that they could be successful here. Somewhere along the way, we as an institution weren't there to be helpful," Medley said. "We see it very much as the student giving us another chance."

Wayne State students who withdrew more than two years ago, had at least a 2.0 grade point average and owe no more than $1,500 to the college are eligible for the Warrior Way Back program. Medley said the college has identified about 5,000 former students in the area who qualify and for whom they have a current address. About 60 percent were seniors when they left the college. And the vast majority (about 80 percent) have some level of financial need. Medley said she hopes eligibility requirements for the program can eventually be expanded further.

In the interim, the college is already seeing returns on the initiative. Since Wayne State began Warrior Way Back in the fall of 2018, 142 students have enrolled in the program. Twenty have since graduated, and 10 more are expected to follow suit in December. Medley said the buzz about the program has even prompted former stu-

dents who left without graduating but didn't owe money to the university to inquire about returning.

Warrior Way Back is part of broader changes happening at Wayne State University in recent years. The university has received national attention for improving its graduation rate. About a third of new students at the college were completing a bachelor's degree in six years in 2014. At 13 percent, the rate was even more dismal for African American students. But the college boosted its six-year graduation rate to 47 percent by 2017, although degree attainment for black and Latino students still lags.

That improvement is due in part to more personal outreach to students by advisers and initiatives such as a summer program for entering freshmen who need remedial courses. Wayne State officials they want to cut the university's racial achievement gap in half by 2025.

"We have more support now to help those students cross the finish line," Medley said.

The Policy Perspective

Julie Ajinkya, vice president of applied research at the Institute for Higher Education Policy, said a key feature of the Warrior Way Back

model is that a student's balance is forgiven over a series of terms, so they are incentivized to make progress toward the degree. Just as important, she said, is that colleges themselves change how they support students.

"We're not just asking folks to re-enroll, crossing our fingers and hoping something is different this time around," she said.

While students benefit from finishing their degrees, colleges also stand to gain from the returning students. The balances being forgiven have already been written off by the college. And Wayne State generates more revenue from tuition and fees for those students than it loses by canceling their outstanding balances.

IHEP has created an online cost calculator that shows college leaders the potential return on investment from establishing their own debt forgiveness plan modeled on Warrior Way Back. The group completed that project with backing from the Lumina Foundation and the Kresge Foundation, which have provided grant funding to organizations in 24 cities across the country since 2017, including Detroit, to ad-

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When they came to us originally, we said based on their admission that they could be successful here. Somewhere along the way, we as an institution weren't there to be helpful. We see it very much as the student giving us another chance.

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dress higher ed degree attainment.

Other colleges have used creative ideas to get students back to campus, including offering scholarships. But Wayne State's focus on using institutional debt forgiveness is as significant as the way it's become a regional strategy to steer former students toward college completion.

"If you live in the Detroit area, you have an entire ecosystem of higher education that has adopted what I think is a commonsense policy allowing people to continue their education," said Dakota Pawlicki, Lumina's strategy officer for community mobilization.

Thanks in part to Detroit's inclusion in a network of Lumina "Talent Hubs," the Wayne State model has been noticed by institutions well outside Michigan.

Colleges in Indiana, Ohio, Oregon and Wisconsin have inquired about the program. And Eastern Iowa Community College already has its own institutional debt forgiveness program underway, Pawlicki said. But the program's influence has been largest in Wayne State's own backyard.

Model for Other Detroit Colleges

After learning about the Wayne State model, officials at Oakland University, another four-year institution about 40 minutes north of downtown Detroit, opted to target an even larger group of students -- including both students who left without a degree as well as those at risk of dropping out.

"We wanted to look at ourselves to make sure we're not increasing the problem," said Dawn Aubry, associate vice president for enrollment management at Oakland. "What can we do to make sure we're not contributing to the stop-out issue?"

College officials look for telltale signs that students may be at risk

of dropping out -- lower grades, changes in majors or overall time to earn degrees -- and reach out directly to offer individual support, including advising and financial assistance.

Oakland's Golden Grizzlies Graduate Program forgives the outstanding balance of former students for each semester they make progress toward a degree. It also offers microgrants of up to $500 to those students who don't owe a balance to the university.

At Henry Ford College, a two-year college in Dearborn, Mich., officials are making the process easier for students who have left college without a degree to get an official transcript -- one of the biggest barriers for students to later earning a degree. Students who pay down half their balance can receive the transcript immediately. Those who agree to a payment plan can re-enroll in classes. The college also assigns those returning students individual academic advisers.

Daniel Herbst, vice president for student affairs at Henry Ford, said the college's president became interested in starting an initiative like Warrior Way Back after hearing

Medley speak about the program.

"Some schools will look at this as a way to increase enrollment," Herbst said. "For us, it's more about serving students who really need the opportunity to come back to school."

Employers Aim to Develop New Talent in Region

Local industry has taken its own interest in the debt forgiveness model to hit ambitious goals for a more educated workforce in the region. An initiative backed by the Detroit Regional Chamber has set a degree-attainment goal of 60 percent, including high-value certificates and associate degrees, for adults in the area by 2030.

The Detroit metro area's degree-attainment rate is currently 45 percent, and the population of new high school graduates is declining. So to boost the share of residents with postsecondary credentials, local colleges have to do more to reach the adult students, said Greg Handel, vice president of education and talent at the Regional Chamber. The Wayne State model for steering students back to campus appeared to be promising for other colleges in the area as well, he said.

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> If you live in the Detroit area,
> you have an entire ecosystem
> of higher education that has adopted
> what I think is a commonsense policy
> allowing people to continue
> their education.
>
> "

A Second Chance at Detroit Colleges

"The idea here is taking a great idea and commitment from Wayne State to tackle this issue and seeing if we could leverage that idea and turn it into a regional strategy," Handel said.

The debt forgiveness model is just one strategy among several being tested in the Detroit area to hit degree-attainment targets. The chamber is also working with local colleges to create stronger degree pathways for adult students and also encouraging local firms to offer tuition benefits to employees who enroll in higher ed programs. The chamber is also playing a direct role in connecting students with colleges.

"There's this notion that maybe a generation ago people moved to where the jobs were. Now companies with the best jobs that pay the most tend to seek out the most educated talent," Handel said. "We need to ensure we that we have a good, solid pool of educated talent both for our existing employers and for employers that may want to expand into our region."

A generation ago, many Michigan residents were able to get well-paying jobs without continuing their education past high school, said Tiffany Jones, director of higher education policy at the Education Trust, which advocates for closing gaps in achievement for low-income students and students of color in colleges and K-12 schools.

"Those jobs are few and far between now," Jones said.

The debt forgiveness model has the potential to increase the social mobility of new graduates because their degrees will boost their prospects to get a better-paying job, Jones said. It also matters that Wayne State in particular is pioneering the new program, she said. Nearly 40 percent of the university's student body is nonwhite, and 50 percent are low income. Those students are disproportionately likely to benefit from a program like Warrior Way Back, Jones said.

She noted that the program also reflects a shift in understanding of higher ed institutions' role in their students' success.

"A decade ago, if someone dropped out, college leaders would have a hundred reasons why that was the case. All of those reasons put the blame entirely on the student," Jones said. "Higher ed institutions actually have a role in these outcomes and can do better."

