

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

COMMUNITY COLLEGES



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Choosing Change

By Kay McClenney

The nation's community colleges want it all. They have committed themselves to dramatic increases in college completion rates for their eight million wildly diverse credit students. They are acting to ensure that those credentials represent high-quality undergraduate learning. They insist that they will simultaneously improve educational attainment and achieve equity in outcomes across racial, ethnic, and income groups. And they want to keep the door to educational opportunity open.

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If all those aspirations are to be achieved, then “virtually everything else must change.”

That is the central challenge laid out in the report from the 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, *Reclaiming the American Dream: Community Colleges and the Nation's Future* (AACC, 2012, p. 20). The Commission grappled with societal and economic conditions for community college work, revisited strongly held values related to postsecondary access and equity, and examined the sector's current performance. The result was a call for community colleges to *redesign* students' educational experiences, *reinvent* institutional roles, and *reset* the system.

Realities confronting community colleges—and the nation—include a diminishing middle class, declining family income, persistent childhood poverty, and a continuing decline in educational attainment relative to other nations—the US now ranks 16th in the world in college completion rates for 25- to 34-year olds (OECD, 2009). Furthermore, there is concern that community colleges are significantly under-producing graduates prepared for high-demand occupations (ACT, 2012).

It was this set of realities that led the 21st Century Commission to declare:

The American Dream is at risk. Community colleges can help reclaim it. But stepping up to the challenge will require dramatic redesign of these institutions, their missions, and most critically, students' educational experiences. (AACC, 2012, p. vii)

This is no modest ambition. And indeed, the specific recommendations set forth by the Commission are far-reaching and bold. The focus of this article, though, is not the recommendations *per se* but the nature of the changes and choices that lie ahead if community colleges are to help reclaim the American dream.

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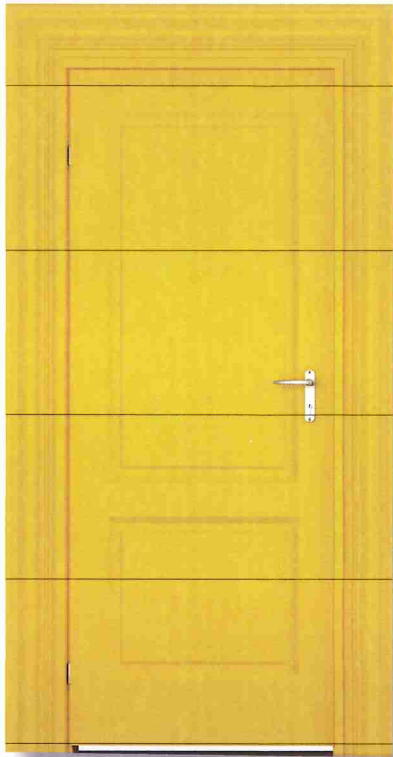
“However promising a particular strategy may be, college leaders recognize the truth in the assertion, generally attributed to Peter Drucker, that ‘culture eats strategy for breakfast.’”

BEYOND MARGINAL CHANGE

Community colleges have long excelled in their ability to innovate—creating new programs literally “on a dime” in terms of both time and money. Those innovative programs and services, usually grant funded, often serve small numbers of students very well. Typically, though, as in most educational settings, innovations are arrayed on the margins of institutions, led by heroic individuals or small, committed cadres of faculty and staff. There, they unintentionally take the heat off, protecting mainstream institutional work from pressures for more pervasive change.

Now, after at least a decade of data review, reflection, and the piloting and evaluation of a wide array of strategies for improving student success, many community colleges are realizing that marginal change simply will not suffice. However promising a particular strategy may be, college leaders recognize the truth in the assertion, generally attributed to Peter Drucker, that “culture eats strategy for breakfast.”

To believe that a college can plop down new ways of working on an institution that is essentially untransformed and on a broader policy and accreditation environment that may constrain rather than support change is to live in what Paul Hill calls “the zone of wishful thinking” (Hill, et al, 2000, p. 62). There are substantial issues pertaining to institutional culture and to the traditions and architecture of higher education more generally that must be addressed for new forms of work to be invented and then implemented at a scale significant enough to serve many more students at much higher levels of effectiveness.



NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART

So while innovation is relatively easy, transformation is horrendously difficult, and cultural change is at the heart of the work. The undertaking is intellectually challenging, administratively complex, and (too often) politically risky. It requires all parties to imagine their way out of the boxes in which we work. It demands unprecedented leadership at all levels, as well as collaboration.

In *Reclaiming the American Dream*, there is a summary of

the kinds of shifts in institutional culture and practice that will be required (see Figure 1). Offered here are a few brief descriptions of work underway in colleges and consortia that illuminate possibilities for community colleges to both *be* different and *work differently* in the future.

