

# Guiding Students to Success at Community Colleges

**INSIDE**  
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# Introduction

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For community college educators, a central issue in recent years has been promoting success. Many community colleges have struggled to increase completion rates – even as they have tried many tactics to do so.

At many colleges, this work now extends beyond what goes on in the classroom. Colleges focus more than in the past on guiding students – through advising, curricular requirements and monitoring student progress. And these efforts are in many cases paying off – especially when combined with reforms of remedial education.

The articles in this compilation explore these issues broadly and specific efforts by some community colleges. *Inside Higher Ed* will continue to track these issues, and we welcome your views of this compilation, and your ideas for future coverage.

**--The Editors**

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# Powering what's next for higher ed

There's no doubt that higher education is undergoing a rapid evolution. With a dwindling pool of funding, community colleges must find new sources of revenue, as well as innovate new and creative ways to engage, attract, and educate today's students.

Technology—and how it is used—can make all the difference for today's institutions, and embracing modern technology offers the best options for transforming the educational experience.

But there's a serious road block: Departments at community colleges have traditionally operated within “silos,” and all too often, important data is scattered across the institution. Making the right connections between data points—let alone analyzing their patterns and significance—becomes a real challenge, if not an impossibility.

That's why a new approach to campus technology is vitally important. A truly integrated campus system intersects campus silos and connects faculty, staff, and administrators—which means increased efficiencies and a better, more cohesive experience for students. This is especially important for community colleges, since they are at the forefront of the educational experience and play a critical role in enhancing the skills of students and preparing them for the job market.

Ellucian is passionate about higher ed. It's our singular focus. That's why we develop innovative solutions that connect people, processes, and technology. We believe in the power of this technology to transform how recruiting, admissions, and student success teams operate and to help them meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. We hope you find this eBook informative and useful, and we look forward to partnering with you to power the future of higher education.

**Kimberly Bloomston**

Vice President of Constituent Relationship Solutions  
Ellucian



# NEWS

## Selecting Courses for Students

A California community college picks course schedules for students to encourage them to enroll full-time and reach graduation quicker.

By **Ashley A. Smith** // May 2, 2019



High schools across the country provide preassigned class schedules to their students that often match those students' career and education interests.

Administrators at Cosumnes River College, a community college located in Sacramento, want to continue that practice for its first-time, full-time students. This fall, Cosumnes plans to create and give each student a 15-credit course schedule based on their major. As a result, instead of students registering and scheduling courses on their own, the college is doing it for them.

"College isn't something that you should figure out on your own," said Ed Bush, president of Cosumnes River. "We're just

matching the experience they're accustomed to at the high school level and providing them with the first courses they need, not just in English and math, but based on their academic interests."

Community colleges typically ask students to plan their courses each semester. If problems arise, students can add or drop classes by a specific date. CRC flips that tradition with premade schedules. If students have a conflict or a problem with the courses that were selected for them, they now must opt out of those courses.

"Many students who desire to be full-time have great difficulty in being full-time, and some students that are full-time were put in a class that didn't match their ed-

ucational goal, but they wanted to be full-time," Bush said.

The college expects that under this new scheduling system, students will not only complete college quicker because they are taking 15 credits a semester, but also won't end up with an excessive amount of credits that aren't relevant to their degree programs or don't eventually transfer to a four-year institution. Nationwide, community college students on average take 22 more credits than are needed for an associate degree, according to a 2017 report from Complete College America.

Last fall, 13.1 percent of CRC's first-year recent high school graduates took at least 15 credits. About 73 percent of this group

## Selecting Courses for Students

enrolled in fewer than 12 credits their first term. And among the college's full enrollment last year of more than 14,100 students, 26.2 percent attended full-time, or took more than 12 credits a semester, according to data from the college. While nonrecent high school graduates in their first year will be able to sign up for the 15-credit scheduling program, the college said about 1,000 recent high school graduates will participate this fall. Bush said that's about 80 percent of the college's freshman class.

Some groups, such as the Faculty Association of California Community Colleges, have been critical of the state's efforts to encourage students to pursue full-time course loads instead of investing more resources to help adult learners or students who have no choice but to go part-time because of work and family responsibilities.

### State Grants for Full-Time Status

Bush said he expects the college to eventually have premade schedules beyond just the first semester and to eventually include part-time students.

CRC administrators were eager to try the new scheduling system after realizing that high-demand courses at the college, such as math and English, tend to fill up quickly. The college didn't have a good system in place to meet the high demand of students wanting those courses or that could provide the right counseling to students.

California's new [Student Success Completion Grant](#) provides a financial incentive to CRC students who take the full-time credit load. The grant, which expanded two existing programs last year, awards students \$2,000 a year



Once we got past that stage, the remaining part was to make sure we had enough folks around to provide that one-on-one support for students, [to] sit down with them and identify which particular schedule they'll register for.



if they take more than 15 credits each semester. Students who enroll in 12 or more credits qualify for \$1,000 a year.

"The difference between taking 12 units or 15 units is significant," said Tadael Emiru, CRC's interim vice president of student services. That financial incentive also is a "wake-up call" to high school and college counselors.

CRC counselors and support staff have been visiting Sacramento-area high schools over the past few months to meet with students who will be attending the college this fall, to have one-on-one conversations with them about their academic and career interests. The college's new scheduling plan requires that college counselors know earlier than is typical for a two-year institution what major or program path students want to pursue so schedules can be built that will meet the students' availability. CRC's opt-out scheduling plan relies on so-called [guided pathways](#) as a structure for mapping out students' program paths in any particular major.

"The key here is knowing which courses students will be registered for -- that was the most difficult

thing to figure out," Emiru said. He said the college's counselors already have built first-semester schedules for every current academic program the college offers.

"Once we got past that stage, the remaining part was to make sure we had enough folks around to provide that one-on-one support for students, [to] sit down with them and identify which particular schedule they'll register for," he said.

CRC's ratio of students to counselors is 900 to one, which Bush admits is not ideal. The American School Counselor Association recommends a student-counselor ratio of no more than 250 to one. The National Academic Advising Association found that the national average for community colleges is 441 to one.

Teresa Aldredge, a CRC counselor, said the college is hiring three counselors this summer to help with the new system. The college also is hiring two full-time faculty members in math and two full-time instructors for English because the new scheduling system will increase demand for those courses, Emiru said.

"We made this promise to stu-

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dents that these are the classes they'll be able to take," Aldredge said. "If I give a first-time college student a schedule and I guarantee English and math in the first semester, then the administration has to ensure there are enough English and math classes."

Kay McClenney, a senior adviser to the American Association of Community Colleges and former director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement, views CRC's scheduling efforts as the natural next step in developing guided pathways initiatives at colleges across the country.

"I am hoping that Cosumnes intends to expand this practice to include part-time students who typically need guidance and clarity about their paths even more than full-time students," she said, adding that some colleges have considered prebuilding students' class schedules for a full year to

accommodate their work schedules.

Still, the move by the college and similar ones elsewhere will be controversial, with concerns about the potential to "track" students into specific courses and programs.

"We expect we'll have a number of students come to us and say, 'I signed up to take all these classes but ... I have to take more hours at work,'" Emiru said. "We have to deal with those situations on a case-by-case basis. What we don't want to do, and we've been consistent in saying this to students, we're not going to present it as an option to go part-time."

Davis Jenkins, a senior research scholar at the Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teachers College, said students want this type of scheduling and program guidance. He said students typically want to know the financial and long-term

benefits of taking 15 credits a semester or 30 credits a year.

"As it is, most community college students get little support to explore options and interests and develop a direction," Jenkins said. "To put in place this policy, Cosumnes is redesigning a new student experience to help students with this exploration process from the start."

And this level of guidance already happens for first-time students who attend selective universities, he said.

"First-time students at UCLA and Berkeley get all sorts of support to develop education and career plans," Jenkins said. "Why should we let community college students, who are less likely than students at selective institutions to have family members and friends who can guide them in their decisions, figure out a path on their own?" ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/05/02/community-college-picks-courses-students-bid-boost-completion>



# Modernizing technology to drive retention

At Pearl River Community College (PRCC), Mississippi's first and oldest two-year academic institution, modernization is playing a key role in helping students reach successful outcomes.