Medley said that's true of Wayne State, where college officials are now more focused on how they can better help both current and former students finish degrees.

"We're a different institution than we were 10 years ago," she said.

Paglia, now 27, is emblematic of the kinds of changes college officials believe Warrior Way Back can lead to for individual students. She entered the fall semester with only one class remaining to complete her bachelor's degree but got approval to begin taking courses for a master's degree in urban planning concurrently.

And her return to college has already helped her land a new job at the Community Housing Network, a nonprofit that helps connect people dealing with chronic homelessness with housing options. The job goes "hand in hand" with her graduate program, she said. She got it after giving a presentation on chronic homelessness at the Detroit Institute of Art.

Paglia acknowledged initially feeling nervous about coming back to campus. But she said she soon realized many other students had dealt with similar challenges.

"You start to realize this is more common than you think," she said. "It was scary feeling like you didn't belong after so long, but no one made feel like I didn't belong for a second." ∎

The Secret's Out

Claflin is not well-known outside South Carolina, but the liberal arts institution stands out among seven other HBCUs in the state and is raising its national profile.

By **Marjorie Valbrun** // October 1, 2019

For those in the know, Claflin University has always been a bright spot in a landscape of bad news about dwindling resources, decreased state funding and declining enrollment at many colleges that predominantly serve black students.

To the uninformed, the private liberal arts institution in Orangeburg, S.C., is just one of many small, indistinguishable historically black colleges, or HBCUs, struggling to keep their doors open and remain relevant at a time when some question if such colleges, or at least as many of them, are still needed. (There are eight HBCUs in South Carolina alone.) Never mind that Claflin is financially secure, its enrollment numbers stable and its reputation strong.

This conflict between perception and reality was always top of mind for Henry Tisdale. He spent considerable energy pushing back on the misperceptions even as Claflin reached one milestone after another, meeting and sometimes exceeding goals big and small that he set for the university when he became president 25 years ago.

"When I arrived at Claflin, I knew firsthand the excellence that already existed there," he said. "It was considered one of America's best-kept secrets. I was determined not to keep it that way."

By the time Tisdale retired last June, the secret was decidedly out -- and others had taken note.

Today Claflin, which is affiliated with the United Methodist Church, is among the most highly regarded HBCUs in the country. It has a freshman retention rate of 78 percent and a job placement rate of 86 percent, among other good academic outcomes.

Its average four-year graduation rate for the last five years is 40 percent, and the average six-year graduation rate for the same period is 50.4 percent, which is higher than the average for HBCUs.

Enrollment has also climbed steadily over the decades. The university had 1,023 students enrolled when Tisdale arrived in 1994; that number had more than doubled to 2,172 by the time he left.

As Claflin's reputation has risen, outside benefactors have come calling with offers to help build on the university's momentum. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation gave the university $1 million in unsolicited grants to help it revise and improve its general education program by aligning the School of Humanities and Social Sciences' curriculum more closely with workforce needs. The old program required students to complete 46 credits; the new program requires 39 credits and gives students more flexibility to customize their courses and add minors and certificate programs based on their career goals.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Lilly Foundation are also supporting various initiatives on campus to help more students graduate, better prepare them for

SOURCE: CLAFLIN UNIVERSITY
Henry Tisdale

careers and improve their employment prospects.

Tisdale said representatives of the foundations told him they had been tracking the university's progress and wanted to encourage its efforts.

"They're recognizing the climb of the university and the student success of the university," he said. "They not only want to support us financially but to partner with us to share what we do with other institutions."

He noted that Claflin enrolls many first-generation students from families with limited financial means and who are eligible for federal student aid. Roughly 40 percent of the students fall into that category, according to the university's institutional research office.

"These students may be academically challenged when they arrived at Claflin, but the foundations look at our outcomes, our high retention, graduation and jobs placement rates," Tisdale said.

Satisfied alumni have also been paying attention. They helped Claflin become the leading HBCU in alumni giving, a distinction the university has held for the last 20 years. It was also the first HBCU to reach 50 percent in alumni giving. (It hit an all-time high of 52.2 percent in 2013.)

"I think this stems from the fact that our alumni are very pleased with the education they receive from the university," said Tisdale, a mathematician who graduated from Claflin and received his doctoral degree from Dartmouth College. "We also spend a lot of time educating our students about philanthropy while they're still students, and about giving back and serving before they leave the university."

Claflin's endowment grew from $7 million to $27 million during Tisdale's tenure. The endowment is modest compared to those of more well-known HBCU powerhouses such as Howard University ($688.6 million in 2018), Spelman College ($389.2 million in 2018) and Morehouse College ($145 million in 2018). But Tisdale says those institutions had very long head starts.

"They're in a league by themselves," he said. "They didn't acquire their endowments in the last 20 years. They had the opportunity to accumulate those funds over many decades."

Harry L. Williams, president and CEO of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, which represents and supports public HBCUs and other predominantly black institutions, or PBIs, largely credits Tisdale for the university Claflin is today.

"He has created an institution that can be a model for other small private institutions, and not just HBCUs," Williams said. "The key word is 'stability,' the stability he brought to the institution. What he has been able to do is create a strong culture of sustainability. When you can keep people focused on the mission at hand, it keeps things moving. When parents visit colleges campuses, that's what they're looking for."

Tisdale did this in part by getting alumni to invest in the university, Williams said.

"Students are your greatest ambassadors, and if they're happy and satisfied, they're going to promote the university," Williams said. "They're going to be your biggest advocates and help recruit students to your institution. And his being an alumnus of the institution also played a critical role."

Tisdale said he got plenty of help building up the university not just from alumni but also the university's governing board.

"I was very fortunate to have a Board of Trustees that worked in partnership with me," he said. "They were true leaders in fundraising at the university and contributing to its success."

It also helped to have the backing of faculty and administrators.

"He's the real deal," Karl Wright, Claflin's provost and chief academic officer, said of Tisdale. "I worked at South Carolina State University, our next-door neighbor, for some time. Claflin was not even on the map then -- it was just a nice, small school. He made Claflin relevant, and he made it special."

Wright cited various rankings placing the university in the top tier of HBCUs nationally and also non-HBCUs in the region. He credits Tisdale's leadership style, the academic programs he built and the administrators he charged with helping him run the university.

"He was a catalyst for all of that," Wright said. "We are now far and away considered the best HBCU in South Carolina -- there's no one even close. We became the relevant benchmark for a lot of other HBCUs and non-HBCUs. I can't tell you the number of times we've gotten calls from people at other colleges asking if they can come to Claflin to see what we're doing."

Williams, a former president of Delaware State University, a public

> " Students are your greatest ambassadors, and if they're happy and satisfied, they're going to promote the university. They're going to be your biggest advocates and help recruit students to your institution. "

HBCU, said Tisdale's relationship with the board played a large role in his effectiveness as president.

"If you have the right connection between the board and the president, it's amazing what you can do," said Williams. "The right chairman of the board and the right president aligned together always moves the university forward. It's the key to the success of any institution of higher learning."

Williams worked closely with Tisdale when their respective universities became part of nine HBCUs to take part in a Gates Foundation initiative to improve student outcomes and erase race and income gaps by addressing poor academic and personal support, inflexible and ineffective learning pathways, student loan debt, and other barriers.

