**Mending the Broken Promise: Our Students, Our Teachers, Our Missions** *

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Unfettered access, a major component of the democratic promise of community colleges, has, over the years, morphed from a guiding inspiration to a required mandate. Contemporary community colleges continue to offer the most generous point of entry to incoming students seeking a postsecondary education. By implicitly and usually explicitly promising to provide a home to all potential students, community colleges promise to meet their ever more widely variable academic, financial, and social needs. Community colleges promise to enable all students to meet their divergent goals for education; consequently, community colleges promise to help all students achieve their dreams.

Our contemporary colleges simply cannot meet the enormousness of this promise. While we have been able to hold open our doors to all interested students, we have not been able to provide in navigable pathways to achievement across the stunning variety of programs and courses our contemporary colleges now offer (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). This failure has obviously impacted the institution in negative ways, most glaringly in low retention and completion rates. In

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fact, statistics compiled by the National Student Clearinghouse indicate that about only about 40 percent of incoming students reach completion in six years. By the arguably less accurate statistics compiled by the U.S. Department of Education, that number is closer to 20 percent (Juskiewicz, 2014).

Every single one of the 13 million students who attend a community college comes to college with individual struggles, hopes, and dreams. When community colleges fail, the institutions suffer, but the students absorb the majority of the impact. Students looking to better themselves are willing to put in the work and to make the social and financial sacrifices. But after too many months or even years spent finding their footing on an achievable path to completion that will put them on track for a higher paying job, they realize that they cannot continue making the same sacrifices. For this student, and for the many who are also in her position, completion is out of reach. Their dream is shattered.

Although community colleges are critical to the American system of postsecondary education, history has shown the incredible difficulty of aiming for both access and achievement. But of course difficult does not mean impossible. It is true that under present conditions our institutions cannot be all things to all potential students. However, by working to emphasize individualized attention and enhance academic and student support services, community college leaders, administrators, faculty members, and policymakers can repair the promise we make to the students who depend on us for a way forward.

Community colleges and community college students differ radically from traditional postsecondary schools and students. We open our doors to everybody, but because we do, we are responsible for educating students whose academic, financial, and often social needs are frankly incomparable to students at those more traditional postsecondary schools. To implement methods for individualized attention and to enhance academic and student support services, our colleges must comprehensively change, and in some radical ways. Most extensively, our colleges must change the culture in which we operate.

At a structural level, this means that our colleges must cease emulating models that do not answer to our institutions' specific needs. First, community college leaders and administrators must cease attempts to reproduce the work of traditional baccalaureate-granting institutions. We are not selective, so why do we have an "Admissions" office? Our students are generally not sophisticated enough to seek help on their own, so why do we have "Counselors" who sit in their offices waiting for students to make appointments? Our "Career and Transfers" offices provide advice as to how to prepare a resume and complete a transfer application.  Why don't we have an employment office instead of a career counseling office and why don't we intercede on behalf of the transfer student to secure a place in a baccalaureate-granting college? Second, while we must cease putting our energy and resources into emulating an institution that does not address the same needs or the same challenges as do our institutions, community college leaders and administrators must also cease efforts to operate as cafeteria-style educational institutions. The cafeteria model took hold at many postsecondary institutions (community colleges and traditional colleges alike) in the 1980s and 1990s, when it was better known as the smorgasbord model. The model was designed to respond to student demands for autonomy and diversity (Smelser & Schudson, 2004).. In its ideal form,

the cafeteria model was supposed to create wide institutional appeal by offering incredibly flexible options toward award or program completion. In the real world of community colleges, however, the model translated to an enormous number of courses offered in different vocational-oriented and transfer-oriented and terminal-oriented and continuing education programs. The unprecedentedly large number of courses in an unprecedentedly large number of programs overextended community colleges, overtaxed administrators and faculty members, overwhelmed students, and led, unsurprisingly, to grossly extended times in which students were capable of completing awards and programs.