PRCC has combined the latest in higher education technology and evidence-based curriculum reform to:

- **Improve** students' ability to view and plan coursework and degree progress.
- **Enable** better communication with instructors and advisors.
- **Provide** self-service options for students to be more independent and proactive in their course planning.

## THE RESULT

**3.8%**  
**increase**

in year-over-year retention.



**Learn more** about  
Pearl River's technology  
transformation.



## Advising Equals Engaged Students

Retention and graduation rates increase for community colleges that beef up or get creative with their student advising services.

By **Ashley A. Smith** // February 13, 2018



It's a no-brainer that the more advising colleges offer, the more engaged students will be in their education.

But a [new report from the Center for Community College Student Engagement](#) shows that effective advising may have a larger impact on returning students and thus colleges' persistence and graduation rates.

The report highlights that 78 percent of returning students reported meeting with an adviser, compared to 62 percent of entering students. According to CCCSE, that detail is significant because less than 50 percent of first-time-in-college students return to the same institution the following fall, indicating that early advising leads to increases in retention.

"Clearly advising is not the same for all students," said Evelyn Waiwaiole, executive director of the center. "But when advisers are spending more time talking with

students about developing an academic plan, their career ambitions and opportunities for employment -- this is where community colleges are seeing greater student engagement."

The report found more engagement among students who had longer advising sessions, met with their adviser more often and had an adviser who helped them develop academic and career plans.

The community college survey measures engagement using five different types of student behavior benchmarks -- active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners. The better students respond in each of those areas, the more they were determined to be engaged learners. The data in the report are based on survey responses from more than 90,000 returning students at nearly 200 institutions and 40,000 first-term students at near-

ly 100 colleges.

In 2016, the Community College of Philadelphia started a new advising model that led to a fall-to-fall increase in the college's persistence rate with first-time-in-college students -- from 45 percent in 2015 to 51 percent in 2016. The year-over-year persistence rate increased for students who were assigned an adviser, as well -- from 70 percent in 2016 to 75 percent in 2017.

The college's new advising model shifted from using part-time faculty advisers to hiring nine (and soon to be 10) full-time advisers who are assigned to students.

"We moved toward the guided pathways model and I feel strongly that in order for that to work you need advisers working on particular structures to ensure students have a guidepost and a clear sense of where they're going," said Donald Generals, president of the Philadelphia college, adding that the



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college didn't use new dollars to hire the advisers but shifted money from vacant positions. He declined to disclose how much the shift cost.

"We did look at it as an investment," he said. "We think that when students stay, not only are they more likely to succeed, but the investment comes when they do stay long enough to complete."

The report also found that returning students who met with an adviser for more than 30 minutes showed more engagement than those who spent less time with an adviser, although initial advising sessions for nearly half of the students surveyed ranged from 16 to 30 minutes.

New students at Cleveland State Community College, in Tennessee, get at least an hour of advising, and all credited students must attend an advising session every semester. Since making those changes and others to how the college offers advising in 2013, Cleveland State has seen increases in its graduation rate.

The college's three-year graduation rate increased from 14 percent in 2010 to 22 percent in 2013. The number of full-time students, or those earning at least 24 credits in the first year, also increased from 10 percent in 2012 to 30 percent in 2016.

"The mandatory advising has helped students," said Michele

Wollert, coordinator of academic advising and transfer articulation at Cleveland State, adding that the college relies on faculty members to also work as advisers and that they're assigned to students based on what they teach and the students' majors. "Before you had students signing up for classes that were not part of their program, but if they're able to talk to an adviser before registering each time, that helps."

Students also saw a difference between those who talked to them about their academic goals and those who helped them develop an academic plan, with about 86 percent of returning students reporting the former and 65 percent reporting the latter. And only 39 percent reported that an adviser discussed regional employment opportunities with them based on their career interests.

Nearly 65 percent of students reported that their adviser did not discuss when their next advising session would take place.

Tonjua Williams, the president at St. Petersburg College, in Florida, said her institution changed from a standard approach that treats all students the same to one that recognizes that students have different personal and academic situations and arrive at college with different levels of preparedness.

"We realized our students needed to be engaged and our advisers

had to transition from being transactional to being more relational and getting to know the student," she said, adding that the college hired more advisers.

Despite Hurricane Irma hitting Florida last year, the college saw 500 fewer withdrawals in the fall semester, which Williams partially attributes to advisers and instructors staying engaged with students.

The report also highlighted one group of students who seemed to have a significantly better advising experience than other students: athletes.

For instance, among returning students, 67 percent of athletes said they were required to see an adviser before registering for classes, compared to 54 percent of nonathletes. Sixty-nine percent of athletes reported meeting with the same adviser multiple times during a term, compared to 55 percent of nonathletes.

The attention paid to athletes could serve as a model for how colleges can improve advising for all students, Waiwaiole said.

"It may be cost prohibitive to scale up a comprehensive advising model that currently is used for only a small group of students," she said. "But colleges can evaluate their processes for small-scale in-depth advising and consider which aspects of the model might be used for all students." ■

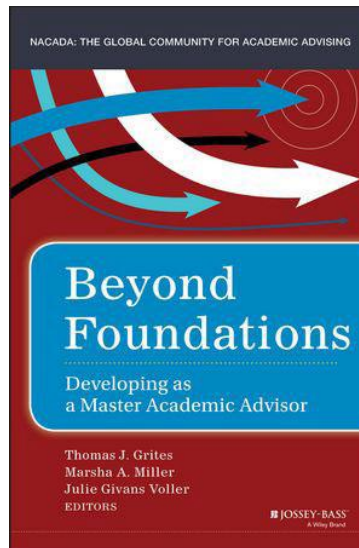
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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/02/13/proactive-advising-leads-retention-and-graduation-gains-colleges>

## Guiding Those Who Guide Students

New book dives deep into the profession of academic advising, offering direction on how advisers can best counsel students.

By **Kasia Kovacs** // January 4, 2017



Imagine you're a college adviser, and a student comes to you for help. She's an English major in the second semester of her senior year ... and she tells you that she "just found out" she needs a math course to graduate. She wants you to let her out of the math requirement. But you suspect that she intentionally avoided the class.

What would you do?

This is one of the scenarios in the book *Beyond Foundations: Developing as a Master Academic Advisor* (Wiley/Jossey-Bass), edited by Thomas Grites, assistant provost at Stockton University; Marsha Miller, assistant director of resources and services at the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA); and Julie Givans Vollar, research and planning strategist at Maricopa Community Colleges.

*Beyond Foundations* is the latest book from NACADA. The edi-

tors describe the first two books in the series as *Advising 101* and *Advising 201* -- they laid out the broad roles and responsibilities of academic advising and offered strategies to teaching and connecting with students.

The new book goes beyond the basics, addressing challenges advisers will face in the future and offering strategies to help advisers learn and grow through their careers, among other topics. It also outlines multiple scenarios such as the one above and guides readers through solutions. In the example about the English major who wanted to opt out of math, there's no perfect solution, the book states. An adviser must consider several factors, including supporting the institution's educational philosophy and checking the student's precollege academic history in math -- it's all about context.

*Inside Higher Ed* recently asked Grites about the book. His emailed responses follow below.

**Q: What exactly does it mean to be a master adviser?**

**A:** In preparing for the *Beyond Foundations* book, we wanted to appeal to those academic advisers and academic advising administrators who have been in the field for some time (at least three to five years), for two primary reasons. First, much of the literature in academic advising had historically been targeted for practitioners. Academic advising, again historically, is relatively new on the higher education radar as an accepted means of providing a well-planned, well-coordinated, successful means for achieving desirable student learning outcomes and institutional programmatic outcomes. This process is one of holistic engagement of the college student in order

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to maximize the complete college experience -- classroom, out of class, community, first year, transfer, etc.

Second, many practitioners have now become familiar with the basic components of the advising process -- informational, relational and conceptual -- and some of the recent major academic advising and related publications seemed a bit redundant to this ever-growing population of "master advisers."

The editors wanted to reach beyond what many practitioners already knew, especially regarding the conceptual component. We concluded that the informational and relational components were adequately addressed in the previously published Guidebook and Approaches books, so a deeper, broader publication was needed -- one that addressed the conceptual component more directly.