Although Claflin and Delaware State were part of the initial core group in the early stages of the HBCUs Pursuing Transformative Change initiative in 2014, other colleges and universities, including large state colleges and state higher ed systems, later joined to form what would become The Frontier Set, a partnership of 29 colleges and universities and two state systems from across the country representing a diverse cross-section of higher education.

"I continue to acknowledge his leadership smarts," Williams said of Tisdale.

Williams is not alone in his praise for Tisdale.

"The Claflin University motto proclaims that 'The World Needs Visionaries,' and in his years as president, Dr. Henry Tisdale proved himself fully deserving of the high standard the motto sets," Michael Lomax, president and CEO of the United Negro College Fund, said in an email.

Lomax noted that Tisdale, who is a member of the UNCF's Board of Directors, established the university's Center for Excellence in Science and Mathematics, the Freshman College, the Professional and Continuing Studies Center, and the Honors College, which has higher admissions requirements.

The university has also launched fully online undergraduate and graduate programs, and two years ago started an R.N.-to-B.S.N. program, becoming the first and only HBCU in the state to do so.

"Under his leadership, Claflin's growth and progress were rapid and remarkable," Lomax said. "The student population doubled, and so did campus size, and applicants hailed from 26 states and 15 countries."

As chairman of UNCF's member college presidents, Tisdale "also helped shape the course not only of Claflin, but of all private HBCUs," Lomax said.

Some might argue that Claflin's performance should not be surprising, or for that matter, even newsworthy.

A report released in June by the UNCF's Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute concludes that "HBCUs perform far better than their sizes and resources would lead one to expect" when it comes to enrolling and graduating students.

The report argues that these institutions merit more federal and state support, as well as investments of private corporations and philanthropic foundations, at a time of diminishing public funding for colleges.

UNCF, in partnership with the Lilly Endowment Inc., joined with 24 HBCUs and PBIs in 2015 to establish the UNCF Career Pathways Initiative, which helps these institutions strengthen student career outcomes "by increasing the number of undergraduates who transition to meaningful jobs in their chosen fields upon graduation," according to a UNCF-CPI fact sheet.

The seven-year pilot program is designed to boost participating institutions' capacity to work more closely with students and employers and better integrate education and career preparation through stronger internships, more effective experiential learning opportunities, career counseling and other activities.

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The Secret's Out

Nine of the 24 institutions are in three-institution clusters that received up to $6 million each and are collaborating, as well as working individually, to achieve those goals. Claflin, which is located about an hour from Voorhees College and Benedict College, both HBCUs, is leading the Carolina cluster.

"From our perspective, one of the things that are really, really important is building employer relationships, so we worked early on building up two employer councils of private- and public-sector employers that gave us resources, guidance and insight as all three schools have modified their general education programs," said Cathy Franklin, executive director of the Carolina cluster.

She said Claflin reorganized various seminars as a result and is also freeing up space in the curriculum so that students can add more courses in their field of studies that give them "21st-century competencies."

Franklin said being among the universities chosen "was an exciting achievement" and that Tisdale was instrumental in making it happen.

"I loved working with him," she said. "He was very open and supportive."

Lezli Baskerville, president and CEO of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, a membership and advocacy association of all HBCUs and PBIs, described Tisdale's accomplishments as "his success sauce."

Baskerville said Tisdale has shared his five-point "Claflin Model of Excellence," or CME, with 12 freshman classes of presidents and chancellors averaging 50 HBCU and PBI leaders at the association's annual Presidential Peer Seminars. He also mentored many freshman presidents and chancellors.

"Another ingredient in President Tisdale's CME was his intentionality in making the cornerstones of Claflin, the faith and education liberation that historically anchored HBCUs, while simultaneously growing a model, nimble university, that was globally connected and technologically driven," she said in an email, also noting that few people realize that Claflin University has a leading international program.

Dwaun J. Warmack was named the ninth president of Claflin last June. He was previously president of Harris-Stowe State University in Missouri.

"My aspiration is to honor President Tisdale's amazing legacy, by continuing the Claflin standard as a beacon of excellence in higher education for future generations to come," he said in a university press release. ∎

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The Ultimate College Teaming Up in Houston

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

By Ashley Smith // August 7, 2018

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

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

called Houston GPS, and teamed up with Complete College America to achieve that goal.

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

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

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

Guided pathways are traditionally designed to set an academic course for students from the time they enroll until they graduate. While many of those initiatives de-

crease the amount of time it takes students to earn degrees, the programs have shortcomings, Sugar said.

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

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

Sugar then drafted an agreement that would encourage colleges to not only pursue guided pathways but also to align their math courses to specific careers and majors so programs that don't require calculus would not force students to take requisite entry-level algebra

classes. The agreement included other popular reforms that colleges have been pursuing separately, such as meta-majors, which are broad, career-oriented content areas that help students identify the major they want to pursue. Colleges would also agree to corequisite remedial or developmental education that requires students to enroll in college-level gateway English and math courses with additional support.

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

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

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

"They're working with the partner institutions to design academic plans and degree maps that align, and that's nirvana," Sugar said of the college leaders. "They never

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

had conversations like that. It's always been them designing degree maps within their institutions and not looking down the street at … a competitor school and asking, 'What are you doing down there?' "

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

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

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

"We spend a lot of time and energy communicating with students in ways they don't want to commu-

nicate," said Wendell Williams, a special adviser to the president at Texas Southern, one of the newest universities to join Houston GPS. "If you make a phone call, 90 percent of our phone calls are not answered, or the number is not correct."

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

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

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

Getting students to enroll is one thing, but holding on to them and

The Ultimate College Teaming Up in Houston

making sure they leave with a degree is another, he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Drilling Down Into Distance Education Data

New online learning stats show growing demand for online programs across state lines and shed new light on in-state online enrollments.

By Lindsay McKenzie // **February 27, 2020**

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM // METAMORWORKS

Over 1.5 million students studied toward online degrees at institutions in their home state last year, according to new distance education data released today.

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) has been collecting data on the number of out-of-state students studying online for the past four years.

This year for the first time the report includes in-state students studying online in addition to out-of-state students studying online -- painting a much fuller picture of the online learning landscape.

Data collected from NC-SARA's 1,960 member institutions (from every state but California) show that 2.8 million students studied in fully online degree programs in 2019. Of these, 1.5 million were in-state students and 1.3 million were out-of-state students. Out-of-state online enrollment grew by 5 percent compared with the 2018 data.

Before NC-SARA existed, individual states used to collect online enrollment data, but it was difficult to get a national picture, said Cheryl Dowd, director for the State Authorization Network at the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies. "I appreciate that NC-SARA is providing consistency in the reporting," she said.

While the federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) requires institutions to report their distance education enrollment, it does not break down that enrollment by state. "It's helpful for states and institutions to see who is going out of state and where they're going," said Dowd. The NC-SARA database makes it possible to track which states students at specific institutions come from.