The recent work of Thomas Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins (2015) makes clear that although the cafeteria model can provide mostly prepared students with options for filling out the breadth requirements that count toward a baccalaureate degree, for community college students, the cafeteria model just does not work. Over time, its pervasiveness has negatively influenced our institutions and has contributed in major and ways to the persistent poor completion, retention, and transfer rates we see today. According to their research, community colleges have the best chance of mending the institutional promise to be all things to all potential students by installing comprehensive hands-on support services. Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkin (2015) argue that community colleges can work toward these elements through their guided pathways approach. Such a model is excellent and absolutely necessary, but I believe that our institutions must go even further. To implement a culture of individualized attention and to enhance academic and student support services for our students, community colleges must integrate an institutional culture informed by an *in loco parentis* mandate. This requires a radical shift in community college culture

toward meeting the needs of our students, but the shift to a student-centered institution is absolutely necessary to repair our schools and to make the community college promise a reality.

Many community college students (probably even most) have overcome any number of obstacles to arrive at our doors. However, the personal, financial, societal, and academic problems only scratch the surface of the perniciousness of the issues faced by our students. Too often, we forget that the journey from making the decision to attend community college to completing an award or program is an incredibly difficult, multi-step process that necessitates incomparable persistence on the part of the student and a knowledgeable, efficient, and sympathetic guiding hand on the part of community college faculty members and support staff.

Those of us who have worked in community colleges know that for most students, enrollment at community college is not an afterthought. It is instead a serious obligation undertaken after a great deal deliberation. Often, financial status is the major point of consideration. This is not necessarily because community college tuition is so very high (although—and crucially—for many students it is). It is instead because enrollment at community college generally means sacrificing both the earnings a student requires to take care of himself or his family and the short-term earning potential he might acquire. The sacrifice requires a careful calculation that weighs an ideally short-term loss against the likelihood of long-term learning opportunities and financial gain, and it strains many students' already incredibly busy and overextended lives. The sacrifice, even though it is ideally a short-term one, can be absolutely formidable. To wit, in the colleges I have served, 80 percent to 90 percent of the students who make the decision to enter school qualify for some sort of financial aid. However, only the most needy receive financial aid packages that cover tuition and living expenses. The rest of the students, otherwise known as the working poor, do not get the same

assistance. They teeter on the poverty line, but they do not have quite sufficient need to qualify for full financial aid. These students do not have the relative luxury of enrolling in community college full-time. Or, if they do pursue full-time enrollment, they do so while continuing to work. These are the students for whom making the decision to attend a community college is its own form of achievement.

Determining which courses will meet one's abilities, goals, and scheduling requirements, and figuring out how to devise navigable and efficient pathways to achievement via these courses, constitutes the next, often incredibly complicated, step. Too often, this calculation requires too much time and depends too much on a student's intimate knowledge of college-, program-, and course-level logistics. It is no wonder that setting out on a path to completion (particularly a path that will meet students' personal and professional goals) is a hurdle that students with limited time, money, and emotional support simply cannot overcome. More egregiously, the challenges that students face at this stage can be made far more difficult to navigate by unhelpful community college administrators and staff.

While we must determine substantive solutions to reactively meet the challenges faced by students, we must also begin to recognize the opportunity to proactively intervene in our students' lives before their lives are pushed off course by circumstances that are often outside of their control. To identify these opportunities requires a radical shift in community college culture toward what I've called a culture of care. I consider this culture of care to be inspired by an *in loco parentis* mandate. To effectively implement a culture of care, community college staff and personnel must adopt an attitude that reflects the community college's promise of access.

Simply put, our institutions were founded on welcoming all, and we must embody this welcome. From the college fair, to the bursar's workstation, to the classroom, and in the president's office, we must enable students to see themselves as the rightful inhabitants of the community college's institutional home. If community college leaders, administrators, faculty members, and policymakers are going to meaningfully impact retention, completion, and graduation rates, we must recognize that effective retention strategies begin on the way in not on the way out. We must match access with a welcoming culture that is firmly in place by the time students make the decision to walk through our doors.

This culture of care is all the more important when considering the large number of our students who enter community college with low self-worth. Just as insidious as financial, academic, and social problems, low-self-worth plagues too many community college students, reminding them that they are not good enough for "real" college. Indeed the less-than status that adheres to our institutions is often reinforced by students whose teachers, family members, and even friends have reminded them in various ways that they are not—and never will be—college material. The culture that I advocate to be effective, it must go far beyond attitude and far beyond the level of administration. It must instead saturate every aspect of our schools.. Administrators can help determine and guide students to an efficient and efficacious path to success, but it is our faculty members who are best positioned to impact and intervene in students' daily lives. The impact and intervention will not happen because of a simple personal change of attitude (although that certainly helps). It happens through the broader, systemic change that recognizes and values students with an array of needs as the proper inhabitants of our institutions. Such valuation

empowers administrators and faculty members to radically change the community college institutional and classroom environment to reflect the recognition.