**Q: Do students benefit more from professional advisers or professors trained to be advisers?**

**A:** That question is akin to determining student success -- it depends on who is defining "benefit" (or "student success"). What I mean by that is that students determine whether they benefited from the advising experience -- some get more from primary-role advisers, while others get more from faculty advisers, and some succeed from both. I have always believed that a good academic advising program must include both. Primary-role advisers provide more availability and accessibility, broader knowledge of the full curriculum, campus resources, etc.; faculty advisers provide more direct advice from the perspective of their academic disciplines and the student's major, graduate school expectations, etc. Depending where students are in



Most faculty advisers receive very little training, other than how to read a degree audit, the basics of the curriculum and other informational material. I have always found it ironic that many faculty advisers don't recognize the academic advising process as an excellent opportunity to teach -- about the purpose and value of higher education.



their degree programs, one type of adviser might be more beneficial than the other. In both cases, however, I would argue that the holistic approach I mentioned needs to be in place, and that this approach must be taught -- to the students and to all the advisers, primary role and faculty.

An aside to this response must also be recognized -- you use the word "trained" (faculty) advisers. Most faculty advisers receive very little training, other than how to read a degree audit, the basics of the curriculum and other informational material. I have always found it ironic that many faculty advisers don't recognize the academic advising process as an excellent opportunity to teach -- about the purpose and value of higher education, about the rationale for the curricular requirements they view on the degree audit, about the relationship of their major to a broad spectrum of the workplace and how to enhance their students' opportunities in it, etc. Faculty development (training) efforts can provide this awareness and the skills to practice it. And, of course, many faculty serve as academic advisers in an add-on role -- that is, there is often

no selection to assume this role, little training is provided, as I mentioned, limited evaluation occurs, and often no compensation or recognition is provided for doing this task well.

**Q: First-generation, low-income, underrepresented students have lower graduation rates than other students. The book describes ways in which advisers can apply theory to communicating with and helping vulnerable students, but what changes can be made on the institutional level?**

**A:** I think any good academic advising program and academic adviser is aware of all potential resources for such students. These include: registrar, career center, financial aid, tutoring centers, study abroad, FYE, orientation, admissions, retention, counseling, wellness, residence life, TRIO offices, etc. This is not say that academic advisers need to be experts in the policies and procedures of each of these areas, but they should have established contacts with each one as ready resources for themselves and their advisees as needed. Advising units might have to initiate these relationships, and I feel it is incumbent upon them to have

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these contacts available for referrals. Also, a strong relationship with academic deans' offices and faculty development programs can only strengthen the overall advising program across the campus.

**Q: President Obama announced his "completion agenda" in 2009, that by 2020, the U.S. would have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. But according to the book, graduation is only one way to define student success. What do other forms of student success look like? How can academic advisers contend with the pressure to help colleges and universities up graduation rates, while still encouraging students to achieve different forms of success that may not be measurable with numbers and data?**

**A:** You have described the reality that my colleague Marc Lowenstein and I have identified as a critical ethical dilemma that can face many academic advisers, depending on the institution's approach to meeting the completion agenda (Obama's and [the Lumina Foundation's]). I hinted at this dilemma earlier when describing the benefit question. In a recent workshop on this topic, we had a participant indicate that her performance evaluation would be based (partially) on the retention

rate of her students. We are concerned that this could become a common criterion for the future, as it has become in the public school sector with teacher evaluations, the Common Core and standardized test scores. Moreover, graduation rates are indicators of institutional success at best, but not necessarily the only (or even the best) indicator of student success.

My position has always been that institutions should measure student success by whether or not the students meet the goals that they set upon entry. This is especially appropriate in community colleges, where a large number of students do not have a degree purpose in mind; many are there to gain specific skills, meet the minimal criteria to transfer, earn a workplace training certificate, etc. However, if they don't earn a degree, the institution (not the student) is considered a failure in those cases when graduation is the only student success criterion. Even in four-year institutions, each year a small number of students openly admit that they do not intend to graduate. Yet we adhere to this outdated metric to determine student success, which only includes cohorts of first-time, full-time students at their original institution.

**Q: In the last chapter of the book, you write, "We predict that by 2025, academic advisers will garner respect from all institutional leaders and faculty members." Please expand on what you mean by that, and how did you determine the year 2025 as a benchmark?**

**A:** 2025 was somewhat arbitrary, but not totally. For example, the Lumina "big goal" is based on that year; 10 years is about the shelf life for the content of most books we (NACADA) have published with Jossey-Bass; and many changes will certainly occur on the higher ed landscape in that time frame. For example, we foresee new technologies, new federal and state legislation, new modes of instruction, new ways to earn credit, new curricula, new research results, etc., that will affect the practice of academic advising. Further, most institutional success plans designate academic advising as the primary effort that will facilitate these successes. Thus, the longer-range aspiration for the book is that these already seasoned professionals -- and those to be developed between now and then -- will be supported with the tools and continue their motivation to advance the academic advising profession to new heights, recognition and respect. ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/01/04/qa-editor-book-academic-advising>



# What Community College Students Say Impedes Their Progress

A new survey finds they believe too much work and too little money keep them from graduating. But they also cite problems with online education and parking.

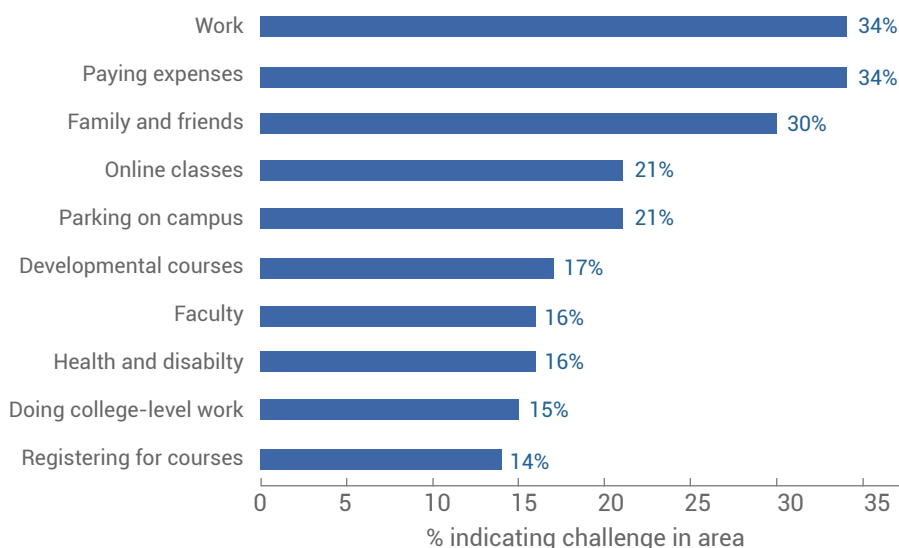
By **Ashley A. Smith** // February 12, 2019



Most community colleges are aware of the challenges students face if they are working, raising children or struggling to afford textbooks. But a [newly released survey](#) digs into the nuances of those challenges so colleges can pinpoint ways to lift barriers to college completion and prevent students from dropping out.

Researchers at North Carolina State University designed and encouraged students to participate in the Revealing Institutional Strengths and Challenges survey. The survey found that working and paying for expenses were the top two challenges community college students said impeded their academic success. The researchers surveyed nearly 6,000 two-year college students from 10 community colleges in California, Michigan, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Da-

**Figure 3.1** Top ten challenges to student success



**Notes**

Percentages do not sum to 100%, because respondents could choose more than one option. *n* = 6,079.

kota, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming in fall 2017 and 2018.

About 2,100 students said work was the largest challenge they faced, with 61 percent saying the

number of hours they worked didn't leave them enough time to study. About 50 percent of students reported their wages didn't cover their expenses. Students also reported



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difficulty paying for living expenses, textbooks, tuition and childcare. Thirty percent of students reported difficulty balancing familial responsibilities with college, dealing with family members' and friends' health problems, and finding childcare. Among those who cited these personal problems, 11 percent said their family did not support them going to college.

"We've moved beyond the notion of satisfaction and engagement, which most student surveys tap into," said Paul Umbach, a higher education professor at NC State and a co-author of the report. "We wanted to help campuses identify areas where they can move the needle on student success."