When it comes to picking a college, even online, proximity clearly matters to students. A 2019 survey by Wiley Education Services and Aslanian Research suggested that

54.1%, 1,517,530 · Out-of-State Enrollment · In-State Enrollment · 45.9%, 1,288,852

2019 Total Reported Distance Education Enrollment
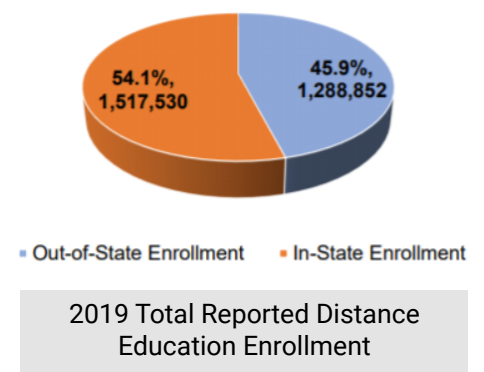
Drilling Down Into Distance Education Data

2019 Top 10 Institutions by Size of Reported Online Enrollment

Institution Name	State	Sector	Total Reported Online Enrollment
Western Governors University	Utah	Private nonprofit	120,876
University of Phoenix	Ariz.	Private for-profit	95,938
Southern New Hampshire University	N.H.	Private nonprofit	95,832
Grand Canyon University	Ariz.	Private nonprofit	69,952
Liberty University	Va.	Private nonprofit	62,561
University of Maryland Global Campus	Md.	Public	47,537
Strayer University	D.C.	Private for-profit	43,765
American Public University System	W. Va.	Private for-profit	43,573
Ashworth College	Ga.	Private for-profit	41,329
Capella University	Minn.	Private for-profit	36,915

online students are increasingly choosing to study close to home. The NC-SARA report shows public institutions accounted for 53.2 percent of the total reported online enrollment in 2019. The vast majority of these learners, 80 percent, are in-state students.

At private nonprofit institutions, however, a different picture emerges. At these institutions, 68 percent of a total 836,644 online students were enrolled from out of state. At private for-profit institutions, 92 percent of 475,505 students were out of state. Since 2017, online enrollments at for-profit institutions have declined by more than 100,000, despite a positive increase in 2018, the NC-SARA data suggest.

As public institutions tend to start out with a regional, rather than national, focus online, it makes sense that the majority of their online enrollments are in-state, said Dowd. Public universities tend to have strong local brand recognition and are typically slower than privates to market their online learning at a national level, she said.

With more than 47,000 students, the University of Maryland Global Campus had the largest fully online enrollment among public institutions, followed by Arizona State University and Purdue University Global. Western Governors University reported the largest online enrollment among private nonprofit institutions. The University of Phoenix reported the highest enrollment among private for-profit institutions, with 95,938 students.

In previous NC-SARA reports that did not count in-state online enrollment, no public institutions made the top 10 list of institutions by size of reported enrollment. This year, UM Global Campus came in at No. 6.

"The data confirm what we knew anecdotally to be true -- a lot of public institutions are serving their state citizens with online learning," said Lori Williams, CEO and president of NC-SARA. "We know that campus-based students tend to go to schools within a 50-mile radius of their home, and we thought that something similar was happening online. Now we have the data to support that assertion."

Members of NC-SARA agree to shared national standards that make it easier for them to offer online programing across state lines. There are 49 states participating in the agreement, with the exception of California. The District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands also participate in the agreement.

Providing data to NC-SARA is a condition of being a member institution, said Marianne Boeke, director for policy research and state support at NC-SARA. This year the report had a 99.5 percent response rate, with exceptional circumstances preventing a small number of institutions from participating. "We've never had a repeat offender," she said.

Boeke said she and her colleagues are mindful that they do not want to burden members with excessive data reporting requirements. But they want to make the data they collect as useful as possible to their state and institutional members, she said.

Tracking Learning Placements

This year, NC-SARA introduced a new addition to its report: exploring the number of students in online or on-campus programs participating in out-of-state learning placements. These include, for example, internships or clinical placements for students in medical fields. It's a topical issue, given the looming federal requirement for institutions to make disclosures to all students about professional state licensure requirements, said Williams.

Drilling Down Into Distance Education Data

While NC-SARA institutions have been required to make professional licensure disclosures to students for some time, institutions still struggled to pinpoint how many students are engaging in experiential learning, said Boeke. "At the departmental level, administrators absolutely know where their students are and track them closely. But trying to filter that up to the institutional level has been tricky," she said. "It's going to take a while to get systems in place so that each institution can report this data efficiently and accurately."

A total of 239,955 out-of-state learning placements were reported in 2019, but Boeke suspects this number is likely "on the conservative side." The majority of these placements, 60.5 percent, were in health-related programs, followed by education (9.5 percent) and business (5 percent).

Some states and programmatic accreditors do collect information on where students find placements, particularly in highly regulated fields such as nursing, said Jennifer Mathes, interim CEO of the Online Learning Consortium. But it's "not easy to pull that information together to get a national picture," she said.

Both Mathes and Dowd said they would like to see these data being collected on a more granular basis in the future -- perhaps breaking down health-related placements by their associated program titles. But both said they understood that NC-SARA is being careful not to overburden their member institutions.

"They're asking the right questions for their organization. I think they've got the balance just about right," said Mathes. ∎

> " Before NC-SARA existed, individual states used to collect online enrollment data, but it was difficult to get a national picture. "

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OPINION

Curing Programmitis to Create Diverse Student Success

Transformational change -- a total restructuring -- is needed
to disrupt embedded patterns and reorient campuses
for a new student body, argues Adrianna Kezar.

By Adrianna Kezar // January 29, 2020

"Programmitis." This term, coined a few decades ago by Daryl Smith, senior research fellow and professor emerita of education and psychology at Claremont Graduate University, was used to described campus efforts to address the increasingly diverse student body. College and universities looked at students as a problem needing to be fixed with interventions -- with programs. Smith was concerned with not only the deficit orientation but also the sheer inadequacy of such approaches. The programs typically reached few students, touched them too lightly and applied a Band-Aid to a gaping wound. Smith called instead for institutional transformation to support diverse student success.

Higher education has been making efforts to address a more diverse student body for four decades, yet the needle has moved very slowly, with only minimal progress in improving the retention and success of first-generation, low-income and racialized minority students. The same goes for adult, commuter and part-time students, while statistics for other groups -- such as transgender, learning-disabled and LGBTQ students -- are not even tracked. Higher education has added programs and services "on the side" without a substantial rethinking of its core functions and practices.

In *Becoming a Student-Ready College*, Tia Brown McNair and her colleagues called for campus leaders to rethink their efforts at wishing for different students while putting in just marginal supports. The authors noted the need, as well, for significant changes and indicted the organizational structures in higher education as being impenetrable for students.

The calls for institutional transformation and culture change have either been too daunting, leading campuses to continue piloting small changes, or have left higher education administrators not knowing how to approach such a process. What many of those administrators have yet to grasp is that the problem is not students. Rather, the issues stem from the reality that colleges and universities have never been set up to serve first-generation, low-income or underserved racially minoritized students.

In *Recognizing and Serving Low-Income Students in Higher Education* I traced how colleges, minority-serving ones aside, developed historically to serve the wealthy and elite, demonstrating how ingrained the patterns of whiteness, class and privilege are. In those analyses, I highlighted how the structures of higher education institutions prevent students from succeeding, and I underscored why side programs and services alone will never suffice. A total restruc-

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turing is needed to disrupt these embedded patterns and to reorient campuses for a new student body.