It will surprise no one to learn that community college teachers operate under incredibly challenging conditions. However, the extent and intensity of the challenge is seldom the center of the critical conversations about our schools. Without a clear-eyed accounting of our institution's import and without an honest discussion of the characteristics of the student populations we seek to teach and to serve, we will not be able to transform our institutions into student-centered schools dedicated to facilitating the achievement of all.

Part of this accounting recognizes that community college teachers operate in a completely different environment and must utilize completely different pedagogical strategies than teachers at more traditional postsecondary schools. First, the environment plays to our students' persistent sense of low self-worth. Community college students are incredibly resilient in some surprising contexts, but they are often much less resilient than other postsecondary students in the context of the traditional postsecondary classroom. This is often the reason they seek out the education offered at community colleges. For students with a history of low or deficient academic performance, an array of personal challenges, and persistent (if unrecognized) sense of low self-worth, the traditional classroom environment can be debilitating. Such students often perceive an initial critical encounter as validation of their inability to compete. They may question whether they are wasting money in trying to get an education or wasting time trying to attend college. Traditional pedagogical methods can fail because the students at our institutions are generally not prepared for college level work. This is particularly the case in the remedial or developmental

classroom, where the coursework does not always appear to be immediately applicable to students' future academic goals. The valuable buy-in that implicitly encourages students to continue along the apprenticeship continuum is often off the table before students even have a chance to engage.

That our faculty members work incredibly hard to expand the limits of the community college classroom and diversify their pedagogy is absolutely undeniable However, in twenty-first century community colleges, the classical delivery of relevant material is deployed to meet the most immediately obvious need, which in the community college classroom is academic. In fact, despite the varied challenges that community college students bring into the classroom, it is this deep academic need that can strong-arm the pedagogy and all but force faculty members to assume a strictly academically oriented interventionist role. This is not necessarily a reflection of the level of students' unpreparedness; it is instead a reflection of the critical mass of students who are academically unprepared. Plainly put, faculty members at community colleges must facilitate learning in classrooms in which the majority of students need a lot of academic help. Faculty members at community colleges must undertake their work at uniformly underfunded institutions that continue to be marginalized by insiders, such as students, and outsiders, such as high school guidance counselors. At community colleges across the country, faculty members undertake business-as-usual under impossible conditions: they try to engage underprepared, overextended, and unconvinced students in classrooms that do not garner the resources or the respect deserved and needed.

Consequently, at community colleges, faculty members are engaged in an uphill battle in which the hill resembles a mountain. The battle is made the more difficult because our teachers are seldom trained for this kind of work or for this kind of environment. Instead, our teachers usually

undertake the same training as other postsecondary teachers: they learn in an environment that prepares them for traditional postsecondary schools, which feature a competitive classroom environment and which favors the master-apprentice pedagogical style. Given the omnipresent model for postsecondary schools provided by baccalaureate-granting institutions, the gap in training is a given. It is, however, meaningful: our teachers must learn the nature of the battle, the slope they must climb, and the best strategies for navigation while on the job.

Ironically, community college teachers probably have the most important tasks in our institutions. Unlike most college leaders and administrators, these faculty members have the relative proximity to students that allows for opportunities for regular student interactions. Faculty members therefore have the space necessary and the justification implicitly required to rigorously interrupt the negative feedback loop that keeps so many students' perceptions of their academic ability and future worth so low. Doing so, however, depends on the full integration of a culture of care at the classroom and pedagogical level. This will not only provide the appropriate environment but will also equip faculty members with the tools of supportive individualized intervention. Faculty members must be empowered to build the kinds of classrooms and individual learning experiences in which students are encouraged and enabled to view the classroom, and thus the community college itself, as a safe academic space that will help them to meet their specific academic and life goals.

Of course, the responsibility makes the already difficult job of teaching at community colleges even more challenging. A full-scale cultural shift requires both time and money. More materially, it requires effective professional development opportunities that provide faculty members with the support and the tools to meet students' diverse needs. Although community colleges currently

spend very little money providing the type of professional development opportunities that will enable our teachers to effectively reach our students, given the near majority of adjunct or part-time faculty at our colleges, professional development is a critical investment in our institutional bottom line.