Umbach and Steve Porter, also a professor of higher education at the university, said they noticed a dearth of surveys that asked students about the barriers they face to completing college and wanted to provide a tool that colleges could use to eliminate those barriers and boost graduation rates. The national survey is based on smaller surveys the community colleges used to glean information specific to students on their individual campuses.

Each college receives the same survey but has the option to add 10 of its own questions for an additional fee. Umbach and Porter are hopeful more colleges will be interested in purchasing individualized surveys.

"We saw a gap among the surveys out there," Umbach said. "None are asking students directly about the challenges they face and the different strengths their colleges have related to student success."

The most well-known student survey is produced annually by the Center for Community College Student Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin. CCCSE's survey addresses student engagement, which can be an indication of whether students are learning.

But the CCCSE survey is much more than a student engagement tool; it has detailed information about the many barriers to college completion that students face. Those barriers include financial problems, being required to take costly and time-consuming non-credit-bearing remedial education courses, or only being able to attend part-time. These obstacles can discourage students from finishing college and prompt them to

drop out, CCCSE executive director Evelyn Waiwaiole said.

The RISC survey isn't the first to ask such detailed questions of students. The Hope Center for College, Community and Justice at Temple University has been encouraging students to identify their housing, food, transportation and financial insecurities, she said.

"I welcome any survey that is providing data to help colleges get better," Waiwaiole said. "We are about institutional improvement."

Kay McClenney, a senior adviser to the American Association of Community Colleges and former director of CCCSE, said the RISC survey identifies issues on a national scale that colleges have attempted to find on their own locally.

She said the work and financial challenges cited by students could be useful for colleges considering initiatives -- such as a plan to encourage more part-time students to attend full-time -- to help students succeed. A growing number of states have been [experimenting](#) with different types of financial incentives to encourage students to take more credits, which increases their likelihood of graduating.

"The practice of sharing with every student a full-time financial aid package and allowing them to make a more informed decision between whether to attend full-time or work at McDonald's may make a difference," she said.

Of the students surveyed, about 60 percent attend college full-time and 40 percent part-time. Nationally about 64 percent of community college students attend part-time.

Colleges and states should view the results as evidence that financial aid and social service policies are not doing enough to help community college students succeed,

<i>The 2,095 students choosing "work" reported:</i>				
<b>Work</b>	34 % (n = 2,095)	{	Work hours do not leave time for study	61 %
			Pay not enough to cover expenses while in school	49 %
			Work schedule prevents campus resource use	36 %
			Work schedule conflicts with classes	35 %
			Work schedule not flexible during semester	26 %
<i>The 2,055 students choosing "paying expenses" reported:</i>				
<b>Paying expenses</b>	34 % (n = 2,055)	{	Living expenses	71 %
			Books, software, and other supplies	58 %
			Tuition and fees	55 %
			Childcare	11 %
<i>The 1,844 students choosing "family and friends" reported:</i>				
<b>Family and friends</b>	30 % (n = 1,844)	{	Difficulty balancing demands of family and college	72 %
			Difficulty dealing with health of family and friends	35 %
			Difficulty finding childcare	13 %
			Family does not support me going to college	11 %

# What Community College Students Say Impedes Their Progress

said Katharine Broton, an assistant professor at the University of Iowa and a faculty affiliate with the Hope Center for College, Community and Justice at Temple.

"It's clear that paying for college, juggling work and family responsibilities are academic issues critical to student success," she said.

There are teaching and learning areas that could be improved, too, but equally important is ensuring students' basic needs are met, Broton said

Porter and Umbach expected students to cite work responsibilities and finances as major barriers, but they were surprised by other challenges students identified.

"The biggest surprise we had was parking," Porter said. "This is a big issue for them because of personal schedules or work schedules."

He said many students don't have the luxury of being able to arrive on campus an hour early to look for available parking spaces, only to end up late for class or for exams.

Nearly 1,300 students identified parking as a challenge, with 86 percent reporting they have a difficult time finding parking near or on their college campuses. Only 10 percent said parking near their campus is too expensive.

Another surprise was the 1,300 students who identified online classes as a challenge. Fifty-three percent of them reported difficulties with learning online, and 44 percent said the lack of interaction

with faculty is a problem. Nearly 40 percent of students said they had problems keeping up because their online courses didn't have regular class times.

"Throwing courses online with no real interaction is a recipe for disaster," Phil Hill, an education technology consultant and co-founder of Mindwires Consulting, said in an email. "Not providing online community college students with proactive advising and support services is also a big problem."

Hill said the California Community College System's [Online Education Initiative](#), which he worked on as a consultant, is a good example of a well-designed online learning system. It helped close the gap between the rate of students successfully completing traditional courses and online classes from 17 percent in 2006 to 4 percent in 2016.

"Online education can work for community college students and is an important part of student access, but there are no silver bullets," Hill said.

Despite the challenges cited by the students surveyed, they had positive opinions about their colleges that indicated that two-year institutions are doing well over all. Ninety-five percent of students reported they would recommend their college to a friend. About 50 percent of students said their college is worth more than what they're paying, and 48 percent reported their institution had a fair value.

"They do see a better life for themselves, and they have an overriding optimism about the potential of college," said Lauren Walizer, a senior policy analyst with the Center for Law and Social Policy, adding that the survey confirmed much of the work CLASP has done in identifying challenges two-year college students face. She noted, however, that optimism is not always enough to carry students to the finish line.

State funding of community colleges is another contributing factor to students' academic outcomes. State governments often underfund community colleges, which limits the resources and support services they can offer students, Umbach said.

A [report](#) released last year by the Century Foundation found that states spend less on community colleges, which enroll high numbers of disadvantaged students, than on public four-year institutions. Educational spending per public four-year college student increased by 16 percent between 2003 and 2013, while per-student community college funding increased by just 4 percent, according to the report.

"Community colleges are already underfunded, and they are limited in many ways and don't have the resources to do more," Walizer said. "Inadequate funding at public institutions is generally a big problem. But with more funding, they could offer more classes at more times and have the resources to pay professors." ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/02/12/survey-asks-community-college-students-detail-their-challenges>

# Technology that powers a more connected student experience

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## Mixed Results on Florida Remedial Education Gamble

New research on Florida's remedial education law shows more students are taking and passing college-level courses. Despite the progress, researchers still see significant numbers of students failing and can't explain why.

By **Ashley A. Smith** // March 29, 2019



SOURCE:  
GETTY IMAGES / DINOCO GRECO

Florida gambled big in 2013 when the state adopted a law eliminating placement exams and remedial college courses and gave recent high school graduates the option to take college-level introductory math and English courses.

New [research](#) released this month by the Center for Postsecondary Success at [Florida State University](#) found that the gamble paid off. More first-time college students, including black and Hispanic students, passed the college-level math and English courses, also known as "gateway" courses, after the [law](#) went into effect in 2014. While other states have made big moves to reform college-based remedial education, Florida remains the only state that allows students to opt in to a gateway course. The state's remedial

education law also mandated that two-year colleges replace remedial courses with credit-bearing developmental education courses.

The researchers studied six years of freshman data, from 2011 to 2016, at Florida's 28 two-year colleges and found more students passed the college-level English

and math courses after the remedial education law was adopted. The law also required the colleges to offer "enhanced advising" and more academic support services, such as tutoring and early alert academic intervention systems because of concerns that an influx of underprepared students would

“

When we look at the reforms Florida is talking about, they have some things that may be promising but some things we need to dig deeper in to functionally before we can actually say it's better.

”



# Mixed Results on Florida Remedial Education Gamble

**Table 26** Cohort-based passing rates in introductory college-level, all students

	Pre-policy			Post-policy		
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
English Composition						
Success Rate	42.00%	45.75%	47.90%	52.26%	54.84%	53.87%
Number of Success	30,460	29,662	32,786	35,699	36,875	36,289
Number of Students	72,527	64,838	68,440	68,315	67,232	67,364
Intermediate Algebra						
Success Rate	17.30%	18.52%	20.79%	24.23%	27.30%	26.05%
Number of Success	12,547	12,006	14,229	16,554	18,357	17,545
Number of Students	72,527	64,838	68,440	68,315	67,232	67,364
Gateway Math Courses						
Success Rate	14.90%	15.77%	16.70%	18.47%	22.07%	22.35%
Number of Success	10,804	10,228	11,431	12,615	14,839	15,055
Number of Students	72,527	64,838	68,440	68,315	67,232	67,364

rush into college-level courses. Those additional services appear to have helped students, according to the report.