In a new report, "Creating a Diverse Student Success Infrastructure," from the Pullias Center for Higher Education and the American Council on Education, I provide a pathway for leaders to conduct this institutionally transformative work, modeled on the examples of campuses that have been successful in undergoing such changes. I base my ideas not only on empirical data but also on sound research from systems theory -- research that demonstrates that when the infrastructure is aligned to support a change initia-

tive, transformation is more likely to occur and be sustained.

The infrastructure of a higher education institution includes core features that facilitate organizational functioning and day-to-day operations, including planning, governance and decision making, policy, finance/resource allocation, information and institutional research, facilities and information technology, human resources and development, incentives and reward structures, and metrics and accountability. The more these elements are strategically leveraged and aligned with the goals of diverse student success, the more an institution can mobilize to effectively serve such students.

For example, policies dictate the actions of faculty and staff members and create the conditions in which student success can be achieved or not. Because policies establish the possibilities for action, they are a strong driver of systems and cultural change. Academic policies such as grading on a curve encourage competition and signal to students they are in a survival environment, not a thriving one. Another example might be scheduling policies that do not allow for students in the same cohort to take classes together and form a community that encourages their success.

This is particularly important because campus policies were generally established when institutions were not diverse. If senior administrators routinely examine key institutional policies, they can work to change the ones that create barriers -- such as those related to admissions criteria, student advising, curriculum, staff hiring criteria and faculty promotion and tenure. Left unexamined, however, such policies can shape a set of experiences that is exclusive rather than inclusive.

An effective institutional infrastructure includes three core elements related to change and systemic support for diverse student success:

■ **Implementation of interventions to support students.** Efforts to put in place proactive advising, for instance, without investments in the infrastructure -- such as technology, training and policy review -- are likely to face serious challenges. In contrast, when the proper infrastructure is in place, it facilitates, eases and often speeds the adoption of new programs and initiatives.

■ **Institutionalization of sustained interventions over the long run.** Interventions often come and go due to a lack of tangible support or because organizational hurdles are too overwhelming. Yet if campus administrators pledge continuing financial, policy and leadership support for cross-campus mentoring, for example, then change agents will struggle less to overcome organizational inertia and any issues that prevent them from supporting and embedding the change.

■ **Culture change resulting from having student success values integrated into the day-to-day work of the campus.** That includes the campus's decisions, processes and activities. For example, moving from grading on a curve to a more developmental grading approach reinforces and embeds an institutional ethos that supports student success rather than a sink-or-swim approach.

Ultimately, the benefit of the student success infrastructure is that it can lead to broader institutional transformation. As more and more elements of the infrastructure are aligned toward the same underlying values of diverse student success, the more likely it is that the entire campus will be a different place.

It is time to move support for diverse students from the margins of institutions -- in isolated programs and services -- to the center. With the right infrastructure, we can finally make good on the values that promote the success of all students in college. ■

Bio
Adrianna Kezar is a professor of higher education at the University of Southern California and director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education. She is a national expert on student success, equity and diversity; the changing faculty; change; governance and leadership in higher education.

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/01/29/transformational-change-needed-campuses-adequately-serve-diverse-new-student-body

Faculty Members Are the Key to Solving the Retention Challenge

It is essential to build a culture of success for students in the classroom, department by department, writes Carl J. Strikwerda.

By Carl J. Strikwerda // September 4, 2019

The biggest challenge that America faces in higher education is graduating more of our students. Providing access to education is a major issue, but if students fail to finish, they can't gain the value of a postsecondary degree.

Nor can the United States remain competitive as a nation in the global economy. We once led the world in the percentage of college graduates in the adult population. Depending on which measure is used, we now rank as low as 19th. The decline is not because we send fewer young people to college than other nations do. The gap comes from our failure to graduate students, even after six years.

Why is this the case? For a large portion of young people, it's because they don't make adequate progress toward their degree. The United States has more than 3,000 four-year colleges and universities. The American Talent Initiative, using IPEDS data, has found that fewer than 300 of these institutions graduate at least 70 percent of their students within six years. Nationwide, only 59 percent of students graduate within six years. If we add in community colleges, the largest single sector within American higher education, the picture is more troubling still. Only 14 percent of community college students who say that they plan to get a four-year degree actually obtain one within six years of beginning community college.

The failure to have more students graduate is a human and financial tragedy. From the human perspective, it leaves millions of families with less of an opportunity to advance economically, embitters them toward society as a whole and dashes the dreams of young people for a better life. The financial implications are equally troubling. Millions of students leave college with loans that are all the more difficult to pay because they lack a degree to earn a higher income.

In fact, the student loan crisis is disproportionately a crisis for those without degrees. The likelihood of default is actually in inverse correlation to the size of the debt. Almost one in four of those with less than $5,000 in student debt are in default, while only 7 percent of those with more than $40,000 in student debt are in default. Meanwhile, colleges and universities collectively spend billions on students who do not graduate while still having to spend more to recruit, advise and teach new students to take their place.

On top of that, the students who suffer from this defeat are disproportionately those who can least afford a setback. The correlation between those who succeed or fail in college and students' family income is a close fit, even after controlling for test scores and high school grades. The higher the income of the parents, the likelier students will find a way to graduate. The lower the family income, all things considered, the more likely they will not.

Many of the students failing to graduate clearly have the intelli-
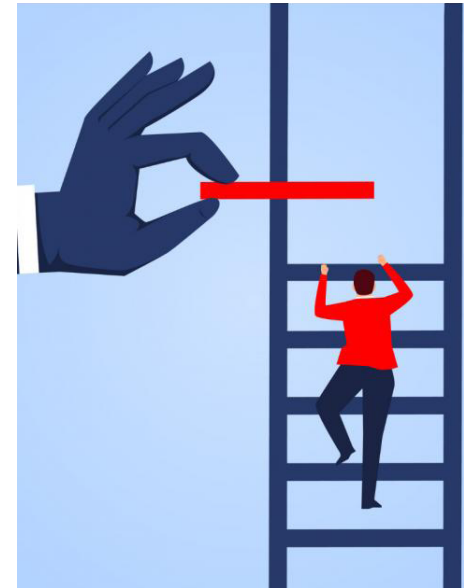
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gence and desire to succeed. True, many fail due to personal issues, finances, prior educational gaps or family problems. Too often, however, we in higher education have failed them. Advising, financial aid counseling, student support systems and campus climates all have to play critical roles in order to help students graduate.

The Most Direct Way

Even more important, the research and money being poured into helping improve retention often doesn't flow to those who are crucial to student success: the faculty and department chairs, program directors, and deans who shape faculty culture. Faculty members are often the most direct way to help at-risk students.

Colleges and universities reach out to at-risk students in myriad

ways, with registrars, advising centers and financial aid offices all playing important roles. Yet students may decide to ignore such efforts. By contrast, if students do not show up for class and turn in their work, failure is guaranteed. No matter what else colleges and universities do for students, success in the classroom is essential.

In the last analysis, then, it is instructors who control their fate. Colleges and universities can often do more, at less cost, to help at-risk students by concentrating on how to reach them most effectively in their academic work than by other means, as important as they may be.