Student retention depends in no small part on classroom experience: when students feel alienated by community college administrators and by faculty members, they leave. In my experience, they only rarely return. The tremendous financial pressures under which community colleges operate make professional development a luxury, but our institutions must make such development a priority. Only by teaching our leaders, administrators, and faculty members to provide specialized, often individualized teaching and support services will we enact a culture of care that can result in student and institutional success.

Doing so is difficult, but it can be done. I know because throughout my career, I have worked to this end. Community colleges succeed when the particularity of the institution is not just understood but embraced. Community colleges succeed when the particularity of students, who so often arrive with a variety of challenges, are not just tolerated by welcomed. Community colleges succeed when the institution seeks to meet its students through a culture of care made actionable through highly individualized student services. Community colleges succeed only with a great deal of effort and resources, but when the colleges do succeed, the results are extraordinary.

The case for more comprehensive, more connected, and thus more effective remediation has been building, particularly in the last decade, thanks to research conducted at the Community College

Research Center (CCRC) (Hodara, Jaggars, & Karp, 2012; Visher et al., 2012). However, the difficult task of determining the most effective developmental education has not yet received nearly enough research attention. Of course, both research and the implementation of research necessitate funding, and the high cost of remedial and developmental programs is already staggering. By some accounts, remedial services at community colleges range from 1.9 to 2.3 billion dollars (Strong American Schools, 2008).

In the past, academic administrators worked to keep the institutional costs of remediation down by relying on new or part-time faculty to teach remedial courses. Although asking teachers with less experience to teach the colleges' neediest students is often a faulty, and in its own way, costly model, these new teachers have been responsible for an important shift. In fact, thanks in part to the influx at community colleges of young, committed faculty members who value teaching and research equally, a great deal more attention has begun to be paid to the import of remediation and developmental education.

Over the last five to ten years, I have seen many bright doctoral candidates elect to teach at community colleges over more prestigious 4-year institutions. These teacher-scholars are often attracted, like I was so many years ago, to our institution's democratic ideals and to our willingness to work toward the practical achievement of all potential students. Sometimes, these candidates hear the federal government's call that community colleges constitute America's future; sometimes, they are enticed by the difficulty of the colleges' deep and seemingly intransigent problems. Whatever the reason, these teachers and scholars feel called to contribute to the body of knowledge emerging around best practices in remediation and developmental education. I

wholeheartedly welcome this trend, even when it points to problems and even when it calls for more comprehensive change and yet more funding. The passion and work of these teachers and researchers infuses our sector with excitement for engaging in serious examination of how best to reach and teach our students.

Various examples of the results of this shift already show promise. Places like the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) in Maryland, for example, have experimented with the Accelerated Learning Program, or ALP. ALP allows some students to bypass remediation in favor of taking modified college-level coursework. When the program allowed students whose placement-exam results fell just below the cutoff scores for remediation to take English 101 with an additional hour of extra support, those students excelled. According to research conducted by CCRC, students receiving this type of treatment did just as well as those students who were placed in Freshman English remediation (Jenkins, et al, 2010).

The current efforts developed by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges also show promise. Unlike the approach at CCBC, Washington's model is more interventionist and integrated, and thus more along the lines of my own argument. The model, called Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST), is designed to reach students who would otherwise merit un-integrated remedial courses. In I-BEST, such students take courses developed and taught by co-instructors. An occupational or technical instructor and a basic-skills instructor work together to integrate basic skills-level pedagogy into college-level occupational or technical coursework. The paired approach provides students with an integrated on-ramp to college-level courses. As students' progress through the program, they learn basic skills in real-

world scenarios offered by the college and career portion of the curriculum (Wachen, Jenkins, & Van Noy, 2011).

Another positive development in integrated remediation, which began at City University of New York, is CUNY Start. The program responds to the premise that remedial courses too often serve as a barrier rather than a safety net. The premise is well informed. In 2010, 78 percent of all community college students entering the City University of New York required remediation in reading, writing, or computational ability. Of these students, 23.8 percent required all remediation in all three areas (CUNY OIRA Report, 2011). Students with needs in three remedial needs are at a very high risk of dropping out. In fact, at Queensborough Community College, we found that only 5 percent of students with three remedial deficiencies graduated in 6 years.