Access and Success

Balancing an historic commitment to access with a new emphasis on student progress and attainment, in 2012 the California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force wrote:

In addition to the personal fulfillment that a college education brings, students who earn a community college degree or certificate nearly double their earnings within three years. Whatever the academic skill level at the time of enrollment, all students should be given the tools and guidance to successfully complete their educational goals (2012, p. 1).

The task force report includes 22 recommendations aimed at strengthening opportunities for students, whatever their level of initial college readiness, to complete certificates and degrees.

For example, acknowledging that colleges are no longer likely to be able to do everything for everyone all the time, the California report identifies core priorities: basic math and English instruction, transfer preparation, technical training for careers, and degree attainment. The recommended new policy on enrollment priorities brings to the front of the line those returning and first-time students who have been through diagnostic assessment of their basic academic skills, participated in required orientation, and developed an educational plan.

Another take on linking access to success is evident in several Midwestern states. Through its Shifting Gears initiative, the Joyce Foundation has addressed the need to close the regional skills gaps and to create systems that more effectively serve low-skilled adult workers, aiming to help large numbers of them obtain marketable skills and postsecondary credentials.

In Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, community and technical colleges have collaborated with leaders in adult basic education and workforce development to create pathways for low-skilled adults, helping them move more expeditiously through each of the typically independent

FIGURE 1. NEEDED INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

Move from:	Move to:
A focus on student access	A focus on access and student success
Fragmented course taking	Clear, coherent educational pathways
Low rates of student success	High rates of student success
Tolerance of achievement gaps	Commitment to eradicate achievement gaps
A culture of anecdote	A culture of evidence
Individual faculty prerogative	Collective responsibility for student success
A culture of isolation	A culture of collaboration
Emphasis on boutique programs	Effective education at scale
Focus on teaching	Focus on learning
Information infrastructure as management support	Information infrastructure as learning analytics
Funding tied to enrollment	Funding tied to enrollment, institutional performance, and student success

Source: AACC (2012), p. 14

Effective educational practice in community colleges entails weaving together a collection of discrete practices to create clear, coherent, structured pathways.

systems. Thus far, about 4,000 students have enrolled in the new programs; over half have already completed, while others are still in progress. A recent evaluation of the initiative asserts that there is potential for much larger numbers of students to be served as these programs are fully enacted (Joyce Foundation, 2013).

From Practices to Pathways

There is a growing body of evidence that effective educational practice in community colleges entails weaving together a collection of discrete practices to create clear, coherent, structured pathways from students’ varied points of entry into college through to completion. In the process, as Kuh and O’Donnell (2013) and CCCSE (2012, 2013) note, quality of implementation matters. A lot.

Completion by Design (CBD), an ambitious multi-state initiative supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, emphasizes the need to “create clear and intentional pathways that make it easier for students to complete their studies” (CBD, 2013). Extending the work of the national Achieving the Dream network, this data-informed and evidence-based initiative requires participating colleges to closely examine students’ experiences in order to better understand where they succeed and where they falter. Based on that understanding, each CBD cadre has redesigned students’ experiences from the point of first contact through to completion of a certificate or associate degree with value for further education and/or in the labor market.

Completion by Design States and Institutions

Florida:	Miami Dade College
North Carolina:	Guilford Technical Community College (managing partner), Central Piedmont Community College Davidson County Community College Martin Community College Wake Technical Community College
Ohio:	Sinclair College (managing partner), Lorain County Community College Stark State College

The CBD state cadres officially began to implement these changes in fall 2012. While strategies differ across states and colleges, they are designed with common objectives in mind—e.g., accelerating the attainment of college readiness, ensuring that students enter a program of study as quickly as possible, integrating student and academic supports with instruction, and using technology to improve student learning.

From Low to High(er) Rates of Student Success

One of the most significant changes in the community college field in decades has been the recent recognition that student progress and college completion are now just as important as the long-held value of providing access through the “open door” to higher education. In fact, “access without support for student success is an empty promise” (AACC, 2012, p. 20).

For well over a decade, Valencia College (FL) has focused its work on improving student learning, progress, and completion. While leaders there are the first to say they are not yet as good as their aspirations and students require them to be, their record of improvement speaks for itself. Comparison of entering-student cohorts from fall 2002 and fall 2008 shows that Valencia improved its four-year graduation rates for all college-ready, first-time-in-college, degree-seeking students from 35 to 47 percent. Over the same period, the comparable rates for college-prep (developmental education) students increased from 16 to 23 percent.

Achievement Gaps: From Tolerance to Eradication

Making substantial progress requires relentless focus over a sustained period of time, strong leadership, and the broad commitment and involvement of all college groups—in short, changes in both practices and culture. As community colleges aspire not only to increase college completion rates but also to eliminate the achievement gaps that long have separated white students from students of color, they naturally look for places where those twin goals are being realized.