About 54 percent of 67,364 students passed gateway English courses in 2016, compared to about 48 percent of 68,440 students in 2013. More students also passed gateway math courses; 22 percent of 67,364 students passed in 2016 compared to about 17 percent of 68,440 students in 2013.

"There has been very good progress," Shouping Hu, director of the center, said. "But at the same time, a lot of fine-tuning is needed so student success can be optimized."

Despite the progress, the FSU researchers found they still have plenty of unanswered questions, such as why a significant percentage of students are failing the revamped remedial or developmental education courses. The researchers also have not determined if the progress overshadows the financial and implementation challenges rural colleges and those with modest budgets often face, such as inadequate or no faculty training, when adopting new reforms.

"We cannot just look at the over-

all trend," Hu said.

Although the law has helped a lot of students, it hasn't helped those students who don't succeed in developmental education classes or gateway courses, he said.

The study also found that more minorities and students of color are opting out of the revised remedial courses and taking the college-level courses than before the law change, Hu said.

It's difficult to know if these students took the advice of their college advisers on whether or not to take a remedial course. Hu said the study didn't collect that information.

"Some students are advised to take the developmental education course, and they decided not to take it, and those students were rather successful," he said.

The Florida results show that prior to passage of the law, some academically talented, low-income or socially disadvantaged students were improperly placed in remedial courses, or undermatched, as the practice is called. Students in remedial courses often dropped out or took longer to graduate because they didn't receive academic credit for the classes.

The pass rates of black students

in gateway English courses increased by 6.17 percentage points from 2013 to 2014, to 44.5 percent, after the policy change. The pass rates of Hispanic students also went up from 49.8 percent in 2013 to 54.3 percent in 2014. The pass rates of black and Hispanic students also increased in intermediate algebra and gateway math courses.

"When students are placed in more rigorous courses, they will rise to that challenge and meet the rigorous standards for those courses," said Christopher Mullin, director of Strong Start to Finish, a national network of educators and philanthropists who promote policies that help adult learners, low-income students and students of color succeed in developmental education courses. The network is a part of the Education Commission of the States.

Hu noted that despite the increased pass rates, the overall numbers aren't great.

"For some of the student population, we need to encourage or advise them to opt in to developmental education," he said. "What are the thresholds for students' academic preparedness to advise them to opt out? Until we find an answer on that kind of question, we should have some hesitation to just break it loose and let students do what they want."

Enrollment rates in developmental reading, writing and math courses declined after the remedial education law went into effect. Even though the traditional remedial courses had been eliminated and replaced with developmental classes, students still chose to opt out of the developmental courses.

Enrollment in developmental math decreased from 12,691 stu-



# Mixed Results on Florida Remedial Education Gamble

**Table 2** Developmental education course enrollment rates, all students

	Pre-policy			Post-policy		
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Developmental Reading</b>						
Enrollment Rate	25.39%	22.65%	22.77%	11.44%	8.49%	6.58%
Student Enrolled	18,412	14,687	15,586	7,816	5,709	4,433
Number of Cohort	72,527	64,838	68,440	68,315	67,232	67,364
<b>Developmental Writing</b>						
Enrollment Rate	22.81%	18.86%	18.54%	13.28%	10.98%	10.18%
Student Enrolled	16,540	12,227	12,691	9,071	7,380	6,859
Number of Cohort	72,527	64,838	68,440	68,315	67,232	67,364
<b>Developmental Math</b>						
Enrollment Rate	47.56%	47.86%	43.71%	26.35%	23.18%	21.44%
Student Enrolled	16,540	12,227	12,691	9,071	7,380	6,859
Number of Cohort	72,527	64,838	68,440	68,315	67,232	67,364

dents in 2013 to 9,071 students in 2014. Enrollment in developmental writing and reading also decreased.

Although enrollment in the developmental courses sharply declined, the FSU researchers found that students passed those courses at about the same rate as they did before the law changed and eliminated traditional remediation. Sixty percent of students passed the developmental math course in 2013, and about 60 percent passed in 2014, after the law changed.

The Florida remedial education law allowed colleges to use multiple types of developmental education, which includes modularized, compressed or corequisite remediation. Corequisite remediation

places remedial students in a college-level course but offers them additional support such as a computer lab or study sessions. It has become the most popular form of developmental college education in recent years -- California legislators [passed a law](#) last year requiring the state's two-year colleges to transition to corequisite and eliminate traditional remediation, and Texas [passed](#) a similar law two years ago mandating corequisite use in remedial courses.

"When we look at the reforms Florida is talking about, they have some things that may be promising but some things we need to dig deeper in to functionally before we can actually say it's better," said Andrew Koricich, an associate

professor of higher education at the National Center for Developmental Education at Appalachian State University in North Carolina. "What's glaringly missing is talk about place and locale. We know these reforms are playing out in urban, suburban and rural community colleges differently."

Hunter Boylan, a professor of higher education at the Appalachian State center, said the original reform models have shown progress in student success, but the level of impact at individual colleges will naturally decline as they look less like the original.

A corequisite course that puts students in a college-level math class but only gives them one hour of extra study time in a computer lab isn't going to work as well as a corequisite course that provides a mentor or tutor who spends multiple hours with a student, Boylan said. And these differences between the types of remediation offered to students vary and often depend on how much funding and resources colleges receive. Colleges that have limited financial resources won't perform as well, he said.

"It's a problem that a number of people who are promoting this change believe one size fits all ... Many of the institutions implementing some reforms or developmental education need coaching and mentoring," he said.

Koricich and Boylan, who co-wrote a recent [report](#) examining remedial education in rural community colleges, warn that the differences in college characteristics and funding should give lawmakers some pause as they consider changing remedial education policies.

"Whether a student is taking a

**Table 8** Developmental education course enrollment rates, all students

	Pre-policy			Post-policy		
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Developmental Reading</b>						
Enrollment Rate	25.39%	22.65%	22.77%	11.44%	8.49%	6.58%
Student Enrolled	18,412	14,687	15,586	7,816	5,709	4,433
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Enrollment Rate	22.81%	18.86%	18.54%	13.28%	10.98%	10.18%
Student Enrolled	16,540	12,227	12,691	9,071	7,380	6,859
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Student Enrolled	16,540	12,227	12,691	9,071	7,380	6,859
Number of Cohort	72,527	64,838	68,440	68,315	67,232	67,364

## Mixed Results on Florida Remedial Education Gamble

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developmental education or gateway course, there is still a cost to the institution," Mullin said. "We don't know how much of a cost savings there is to an institution ... in all cases it's making college more affordable for students, and for institutions it's reducing the amount of money they have to spend to get to graduation."

Hu said the Center for Postsecondary Success at Florida State didn't study the impact of each type of remediation on student learning

because colleges offer the courses in various ways. Nonetheless, corequisite courses stood out during the researchers' college visits.

"Those who took the corequisite courses tend to be [more] successful in college-level courses than the students who took some other format of developmental education," Hu said. "Corequisite works a little bit better, because by nature they have the college-level exposure."

Hu said the center is examining the reforms at each of the state

colleges to determine how they adopted the new law and how the different practices relate to student success and narrowing equity gaps.

"Florida is such a diverse state in terms of geography and rural versus urban and suburban areas," Hu said. "From our site visits, we've seen some variation in institutional programs and institutional response and reaction, but we're trying to figure out all of those variations and how that affects student success." ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/03/29/remedial-education-progress-florida-still-leaves-unanswered-questions>

# CUNY's Intensive Remedial Ed Semester Showing Success

Early results for a study of CUNY Start program finds students outperform their peers in developmental courses.

By **Ashley A. Smith** // August 10, 2018



CUNY Start at LaGuardia Community College

A preliminary [report](#) about a City University of New York initiative that provides a semester of intense remedial instruction before students enroll in a degree program determined this method may be key to helping underprepared students overcome significant academic shortcomings.