Based in part on these dismal statistics, the City University of New York inaugurated CUNY Start as a way forward for students with broad remedial needs. CUNY Start provides intensive preparation in academic reading/writing, math, and "college success." The program enrolls prospective CUNY students with a high school or high school equivalency diploma who are not ready for college-level work according to the CUNY assessment tests. The program's most attractive feature, aside from the comprehensive safety net it seeks to provide, is its preservation of students' financial aid. Because it is delivered through the continuing education arm of the university system, the program is offered at a very low cost of $75 per semester. Subsequently, students do not have to pay regular tuition, and they preserve their financial aid eligibility when it can more meaningfully contribute to an associate degree or to future baccalaureate work.

In 2010, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching created a network of colleges to examine and then reform developmental math sequences. The network and the associated initiative resulted in the Statway and Quantway accelerated courses. Statway combines college-level statistics with developmental mathematics and delivers courses focused on statistics, data analysis, and causal reasoning. Quantway, which offers quantitative reasoning coursework, fulfills developmental requirements but also aims to prepare students for success in college-level mathematics. Both methods work to reduce the amount of time it takes students at the basic-skills level to begin engaging in college-level coursework and earning college-level credits. So far, the reported results have been impressive. According to a report by Sowers and Yamada (2015), a traditional remedial pathway in mathematics resulted in a 6 percent success rate, but for students enrolled in Statway courses, 49 percent completed the remedial course with a grade of C or better. For Quantway, the results were even more significant: after one semester in Quantway courses, students' success rate jumped to 56 percent as compared to a rate of 29 percent for students engaged in traditional remedial curriculum.

Perhaps surprisingly, institutions have been somewhat slow to adopt these programs. Forty-nine institutions in 14 states have integrated the Statway and Quantway remedial mathematics delivery model into their coursework. The slow uptake is informative because it reflects some of the difficulties in adoption and implementation. In my own university system, for example, only two of seven community colleges have adopted the program models. The reluctance indicates both the paucity of uniformly positive research and the subsequent inability of leaders, administrators, faculty members, and student support staff to agree on effective approaches.

The great majority of community college students enter community colleges looking for a better way, a pathway to the middle-class. Even though tuition costs are relatively low, for students who are dependent on work and who have family responsibilities, the time constraints, the impact of lost wages, and the tuition costs together make college attendance a very serious commitment. It is hard to imagine a student coming to a community college who is not sincere about attaining an education. What sometimes prevents us from understanding the complexity of these students' needs is that many students seem to come to us with a chip on their shoulder. They are afraid of facing another potentially closed avenue to achievement. They require, I believe, excellent entry-level services to shrug off troublesome pasts and move forward.

Excellent execution of entry-level services begins with appropriate student placement. We must stop relying on the general assessment tests, which immediately challenge students' self-worth and which often contribute to the problem of misplacing students in classrooms where they quickly become unchallenged and uninterested. We must instead refine our criteria for identifying the students who can succeed in college-level coursework and the students who require modifications. Thorough vetting for placement necessitates defining the skills necessary for college success *away* from one test for academic skills and *toward* a holistic approach that accounts for the other skills that can also signal postsecondary success, such as practical skills gained through professional or personal experience (Bailey, 2009; Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins 2015; Robbins et al., 2004; Scott-Clayton, 2011). More thorough evaluations require an initial investment in time and resources, but it is by far more efficient and budget-oriented than putting students in remedial coursework where their interest and ability wither and die.

Excellent execution of entry-level services also begins with front-end individualized attention to student goals. Entry-level academic advisement and personal counseling is absolutely imperative to success. Entry-level advisors have to be savvy about student behavior, understanding what might be a mask of bravado and what might indicate closely held goals; they have to be good at interviewing students; they have to be able to make a thorough diagnostic assessment of academic social and financial needs; and they must be familiar with the curricular offerings of the college and the college's ability to provide the services that each student needs.