Departmental culture, therefore, is also crucial to students graduating. Even at colleges and universities with low graduation rates, there are bright examples of departmental success. Conversely, at the three institutions where I worked over the last 20 years, all of which had admirable retention rates, the variance among departments could be striking. Some departments retained as many as 90 percent of their first-year students into the sophomore year, while others retained as few as 60 percent.

The best indicator, furthermore, is not retention in a department itself, given that as many as 30 percent of bachelor's degree students switch majors at least once in the first three years, and 9 percent change more than once. The best indicator is whether or not students leaving a major also leave the institution as a whole and fail to graduate. The engineering department at one college made a major contribution to the college's overall retention by quickly advising students who were failing about other possible majors. Rather than leaving the college, more of those students

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changed majors and graduated.

Far too little information exists on how to help academic departments ensure that students succeed, in spite of the obstacles that they face. What I have learned from my experience and the internal institutional data that I have worked with are the following:

■ **Individual instructors -- especially in the first semester and first year -- make a huge difference.** If colleges are willing to collect data at a more granular level, it almost always reveals that certain professors have learned how to reach at-risk students effectively and teach them skills to survive at the college. Other instructors can, and should, learn from them.

■ **Introductory courses are crucial make-or-break arenas.** Special care must be taken in developing curricula and creating opportunities in these courses for tutoring, office hours and study-skills sessions.

■ **A slow ramp beats a deep dive.** At-risk students perform better if they take the most difficult courses at a measured pace, rather than a demanding load in the first semester. Departments with lower retention rates can consider rede-

signing their curricula and adding ways for at-risk students to catch up.

■ **It's important to share relevant information widely.** Many instructors, academic departments, department chairs and deans lack information on their role in retention and graduation. They typically would be happy to help their institutions do better in retention and graduation, but they don't have the data, examples of best practices or incentives to change their cultures. Providing such data and clear incentives, and sharing the best practices from the most successful faculty and departments, can make a major impact.

■ **Non-tenure-track faculty members and adjuncts are essential partners.** Often, they teach the majority of first-year students. Many are experts at reaching at-risk students. They can share their insights with other instructors and benefit from more support and training on how to help improve retention.

■ **Collaborative efforts pay off.** Culture eats strategy, if not for breakfast, as Peter Drucker may or may not have said, then at least by the time of the midmorning coffee

break. By fostering a culture of collaboration, departments can rally around the goal of retention and make a difference on their own, even if money, a strategic plan or leadership from above are absent.

At one university where I consulted, a department and the dean were at loggerheads over the department's insistence on running its own internal advising center for first-year and sophomore students. The duplication in effort and money seemed unwarranted. Then I talked to the department chair. She pointed out that her department had one of the highest retention rates, even controlling for students' background and preparation. She explained that the university advising center too often treated all courses, instructors and class schedules as the same. "With students at risk," she said, "we know that we have to steer them to certain instructors, certain classes and schedules, or we won't see them back in a year." Other departments that I've worked with at institutions large and small have revamped their first-year curricula so that at-risk students take an easier initial load, are monitored carefully and then helped to catch up or advised on other majors if they don't do well.

The goal for a department should be to help students do their best and keep them at the university, even if they switch majors. Too often, innovative departments are islands of success. They have helped at-risk students stay and graduate because a chair, veteran faculty member or dean created a culture where retention is a common goal.

Research, funding and leadership at the level of the university are essential if we are to change the trajectory of failure for millions of students. But just as important will be grassroots efforts -- supported by presidents, accrediting bodies and foundations -- to build a culture of success department by department. Making a change could help millions of students and their families, contribute to economic opportunity, burnish higher education's reputation, and restore a bit of faith in the American dream. ∎

Bio

Carl J. Strikwerda is a former president of Elizabethtown College, dean of arts and sciences at the College of William and Mary, and associate dean at the University of Kansas.

Read Original Article ▶▶ https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/09/04/faculty-must-play-bigger-role-student-retention-and-success-opinion

Where Analytics Go Wrong

Jeff Aird says until higher ed uses analytics in a self-aware and brutally honest way, it can't fix the growing problems with student success and retention.

By Jeffrey Aird // September 13, 2017

Colleges and universities have traditionally looked at completion and achievement gaps through an institutional lens. We naturally look outward to identify most problems. We see a K-12 system that produces depressingly low levels of college preparation. We see "at-risk" students with full-time jobs, family pressures and unrealistic expectations.

But what would happen if, instead, we looked at the institution through the lens of the at-risk student? What would they see as the problem? What could they teach us about our institutions?

Most student analytics initiatives follow an interventionist model. Students follow the traditional admissions and enrollment process until at some critical point they act in such a way that suggests their likelihood of success has declined. This behavior could include having done poorly on an early exam, missing a few class periods, dropping a course, or not meeting with their adviser. Algorithms and statistical models identify these markers and signal the institution that intervention is needed. The hope is that this "just-in-time" extra support will meet the students when they most need it and help them solve their problem.

The trouble with this model is that it focuses on building new processes to fix the student's problem. It largely ignores what we can do to keep students from becoming at risk in the first place.

The interventionist model, at least as played out at most community colleges, assumes that students bring with them unique and individual characteristics and background, which, when played out in the higher education system, predispose them to become at risk for failure. The belief is not only that the power of analytics can identify these students early enough, but also that these large, bulky and bureaucratic institutions can customize individual interventions to increase the likelihood of completion.

When a recent vendor of student analytics software explained to me that his tool could "identify which students are unlikely to return next semester," I couldn't help but let out a small chuckle. I responded by saying, "Yeah, it's not that hard; just start pointing." Community colleges interact with students in nonlinear ways and often experience more than 50 percent turnover of students every year. I didn't need help finding the at-risk students. They were everywhere. I needed to better understand why the systems and processes in our college were not already helping them.

What if we could genuinely view our institutions through the lens of at-risk students? What do students think as they fill out the application? Why do they decide to take a certain course? How do they feel about the assignments they are given? We would begin to see that the choices, behaviors and actions we deem "at risk" are often explained as natural and even expected outcomes given the way we design their experience. We would discover that much of the student success problem resides

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not in at-risk behavior, but rather the business model, systems and processes that produce at-risk students and then try to fix them.

Perhaps we don't need to intervene with students, but rather with ourselves?

Exposing Institutional Problems

We need a new business process: one that better matches the needs, desires and expectations of our students. Instead of trying to fix the student, we would put our efforts on exposing and solving the institution's problems. We need to let our student success problem solve ourselves.

Could we transition our efforts at implementing an interventionist analytics model to a formative process model? A formative student analytics model focuses on look-

ing at the institution through the student lens. Shift the focus from creating new supplemental support systems to improving or eliminating the existing processes. Imagine having intricate, detailed and actionable information about all students as they are going through our admissions, orientation, classes, food services, advising, midterms, registration, etc. We could learn from the students how to make those processes better, how to improve their learning and how to increase engagement.

What if this information was readily available to both front-line staff and managers to learn from, respond to and improve by? What if we could build a system so student-centric that few students actually ever became at risk? What if we built a system that works for at-risk students rather than trying to help them through a system that creates them?