The report by MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, is based on the early findings of an evaluation of the CUNY Start initiative, which involves students taking a semester of intensive remedial math, reading and writing prep courses before they begin college-level work. MDRC, CUNY and the Community College Research Center at Teachers College at Columbia University are studying the benefits of participating in CUNY Start. The program also includes academic advising, tutoring and a weekly college skills-building seminar.

"People believe the biggest stumbling block for community college students is completing remedial classes, especially remedial math," Michael Weiss, a senior associate at MDRC and co-author of the report, said. "Here you have a program that knocks out the main stumbling block for students."

The study found that the CUNY Start students made more progress through developmental education in the first semester, especially in math, than their peers who fully matriculated. However, students not enrolled in CUNY Start earned more college credits than the CUNY Start students, who do not earn college credits during the semester in the program.

The study also found that in the second semester, CUNY Start students enrolled in credit-bearing courses at the colleges at a higher rate than their peers who did not participate in the program.

The study examined CUNY Start students at four institutions -- [Borough of Manhattan Community College](#), [Kingsborough Community College](#), [LaGuardia Community College](#) and [Queensborough Community College](#) -- and measured them alongside students who needed remedial education but enrolled directly in the institutions. Students with remedial needs who did not participate in CUNY Start were placed in a variety of corequisite developmental courses that allowed them to take college-level math and English courses along with additional academic supports.

The CUNY Start program is especially beneficial for students who need help in remedial reading, writing and math, said Donna Linderman, associate vice chancellor for academic affairs within the CUNY Office of Academic Affairs. She said it's often impossible for students to complete three to four remedial

## CUNY's Intensive Remedial Ed Semester Showing Success

courses in one semester while also taking college-credit courses.

In the last few years, corequisite remediation, which places students in college-level English and math courses but pairs those courses with additional support, has been the more popular method of providing remedial education. And [multiple studies](#) have shown higher course pass rates in corequisite courses than in traditional remediation. Last year, [Texas lawmakers passed a law](#) that requires corequisite remediation be used in developmental education courses.

However, researchers have questioned whether corequisite remediation is the best option for students with significant academic shortcomings.

CUNY is currently undergoing broad remedial education reform, much like other colleges around the country, Linderman said.

"There are some colleges at CUNY very rigorously and robustly implementing corequisite math and English, and we're targeting those students who just missed the cutoff to be college ready by a fairly modest margin," she said. "CUNY Start is really for those who

have the most significant need. If they matriculated they probably wouldn't go into a corequisite course, but there are so many different pathways through remediation."

Researchers say colleges have not reached a point where they can target which remedial reform works best for individual students.

Maria Scott Cormier, a senior research associate at the Community College Research Center who co-authored the report, said they're still figuring out how programs such as CUNY Start fit with all the other remedial initiatives taking place at colleges around the country.

"The field hasn't come to a consensus, but with the early findings from CUNY Start, we're starting to get a sense of what students with more remedial needs need," she said. "Compared to a lot of other developmental reforms, it's comprehensive in its approach."

Most developmental reforms focus on structural changes, such as altering the amount of time students spend in a lab, and not on the teaching, learning, curriculum, advising and staff training that is tar-

geted by CUNY Start, Scott Cormier said.

Although CUNY Start students miss out on earning credits during the semester in the program, the expectation is that they will be better prepared for college-level courses when they complete the program and will ultimately finish college sooner because they're completing remedial education faster and getting it out of the way at the start of their college years, Cormier said. These students will also save money, because any financial aid for which they are eligible is reserved for when they start taking credit-bearing courses. They pay just \$75 to participate in CUNY Start.

"They're doing this at the expense of not taking college-level classes, so of course they're behind," said Weiss, the MDRC researcher, who also noted that the CUNY Start students will be better prepared for college. "The big unanswered question is what happens when times goes on."

Another report on the impact of CUNY Start is scheduled to be released next year, followed by a full three-year report in 2020. ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/08/10/cuny-initiative-sees-early-success-remedial-education>

# Technology drives student success

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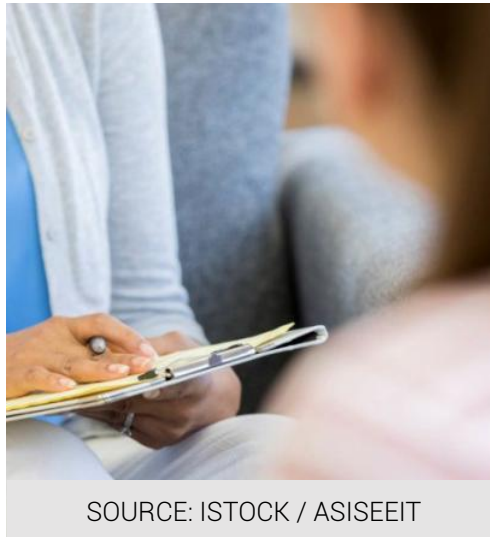




## Guided Pathways Reform

Evelyn N. Waiwaiole, Linda L. Garcia and Coral M. Noonan-Terry share the top five questions to ask when redesigning academic advising.

By **Coral M. Noonan-Terry, Evelyn N. Waiwaiole and Linda L. Garcia** // June 19, 2019



Last year, the Center for Community College Student Engagement released a [national report](#), "Show Me the Way: The Power of Advising in Community Colleges." Since then, we've presented and spoken about the report and the topic of advising more than 50 times. Interestingly, audience members at our presentations ask us the same five questions over and over.

**No. 1: What is the best name for someone who provides academic advising to students?** Whether advisers are called counselors, navigators, mentors, coaches, advisers or something else, their role is no longer simply to enroll students in classes. It includes understanding how to incorporate a relation-

al element in advising with deeper conversations on careers, transfer opportunities, nonacademic commitments, financial issues and much more. As a result, advisers, or whatever title they are given, will need revised job descriptions and to understand the new responsibilities and expectations of the position. And institutions will need to create professional development programs so that such individuals can be trained to meet those expectations.

The payoff for this transition from a transactional to a relational type of advising is monumental. Transactional advising focuses more on process and procedures of academic advising such as using a

ticket system for students to meet with any available adviser to register or drop courses. Relational advising goes beyond transactional advising. It is intentionally designed to build trust, ongoing communication and a sense of belonging between a student and adviser. The National Academic Advising Association, or [NACADA](#), describes it as advisers facilitating interactions where students can be acknowledged, listened to and valued.

A student whose college had redesigned advising identified her adviser as the one person who pushed her to be the most successful student she could be: "She's guided me the whole way. I'm not lying when I say I have 1,000 questions.

She's gone out of her way to do so much for me. When something happened with the transcript, she went and talked to the board. She was like, 'I'm going to get the answer for you,' and she did, and she emailed me, and everything came out clear. Now I'm ready to graduate, and she's telling me, 'Congrats, you're going to be successful,' and I said, 'Because of you.'"

**No. 2: What is the best adviser-to-student ratio?** NACADA's 2011 [National Survey of Academic Advising](#) found that full-time professional academic advisers at two-year institutions had a median case load of 441 advisees. But according to [Rich Robbins](#), associate dean of the college of arts and sciences at Bucknell University, "Meaningful case load comparisons remain elusive because too many factors affect advising delivery." He cites the primary five complicating factors as:

- adviser responsibilities
- advising delivery
- advising approaches
- student needs
- the advising time line

Perhaps the real question is: How do colleges build capacity to ensure that every student's needs are met with advising? Do students need to be seen in a one-on-one advising session? Or can advising take place during class time? In the 2017 Community College Survey of Student Engagement, of the students who responded that they had seen an adviser, 23 percent said that an adviser had come to one of their classes to speak about academic goals and planning. And students who experienced group advising were more engaged than students who did not experience it.

Another way that colleges can build capacity for advising is

through the use of technology. Does your college use technology such as Skype, Zoom, texting or other methods of communication to meet the needs of students? An adviser in one of our focus groups said, "I've talked to students either in groups or individually via Skype. I've texted them through Google text ... because a lot of times, they're like, I'm working. They can sit at their work desk and just text me and get their answers right there, too."