Every student who enters community college must be able to make use of this deeply informed advisement staff. In fact, each entering student should be assigned to an advisor, a coach, or similarly positioned administrator who can help students navigate both the community college experience and the community college as an institution. The advising contact should establish an initial meeting with each incoming student to discuss the student's academic, professional, and personal goals. We often find that underprepared students have unrealistic aims that are frequently informed by a mistaken notion of academic progression and procurement. An advisor can ensure that students are able to articulate their dreams but that such discussions actually inform a realistic plan and a navigable pathway to achievement. The plan and pathway should include an explicit clarification of the student's goals, and it should be obvious to both student and advisor how each step of the plan contributes to reaching the student's desired outcome.

Clearly, this process depends on the individual clarification of goals that will enable advisor *and* student to create a reasonable academic pathway to achievement. The individualization of the service is critical. As the current status of achievement at our institutions

makes clear and as recent research corroborates (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015), community colleges cannot offer *either* a too basic, one-size-fits-all approach *or* a too-complicated cafeteria approach and expect students to achieve their aims. The promise our institutions make when we welcome all students is a promise to provide *each* student a path by which to achieve professional and personal ambitions. Individualized entry-level services, which include thorough, holistic assessment and personal advising services enable colleges to make good on this covenant.

Once the student and advisor together provide a prescription, the rest of the process depends on monitoring student progress through periodic check-ins and determining that each student is able to access the support services necessary to meet goals. This entry-level process is incredibly, undeniably, hands-on and engaged, but some colleges are already effectively providing it and are able to demonstrate dramatic results.

Successful intrusive intervention gives faculty members the power to trigger the formation and involvement of an academic team. Once an academic team is activated on behalf of the student, the existing resources of the college are often placed at the team's disposal. For example, if a faculty member asks that an academic team form to intervene with a student with psychological or social difficulties, then the counseling department becomes involved as part of the student's academic team. If a faculty member forms an academic team because of a student's emergent financial problems, then members of the administration join the academic team, intervening by accessing resources via private philanthropy or federal or state resources. If a faculty member engages an academic team to aid a student with academic concerns, tutors become part of the team. If a faculty member is concerned with a student's time management skills or study habits, a success coach works with the student to access existing resources.

Crucially, the team approach to student success places the responsibility for retention on the *college* rather than on the student. While the intervention is absolutely obtrusive, it is designed to intervene on behalf of students who struggle the most. In that sense, it is not appropriate for all students; it is, however, quite appropriate for many. By creating an academic team that assists the most vulnerable students through their community college experience, the institution fulfills its promise to build a path to achievement for all students who have been accepted.

Taking a proactive stance in retaining these students ensures that the community college provides an individualized service similar to what is provided at many private schools. This can be very beneficial. The extra attention signals to the student that their success is important to the school and to the community the school seeks to serve. In my experience, when this kind of intensive intervention is successful, students come to realize that an entire community is behind them and that the community, through their taxes, has provided the resources necessary for students' success. The transition toward seeing resources as an *entitlement to scholarship* is important. Through this transition, students are empowered to view themselves as valued members of society, not as second-class academic citizens. This in turn places a responsibility on students to do well and to make a contribution to the public good.

Intrusive intervention offers students—particularly low-performing students or students who face particularly intense challenges (that is to say, *our* students)—the chance to succeed. It does this in large part because it situates these vulnerable students more firmly in the larger culture of the community college. However, intrusive intervention in the form of academic teams is just

one of the options utilized by colleges working to enhance student support. In addition, institutions also rely on cohort education as a method for deepening and intensifying student assistance.

Learning communities (Buffingon, 2003), also known as communities of practice, emphasize collaborative learning between and among peers. Although they manifest in different ways, a learning community is generally a small group of students who possess varied skill levels. The small group takes a variety of introductory classes together and/or orientation sessions together. Whatever the manifestation, learning communities are used to foster hard skills in the classroom, such as subject fundamentals, and soft skills outside the classroom, such as study habits. Ultimately, learning communities offer underprepared students more individualized attention while allowing proficient students the chance to practice their skills.

We can consider learning communities a different means by which to achieve the same results of academic teams: the communities function as an institutional method through which students create an academic family. For students who attend community colleges, the approach is successful because it is guided by an instructor and provides students with natural, peer-based positive reinforcement. It is also successful because the communities offer the opportunity for supportive familiar interaction through which students can begin to develop (and see reinforced) an academic identity. Additionally, when cohorts of students at a community college are identified by curricular affinity, they develop stronger ties to the college community and may have a better chance of completing than other students.