New Rules Required

This will require what Mark Bonchek calls "unlearning" in his November 2016 Harvard Business Review article "Why the Problem With Learning Is Unlearning." Bonchek is not an educator, but his message rings true to those who serve community colleges. While community colleges are admittedly a more recent development (at least compared to their university peers), they were built upon a nearly ancient educational model. This model certainly is not obsolete, but, to borrow from Bonchek, "it is decidedly incomplete."

The single greatest challenge faced by community colleges is unlearning the assumptions of structure, design and organization that are nearly ubiquitous. The sector is permeated with obsolete mental models. We see a K-12 system that produces depressingly low college preparation. We see at-risk students with full-time jobs, family pressures and unrealistic expectations. While these factors are largely true, by putting them as the focus of our interventions, we block a perspective of a true self-reflection needed to improve organizational design.

Too many of us see a perfect educational model with broken students. If we could unlearn our current model, we would discover that much of the student success problem resides not in at-risk behavior, but rather the organizational model itself. Think of it -- we have a model in which nearly four in five students are at risk. We intentionally funnel students into a system we know isn't built for them and then we try to "intervene" around the edges to plug the holes. Instead of trying to fix the students, we need to put our efforts into unlearning the model.

We treat students as passive consumers even when they would rather to be co-creators in a meaningful educational experience. We continue to operate as a linear and transactional model even though students don't interact with us in a linear fashion. It's admittedly scary and unclear how we embrace the nonlinearity of the learning journey, but as we shift to focus on building continuous learning-centered relationships with students, we will more fully meet our purpose as community colleges.

Until we use analytics in a self-aware and brutally honest way, we will only be working around the margins. ∎

Bio

Jeff Aird is vice president for institutional effectiveness at Salt Lake Community College.

Improving Graduation Rates by Nudging Faculty, Not Students

Jeff Gold, Roy Stripling and Michal Kurlaender describe a program that encourages professors to use tools offering specifics about the academic trajectories of their students to help facilitate those students' paths to a college degree.

By Jeff Gold, Roy Stripling and Michal Kurlaender // January 23, 2020

Experiments in behavioral economics and education suggest that individuals can benefit from a "nudge" to complete tasks. In higher education, more often than not, these nudges are about student behavior. From scheduling meetings with advisers to attending faculty office hours, students are nudged to complete tasks that could improve their educational success.

In today's increasingly global knowledge economy, however, preparing students for success requires adapting college to students as much as it requires students adapting to college. To that end, we at California State University wanted to test whether faculty members could be nudged to use tools that offer specifics about the academic trajectories of the students in their classroom and follow suggestions for facilitating their path to a college degree. Based on our early results, we would argue that nudging faculty is a strategy that should be in the toolbox for all higher education institutions attempting to better support students.

The impetus for nudging faculty arose as part of our Graduation Initiative 2025, an ambitious commitment by the nation's largest and most diverse university system to help an increasing number of students earn a high-quality college degree and eliminate equity gaps. Achieving this vision requires transformative change at every level within the university's 23 campuses -- and most important, among the 27,000 members of the university's faculty.

For many students, the most influential person in their college experience is a faculty member. Given this outsize influence, faculty members must have the most effective tools to support their students. Empowered with contextualized data about their students, they can identify opportunities to adjust their pedagogy, implement curricular changes and remove institutional barriers to student success.

Supporting faculty in this endeavor, CSU created a set of student success dashboards with interactive visualizations disaggregated to the department, major and course level. Highlights of the dashboards include salient information about students who leave the institution without a degree, analyses of course GPA gaps between underserved students and their peers, and predictive models that assess the relationship between meeting early academic milestones and completing a college degree.

Those dashboards received rave reviews from faculty members, but utilization rates indicated that less than 10 percent of the professoriate was using the resources. To scale the reach of the dashboards and nudge faculty to use the tools, we borrowed from an oft-used student engagement strategy: the email campaign.

The goal was to deliver a personalized email to all campus faculty members that they would open and

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read and that would compel them to click on the embedded links and visit the dashboards. We partnered with administrators at two CSU campuses to produce and send a contextualized message from the provost, alerting faculty of the availability of the dashboards and extolling their value and connection to the campus mission. The subject, salutation and interactive graphics embedded in the email were customized for each recipient.

Below the provost's message, we included an infographic designed to engage faculty with five highly relevant data-informed questions related to the students in their classrooms. Each question was accompanied by a "Find the Answer" button that, when clicked, opened

a browser window and presented a specific page in the corresponding dashboard.

For example, if the question read, "Which electrical engineering courses have the largest GPA gaps between first-generation students and their peers?" the button would take users to a course-level equity-gaps page in the dashboard. A visual depiction of the 10 courses in the faculty member's department with the largest GPA gaps between first-generation and non-first-generation students would be presented.

Were faculty nudged to learn about their students? According to MailChimp, typical education and training industry email campaigns average an open rate of 17 percent and a click-through rate (meaning the email reader clicked on at least one link inside the email message) of 2 percent. Our expectations were marginally higher, given that we were sending the message from campus leaders to their faculty members. But even with this caveat, the results far exceeded our expectations.

Our first campaign, which was conducted during a spring term, received an open rate of 46 percent and a click-through rate of 12 percent. Our second campaign, launched the following fall term, had an open rate of 80 percent and a click-through rate of 29 percent. A deeper analysis of those statistics indicates that, on average, faculty members who clicked through to the dashboard did so on three separate occasions within a two-week period. These repeat visits suggest that faculty members who accessed the dashboard were highly engaged with the data.

Amy S. Fleischer, dean of the College of Engineering at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, attested to the positive impact that using the dashboards had in promoting student success discussions in her college. She noted that her faculty implemented a variety of pedagogical improvements in a mechanical engineering dynamics course as a result of their dashboard discoveries prompted through the email campaign. "By better understanding the particular points at which our students struggle," she said, "we can better target our efforts to improve graduation rates."

Nudging students via text and email messages is an increasingly popular practice that has been proven to have an impact on their success. At California State University, we have seen early success in employing a similar practice with the faculty. Salient attributes of our nudge campaign, which should be considered by other institutions, include the timing of delivery, the author of the message (the provost), the personalized communication and the ability to access the dashboards with a single click.

Today, there is a dire need to identify what colleges and universities can do to better support students in achieving their degree goals. While we focus most of our efforts on understanding and changing student behaviors, we should also support the behaviors of leaders across the institution. We certainly recognize that helping faculty members identify where changes might be needed to better meet their students' needs will require more than an email nudge. But raising awareness around where and how to obtain such information is an important first step. ∎

Bio
Jeff Gold is assistant vice chancellor of student success at the California State University Office of the Chancellor. Roy Stripling is director of the Student Success Dashboard there. Michal Kurlaender is department chair and professor of education at University of California, Davis.

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Higher Ed Leadership and Ed Tech in the 21st Century

Innovations and advances raise questions of how new academic leaders should help choose the best products and develop the best practices, writes Terri E. Givens.

By Terri E. Givens // June 20, 2019

Software and technology have been a part of higher education since the first computers came online. Despite this, many new academic leaders have much to learn about the latest developments in the world of ed tech. Advances in software and new apps raise questions of how leaders should choose the best products, as well as how best practices can be developed.