**No. 3: Should faculty be advisers?** Faculty members are already advising students, whether formally or informally. They spend more time with students than anyone else on a campus. Among full-time faculty, 77 percent of those who indicate advising is not part of their formal role report that they spend at least one hour in a typical week advising students, compared to 98 percent of full-time faculty who indicated that advising is part of their role. Similarly, 73 percent of part-time faculty who indicate that advising is not part of their role report that they spend at least one hour in a typical week advising students, compared to 97 percent of part-time faculty who report advising is a part of their

role.

We know faculty members discuss topics with students such as the courses they need to take, careers, internships and more. We also know advisers discuss some of the same things. What isn't clear, however, is who covers what information. As colleges redesign for guided pathways, they should map out what topics advisers cover, what topics faculty cover and, more important, how to ensure that students receive consistent messages. With two-thirds of faculty members in colleges and universities being part-time, it's important to include part-time faculty in the advising discussion.

**No. 4: Should advising be mandatory?** The real question is how can you continue with optional advising and expect better results? No one dares to ask that in a large group setting or during a plenary. But during a small working group, or in a one-on-one conversation, it's usually phrased as, "How does a college make advising mandatory?"

It was not so long ago that college leaders were having this same conversation about ending late registration. Few colleges have it to-



As colleges redesign for guided pathways,  
they should map out what topics  
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more important, how to ensure that students  
receive consistent messages.



# Guided Pathways Reform

day, but many now have late-start classes, eight-week classes and other innovative ways of meeting the needs of students for whom the traditional 16-week class schedule doesn't work. Is it time for your institution to consider this type of transformative change in advising?

## **No. 5: What else should my college be thinking about when redesigning advising?**

A deeper question is, "Have we included the student perspective in the advising redesign?" Frequently, college administrators and faculty members meet to design or redesign the student experience, including advising. But students are rarely invited to the conversation to share their personal experiences. When students are included, college leaders have an opportunity to understand what matters most to them.

For example, during a focus group, community college administrators asked students to give them on piece of advice about the institution. Several students shared that they would like to be assigned to advisers who specialized in their major.

■ "I think it would be best if we had advisers who were in our fields and knew exactly what we should be taking, when we should take it, when the institution is offering it and what benefits we get from these particular classes, based off their knowledge and their experiences in the field."

■ "I think the advisers should

be specialized in the degree program that you're in so that they can advise you better. They would be more knowledgeable. I know that I feel like I've just lucked out that my adviser is more knowledgeable because of her personal experiences, but not everyone has that same experience."

■ "As much as I do believe more advisers, of course, is always a good thing, I really wish this college would organize our advisers differently. Right now, I don't quite understand how they're organized, but it does feel very much, as you come in, you're just assigned to one. I always feel like it would be better if it was program specific -- as soon as you declare a meta-major that you are transferred to an adviser who knows all about that meta-major ... That way, the advisers would have more knowledge, and I think it would break it down more so they wouldn't have so many students at one time."

Who knows firsthand what is working well and what needs improvement? Students! So, ask them.

We constantly learn from colleges as we travel across the country, and the one consistent takeaway is that there's no silver bullet. Colleges are approaching the redesign of advising in many different ways. For example:

■ Jackson College in Michigan has students fill out an intake form, as you might do when you go to a doctor's office, but the form asks

them about their lives.

■ Alamo Colleges created Alamo Advise, a defined plan for advisers to reach out to students before their arrival at one of the five campuses. Advisers continue to connect with students at specific milestones; for instance, students are required to meet with an adviser after having earned 15, 30 and 45 credit hours. If a student does not meet with an adviser, then a hold is placed on their account until the student receives a pin from the adviser that's required for registering for classes.

■ St. Petersburg College in Florida completely redesigned the student advising experience, moving it from a transactional one to a relational one. Their advisers had to complete 120 hours in career training as part of the redesign.

■ Skyline College in California developed [SparkPoint](#), "a financial education and coaching center to improve college connection and completion by mitigating economic disparities."

All four of these examples approached the redesign of advising in a distinct way, and all four have seen positive results from the changes they have made.

This is not easy work. It is not stand-alone work, either, but part of the guided pathways redesign effort. In doing that work, it's vital to ask, "What problem is the college trying to solve?" before you begin the conversation. ■

## **Bio**

*Evelyn N. Waiwaiole is executive director, Linda L. García is assistant director of college relations and Coral M. Noonan-Terry is program manager of special projects at the Center for Community College Student Engagement.*

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/06/19/top-five-questions-ask-when-redesigning-advising-pathways-programs-opinion>

# Navigating Academic and Student Affairs for Pathways Success

Pathways programs are about the entire student experience, advise Eleccia Moore-Davis and Sheri Rowland, who offer five key recommendations for putting an effective one in place.

By **Eleccia Moore-Davis and Sheri Rowland** // June 19, 2019



SOURCE: ISTOCK / Z\_WEI

The national pathways movement represents the new normal for transforming the student experience and improving college graduation rates. Pathways is a comprehensive and systemic redesign of the student experience -- from the student's initial connection to the college all the way to completion and graduation. Based on our experience with a pathways program at our institution, Tallahassee Community College, we'd like to share five key coordinates that may help other administrators foster an environment receptive to such transformational change.

One of the primary reasons why the pathways movement has become so revolutionary to how colleges do business is because it focuses on the common-sense

premise put forth in the Community College Research Center's "[What We Know About Guided Pathways](#)": "College students are more likely to complete a degree in a timely fashion if they choose a program and develop an academic plan early on, have a clear road map of the courses they need to take to complete a credential, and receive guidance and support to help them stay on plan."

Sounds simple, right? Just build a road map that is easy to follow, and they will succeed. What you learn through this work, however, is that once you start diving into institutional policies, procedures and sacred cows, what looks simple is actually complex and requires mutual understanding and collaboration between academic

and student affairs leaders.

The crucial lesson learned as we have navigated from an overgrown walkway to a more landscaped pathway for students (pun intended) is the importance of leading and managing through change. In our efforts toward that end, we have identified five key coordinates that moved us forward in transforming students' experiences.

**Coordinate No. 1:** Culture. Organizational culture and a willingness to adapt to change are key factors that determine whether pathways work truly transforms the student experience or just tweaks a few processes. Transformational change takes time, years even, so you should tackle small goals that eventually lead to where you want

to be. (“Start with the end in mind” is a key phrase in pathways work and applies here, too).

It is essential to build your case on your campus for why students need, and expect, new ways of onboarding and progressing through degree or certificate programs that lead to their career objective or university of choice. You will need people throughout the institutional community to buy in to the success of this effort, as well as develop a core leadership team from all areas of the campus who can help create a student-centered culture that’s more receptive to embracing the change.

Several strategies we’ve implemented have included:

- The restructuring and realignment of departments and divisions tied to the completion by design phases of connection, entry, progress and completion -- or in other words, what fits together best to monitor a student along the pathway. We’ve also adopted a service philosophy, because we recognize that organizational structure does matter;

- Reinstating “Ask Me” tents throughout the campus, staffed by employees, during the first two days of the term to help welcome and direct students to classes and resources;

- Creating a “Pathways Council” with representatives from multiple areas on campus and co-chaired by the provost and the vice president for student affairs;

- Hosting campus summits focused on professional development, data and research, and strategies that align with the pathways movement, such as an annual professional development day, a summit focused on student performance in gateway courses



A proverb reads, ‘Where there is no vision, the people perish.’ In higher education a better translation might be, ‘Where there is no vision, the people make up their own version, and your initiative shall perish.’



and appreciative advising; and

- Launching the [Growth Mind-Set Assessment](#) and activities in our first-year college-success course, as well as developing plans for campuswide engagement.

**Coordinate No. 2:** Communication. Leaders should never underestimate the value of communication. A proverb reads, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” In higher education a better translation might be, “Where there is no vision, the people make up their own version, and your initiative shall perish.”

The provost and head of student affairs must have a shared vision of the intended outcomes and the why of transformative change. They should consider what campuswide strategies they have to keep people informed of the work and the progress being made toward the goals and ensure there are opportunities for intentional, planned, cross-departmental meetings.

Thus, at Tallahassee Community College, we set aside time each month to meet and discuss projects, results and areas of confusion that must be resolved in order for people to move forward.