With effective accompanying support services, learning communities can serve many students well. However, traditionalists (and I refer here to both administrators and faculty

members) still express suspicion of a model in which students are coached by faculty members and allowed to participate in teaching at a more collaborative level. Administrators and faculty members who prefer the more traditional classroom model, in which a faculty member imparts knowledge while students passively receive information, are often resistant to the concept of learning communities.

Learning communities and cohort education can be achieved and intensified through high-impact practices. High-impact practices join curricular and extracurricular concerns through activities that draw on students' time and attention. They require a commitment on the part of the student, but they offer the student closer, more immediate access to peers and to college resources. Learning communities and various manifestations of cohort education are considered high-impact practices, as are service learning opportunities and first-year seminars.

In my experience, high-impact activities can boost student involvement, aid retention, and impact student experiences. Queensborough Community College Academies depend on such activities to effectively reach students. Similar to the academies themselves, the curricular-based activities have been developed by the faculty and take a variety of forms. Some consist of service learning projects, others utilize technology to create electronic-portfolios, others create collaborative assignments, others conduct original research, and others address global and diversity issues. The common denominator for all of these activities is the group-centered structure. Although engaging students in high-impact group-based activities means that instructors may only be able to cover part of the syllabus, when the activities result in impactful learning processes that carry over to other courses, the sacrifice can be worth it.

All of the methods that I've described in this article are united by their practical delivery of the culture of care through an *in loco parentis* mandate. Community colleges must provide more than access and more than a passive environment where already-interested or already-engaged students can learn. Community colleges must also meet the needs of those students who have secured access but who are not adept, interested, or engaged in the complexity of postsecondary success. Community college support services must be prepared to provide an appropriate diagnosis of students' needs, must be able to create academic maps that delineate the steps that must be taken to achieve academic, professional, and personal success, and must provide careful monitoring as students' progress through their studies. Meanwhile, teachers and support staff must be ready and able to develop and deploy different methodologies to enhance classroom learning. This is what we promise our students. This is only way we will significantly impact our retention and graduation rates.

In fact, although it may be an unpopular opinion, I would argue that community colleges must go even further. Today's community colleges routinely enroll students who aren't likely to succeed and therefore fail to produce what has become the expected outcome of either graduation or better employment. However, these outcomes are not necessarily informed by the expectations of community college students. They are instead informed by the expectations of leaders, administrators, and policymakers who are steeped (and often for good, funding-related reasons) in a need for measurable accountability and who are by and large informed by a postsecondary sector overwhelmingly focused on the baccalaureate degree.

I believe that reaping the rewards of shifting community college academic offerings closer to the guided pathways model proposed and advocated by Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins (2015) means redefining student success *away* from the standards imposed by the SRK and *toward* student-led definitions that privilege progression. Our institutions can enroll and engage students in academic teams, restructure student experiences and programs through learning communities, provide ample opportunities for high-impact activities, and generally provide advising and support services that offer obvious and easily graspable opportunities to continue onto pathways toward completion. However, if our institutions don't *also* redefine success through the achievements that our own students recognize as valid, our institutions *and* our students are unlikely to experience meaningful change in any data attesting to achievement.

A better determination of success and achieved outcomes must first take into account the accomplishments and the valid professional experience that many students bring to their community college studies. Former and current members of the military, for example, should be able to secure credit for the on-the-job learning they have acquired. Similarly, students who bring a variety of skills acquired in languages other than English should also be recognized with credit that corresponds to their professional proficiencies.

In addition, those of us associated with community colleges must recognize that for many students, *progression* and *acquisition* may be as or more important than *completion*. Not all community college students are recent high school graduates who seek postsecondary graduation. In fact, it is widely recognized that community college enrollment soars during economic downturns. Many of our students attend community college to wait out an economic slough, or

turn to community colleges to acquire relevant skills in their industry, or simply seek the skills that

will allow them to change careers. Companies also approach community colleges with contract-

based proposals through which to train individuals in needed skills. While our institutions must

offer a navigable pathway to postsecondary completion and graduation, we must also meet the

needs of the many students interested in progression and acquisition. This is another way

community college leaders, administrators, faculty members, support staff, and policymakers can

put student need first. By providing individualized programs of study, our institutions can help

facilitate the broadest possible range of student success.

## Cited Works

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