The world of educational technology was mainly focused on learning management systems when I started my academic career in the late 1990s. Blackboard was new, and soon we would see new entries such as Canvas and Moodle. Then, when I joined the provost's office at University of Texas at Austin in 2006, it was clear that the campus was going to need a new student information system -- the mainframe version was getting outdated. The efforts to develop data-gathering systems for faculty went through several fits and starts. I recall trying out one of the beta systems that allowed me to put all of the information for my annual review into an online form. But that initial system was abandoned when it didn't work properly, so my efforts were in vain.

When I became provost at Menlo College in 2015, one of my goals was to learn more about the ecosystem of educational technology in Silicon Valley. Also, as a board member for several organizations that support college-bound students from underserved communities, I became interested in the ways that companies were using educational technology to help first-generation and low-income students succeed in college.

At Menlo, the first step for me was getting a better understanding of the software systems and apps that we used across the campus. I knew that we used one system to gather our student information and another as our customer relations manager for admissions. We were also in the process of adding another data management system for our alumni and donors. The transfer of data from each of these systems could be complicated by data entry errors, and keeping track of the status of students often ran into issues. I also soon learned that there wasn't a good solution that covered all three components of a student's passage through the college, and even if there were, it could be prohibitively expensive to try and migrate to a new system.

The imperatives of a changing student body led the college to try various apps for student engagement, particularly those that would work on mobile phones. It was clear that students were rarely reading email and that getting important information to them would require using text messaging. Our student affairs division tried several apps that would not only send important messages but also track student use of services such as advising, the career center and attendance at campus events. Campus security was also a factor, as the need
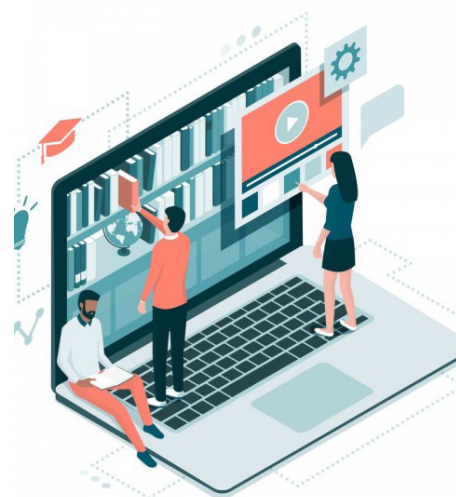
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arose to be able to reach students in case of emergency, such as a natural disaster or security threat.

Using Technology to Improve Student Outcomes

Since I left my position as provost last summer, I have been working with several ed-tech companies and attending conferences that emphasize ed tech, such as ASU/GSV or those focused on a tech topic, like one at *Inside Higher Ed*. Most recently, I started my own company, the Center for Higher Education Leadership, which has a mission of empowering leaders and providing a portal for professional development opportunities. Although we provide support for a broad range of administrative issues, information on the latest in ed tech is an important component of our professional development

offerings.

I have become interested in applications that use artificial intelligence to try to improve student outcomes. Several apps are available that can send students text messages with reminders or ideas for improving their class performance. This includes Study Tree, which started off as a way to connect students with peer tutoring and has evolved into a broader approach to student success -- one that helps with studying and access to complementary resources for courses.

About a year ago, I was invited to an event at the Salesforce.org headquarters in San Francisco, and I also attended their Higher Education Summit in Washington, D.C., where student success was a major theme. I learned about the ways that other universities, like Georgetown University, were using technology to reach students in a variety of ways. And I became aware of companies like Civitas that use predictive analytics to track student progress and improve student outcomes.

The use of data to track and support students has raised some concerns about student privacy and tracking of students in ways that might negatively impact lower-income students. However, it was also clear that these types of data could be used to improve graduation rates, if used properly.

Such concerns led, in fact, to the collaboration among several large research institutions through the University Innovation Alliance. The universities, including my former employer, the University of Texas at Austin, share best practices for using predictive analytics to improve student success, with a focus on improving graduation rates. For example, former University of Texas senior vice provost David Laude,

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who had been charged with improving graduation rates, encouraged the use of predictive analytics and also developed new practices in his own biology courses that improved student retention. He focused on helping students complete those courses rather than using the big lecture classes to weed out less prepared students.

But before they could move forward with their ambitious agenda, members of the alliance found that they had to go back to their institutions and determine what data resources already existed and develop an inventory of data and processes. Similar to my experience at Menlo College, it was important for campus leaders to gain a better understanding of how different units on campus were using data and software, from admissions to student life to alumni outreach. All of the campuses involved have achieved improvements in graduation rates, but the progress has perhaps been slower than expected.

Laude and other representatives from the UIA presented their results at a leadership forum held at the recent ASU/GSV conference. Many organizations such as *Inside Higher Ed* are working to bring higher ed leaders together to learn more about the best practices around student success that are happening at places like ASU, Georgia Tech and the University of Texas at Austin. But more outreach needs to be done, and I'm hoping that my own platform and others will be the means of sharing best practices, not only for four-year institutions but also community colleges.

Collaboration can be difficult, even within college campuses, given the varying needs represented by all the academic and administrative units and the demands of accreditation. The burgeoning world of educational technology is working to address many of the issues that college campuses face, but the results are often piecemeal approaches to different aspects of a student's journey from high school student to alum. It is important to break down the silos across a campus so that institutional leaders can understand the current use of technology, develop plans for collaboration, reduce the redundant use of software and develop a technology strategy that can reduce costs and increase innovation. Meetings of

Higher Ed Leadership and Ed Tech in the 21st Century

key stakeholders are a vital component to developing these strategies, but it will have to be guided by top leaders and chief information officers who have a handle on the broader tech landscape.

Another takeaway for me has been that higher education leaders and those in the ed-tech world need to work to understand and communicate more with each other. This process must start with education. New higher ed leaders need to take the time to learn about the tech landscape and gain a better understanding of the variety of offerings available. Attending conferences like ASU/GSV or Educause is a good introduction to the world of educational technology and will provide new campus leaders with a quick introduction to the vari-

ety of offerings that can help their campuses support students and improve their infrastructure. Our newsletter, *Higher Ed Connects*, is an additional resource for those who cannot make it to a conference or want the latest on ed-tech issues for administrators.

K-12 and higher education institutions must also collaborate more on these fronts. That could be done through creating more connections between high school representatives who are advising college-bound students and college academic advisers. Finding ways to share information could help students have an easier transition from high school to college. This could be done through existing organizations like NACAC and NACADA, who bring together pro-

fessionals who work with students in college admissions and advising.

The stakes are high as we work to improve access and provide support for students so they can be successful in college and in their careers. Higher education is an important gateway to jobs that will evolve as technology like AI continues to reshape the working world. As I watch my own son enter college, I hope he will benefit from a liberal arts education that takes advantage of the latest innovations, providing him with a strong background for whatever career he may choose. That includes the latest innovations in educational technology. This is an evolving topic, and I will continue exploring in future articles the ways that campuses across the country are addressing it. ∎

Bio
Terri E. Givens is chief executive officer of the Center for Higher Education Leadership. She previously served as vice provost at the University of Texas at Austin and provost at Menlo College.