Managers in both our divisions jointly identify any barriers for students, assess the effectiveness of various strategies, share data and plan for future tasks. A wide range of committees and councils are also engaged in project-based tasks aligned with our pathways programs, which allows more people across the campus to become informed and engaged.

**Coordinate No. 3:** Community. As the saying goes, “It takes a village to raise a child,” and pathways projects also require a village to bring about change at the breadth and depth needed to improve student performance, retention and completion. Two of the basic premises of pathways programs are (1) to remove barriers and obstacles for students so that they can be successful and (2) to ensure that the students’ education ultimately prepares them for jobs that produce family-sustaining wages or the chance to transfer to a university to obtain a baccalaureate degree. Therefore, key partnerships both on and off the campus become more important for ensuring alignment among educational partners and with the business community.



To that end, our strategies include offering precollegiate grants in our service district to help prepare middle and high school students for college, a summer bridge program, and high school visits and on-campus preview days to describe the benefits of college to high school students. We've also established better articulation agreements with our university partners to help improve transfer student outcomes (including reverse transfer), data sharing and joint support services. Finally, our associate degree programs in science use business community advisory councils, job shadowing and internships to ensure our graduates can fulfill the needs of our local businesses.

**Coordinate No. 4:** Collaboration. The definition of collaboration in the Google dictionary is "the action of working with someone to produce or create something," but the word is often misused in organizations. Discussing or sharing information is not necessarily collaboration. The art of collaboration is fully realized when people come together to produce or create something different from what was originally designed.

Collaboration can occur without direct authority when leaders empower people by sharing a vision, assigning tasks and allowing them to collaborate to produce strategies that will generate wins for collective work. Instead of reinforcing siloed departmental approaches, colleges should periodically review committee structures and objectives and intentionally promote opportunities for diverse people to work together.

That is probably where we've had our greatest successes. We've expanded our committee



Collaboration can occur without direct authority when leaders empower people by sharing a vision, assigning tasks and allowing them to collaborate to produce strategies that will generate wins for collective work.



and council structures that allow for broader-based participation, assigning specific topics and projects to work groups. In addition, our departments have worked collaboratively to design a first-year experience program that is more than just a course and includes a new student convocation, Welcome Week, college success courses and activities throughout the year to engage and connect our new students to programs and support that will help them be more academically successful.

In our revamped [early alert system](#), our faculty members serve as "first responders" and, when appropriate, make referrals to interventionists from multiple departments of the institution. Gone are the days of an adviser reaching out to an at-risk student about all issues. Learning support staff handle academic performance issues, mental health and behavioral concerns are referred to student services, the financial aid staff manages students' financial concerns, and the list goes on. The design has been intentional to tailor the level of support to each student's behavior and needs.

Finally, as a part of our path-

ways work, faculty subject matter experts and advisers have collaborated to produce academic program maps that clarify the students' paths and ensure they know what requirements they need to complete their certificates or degrees. And they also offer semester-by-semester recommendations for out-of-class engagement.

**Coordinate No. 5:** Celebration. Finding time and ways to celebrate successes with your campus community helps sustain the level of commitment and work for pathways programs that's needed over the long haul. It's important to acknowledge the people who work day in and day out to support your students. At our college, for example, faculty members and administrators can be nominated each year for [Eagles RISE](#) (Respect, Integrity, Success, Engagement) awards, which highlight how those individuals contribute to the culture we want to be known for.

On a personal note, we received awards last year from our college's Student Government Association for our support of students. Those awards speak volumes about the work that's been done to move the

# Navigating Academic and Student Affairs for Pathways Success

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institution toward a culture where every decision is made in light of how it will impact the most valued members of our campus community: students.

We'd like to offer these final thoughts to help others embark upon their own pathways endeavor:

- Pathways is about the entire student experience. It's long-term comprehensive reform, not a short-term initiative or fad.

- The key to working with students is providing them the guidance they need and want to help

them be successful.

- Campuswide engagement is fundamental to success.

- Technology is a key component of being able to develop your pathways program to its fullest potential. In times of limited resources, using technology to track and monitor when students are falling off the path, to send students "just in time" notifications, and to connect them to supports will allow better use of human capital to serve those who need it the most.

- Colleges must evaluate their programs and certificates to en-

sure they lead to family-sustaining wages.

- We must help more students gain real-world experience within their chosen career paths by offering more opportunities for internships, job shadowing and project-based learning.

Last, but definitely not least, you should know that the work is hard but meaningful and productive. In fact, it can become an exciting adventure on your campus as you embark upon evaluating everything anew through the lens of your students and their needs. ■

## Bio

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# Breaking Out of the Shadow College

Strengthening connections between credit and noncredit work-force programs at community colleges would be beneficial for students, writes Jim Jacobs.

By **Jim Jacobs** // March 21, 2019



SOURCE: ISTOCK / ONDREJ PROS

One of the most important developments within the modern American community college is the formation of the “shadow college.” This term originated in the early 1990s at Macomb Community College in Michigan to describe the assortment of occupational courses sprouting up at the periphery of the institution.

This phenomenon was not confined to [Macomb](#), however. At community colleges around the country, continuing education and noncredit offerings were becoming less focused on personal-interest classes, such as floral arrangement, small engine repair and family investment strategies. The economic downturn of the early 1980s and the rapid changes made by American companies facing new international competition impelled community colleges to place more

emphasis on customized training programs that responded directly to the needs of business and industry. Those programs were organized for maximum flexibility in content and scheduling in order to efficiently train workers in the skills needed by local employers, and they existed outside of traditional, credit-bearing occupational programs.

These shadow-college programs represented a significant departure from community colleges’ traditional approach to work-force development. Notably, the focus of occupational instruction moved beyond knowledge of specific technologies in isolation -- such as machining, welding and information technology -- to include an understanding of how technical skills are embedded within a particular company’s pro-

duction cycle. This new emphasis on the business context for technical skills brought the work of community colleges much closer to the specific needs of local businesses and spurred the creation of new nondegree qualifications, such as certifications and business-initiated credentials.

With the growth of the shadow college, community colleges also became far more likely to fashion programs that could lead to employment for adults who either had been displaced from their jobs or were entering new occupational activities. For instance, Grand Rapids Community College is implementing an online [introductory information technology class](#) developed by Google to prepare students for entry-level IT work.

In addition, community colleges became a locus for innovative

# Breaking Out of the Shadow College

economic development initiatives, such as business incubators, advanced technology centers, maker spaces, user laboratories and entrepreneurial training. [Lorain County Community College's Innovation Fund](#), for example, offers initial capital for companies provided that they offer employment opportunities for students. [LaGuardia Community College's business incubator](#) provides space and technical assistance for start-up companies in Queens, N.Y. Initiatives like these pushed community colleges into the areas of economic development and community involvement, and they diversified the ways in which those institutions contribute to the development of human capital in their region.

These various educational initiatives created a sense of awareness among both companies and policy makers of the potential role of community colleges in the development of a skilled work force in

the United States. But the current structure of work-force education at community colleges, with credit and noncredit programs existing in silos, may not be fully optimized to bolster local economies while giving students -- especially working adults -- the best chance of building sustainable careers.

The comprehensive guided pathways reforms underway at many community colleges offer a distinct opportunity for institutions to rethink the relationship between their credit and noncredit work-force programs. As colleges work to clarify student pathways to credentials and careers, they can ensure they are providing students with avenues for both the immediate acquisition of skills and the completion of college credentials.

Strengthening connections between credit and noncredit work-force programs would be beneficial for students in both areas. On one hand, it would help ensure that colleges' credit-bearing path-

ways are relevant to the skill needs of local employers and that they provide adults with credentials of value in the work force. On the other, it would open up more options for the many students who enter the community college intending to complete short-term programs linked to specific jobs and whose career plans change. Many colleges are developing "bridges" between noncredit courses and credit programs. They are also extending the availability of counseling and other support services to students in noncredit courses and programs to support their transition to the credit side.

In this way, the strengths of the shadow college can be used to provide focus for pathways efforts, and the strengths of traditional programs can improve the prospects of students in the shadow college. It is time to move beyond the shadow college and create one system that provides learning alternatives for all students. ■

## Bio

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/03/21/community-colleges-should-strengthen-connections-between-credit-and-noncredit-work>



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