There too, Valencia College has produced results. For the fall 2002 entering cohort of first-time, degree-seeking, college-ready students, four-year graduation rates were 22 percent for African Americans, 23 percent for Hispanics, and 39 percent for Caucasians, while the rate for all ethnicities was 35 percent. By contrast, results for the

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comparable fall 2008 cohort were 48 percent for African Americans, 51 percent for Hispanics, 44 percent for Caucasians, and 47 percent for all ethnicities. In other words, while increasing graduation rates for all students, Valencia actually exceeded the goal of closing the previous gaps between college-ready African Americans and Hispanics as compared with white students.

From Anecdotes to Evidence

The past decade has brought a sea change to the community college field: college leaders, faculty, and staff are more willing, even eager, to examine data that paint an honest picture of students’ experiences as they move into and through community colleges—or as they (too often) convert open doors to revolving ones. This new use of data and evidence-based practice is no doubt a response to a number of factors, but primary among them are the early work of Achieving the Dream (ATD, www.achievingthedream.org)—a rigorously data-informed national reform network that has involved nearly 200 colleges across the country—and the Center for Community College Student Engagement.

Since 2002, the Center has surveyed close to 2,000,000 students from nearly 900 community colleges in 50 states and DC. From the beginning, participating colleges agreed to public reporting of their survey results via the Center’s website (www.cccse.org), which provides extensive interactive capabilities for benchmarking effective educational practices.

St. Petersburg College (SPC) in Florida is an ATD college where a comprehensive redesign of student services to support improved success rates has entailed a grass-roots approach to data use. Early work included the development of an easy-to-use website that supports in-depth analysis by faculty and staff of student characteristics, enrollment patterns, grades, and success rates—all without the need to go through the college’s information technol-

ogy staff for access to the data. More than 200 faculty and staff have been trained to navigate the information system.

At the same time, SPC has launched a major organizational effort under the working title “The 5X180 Plan”—five data-informed initiatives with a 180-day time frame for implementation. They are:

- A revised face-to-face student orientation
- Online individualized student learning plans
- Redesigned career-center outreach and programs
- An early-alert system to reach out to students who demonstrate behaviors predictive of course drop-out
- Expanded out-of-class support activities in the college’s learning support centers

Using as their framework *The Four Disciplines of Execution* (McChesney, Covey and Hulin, 2012), work teams associated with each of the initiatives have developed their own “leading indicators” to assess implementation progress and results. Creating these new data tools is challenging but also constructive, in that it empowers faculty and staff most directly involved in working with students.

According to President Bill Law, moving from a static analysis of student registration and course data to a more robust analysis of how students access services in support of their learning should improve alignment of institutional resources with student needs.

These changes within the field are accelerated by high expectations for community colleges from the White House to the state house, by increased scrutiny from accreditors, and by moves toward performance-based funding in states across the country. But the driving force comes from the colleges’ own passionate commitment to their mission.

From Individual Prerogative to Collective Responsibility

Growing numbers of institutions are changing the conditions in which students learn—for example, by eliminating late registration, enforcing attendance requirements, deploying effective early-alert systems, aligning curriculum and course requirements, requiring student participation in structured educational experiences that evidence suggests will enhance their chances of success, and revamping faculty evaluation and development programs.

But changes such as these require faculty members to engage in campus-wide discussions of data about student experiences and outcomes, the possible redesign of students’ educational experiences based on those data, changes in academic policy to support student success, and enactment of those substantial changes *at scale*.

And part of the culture of higher education has long been that individual faculty



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members determine what they will (or won't) do in their classrooms. This interpretation of “academic freedom” limits the potential scale of instructional innovation and changes in academic policy that could lead to higher levels of student learning, persistence, and attainment.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's work on “Community College Pathways” places a high premium on collaborative faculty work within and across community colleges. Both Statway™ and Quantway™ “aim to increase substantially the number of [developmental-math] students who complete a college-level mathematics course within one year of continuous enrollment” (Strother, Van Campen & Grunow, 2013, p 10).

In initial implementation, both pathways are producing promising results. For example, as compared with baseline data on students in traditional developmental-math programs, Statway™ (the pathway in statistics) has tripled the rate at which the developmental students earn college-level math credit—and they do it in half the typical time.

From Isolation to Collaboration

There is collaborative work going on not only within institutions but across sectors. School-college partnerships are not new. Efforts led by the American Association for Higher Education and the Education Trust, among others, date at least from the 1990s. More recently, CalPASS has provided a stellar model for collaborative work across K-12, community colleges, and universities in California.

The game-changer, though, is the Common Core State Standards, adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia. The goal is to raise standards for high school graduation and to promote the alignment of those standards with college and career readiness. Community colleges, having long contended with the remedial needs of close to two-thirds of their entering students, now must work more closely with their partner school districts to craft and maintain that alignment.

In Oregon, Tillamook Bay Community College (TBCC) offers a two-year scholarship to students graduating from Tillamook High School (THS) with a 3.0 GPA. But in 2010, 80 percent of students earning the scholarship required at least some remedial work.

Consequently, the college and high school collaborated to improve students' college and career readiness. A cross-sector team used data and the League for Innovation's “Significant Discussions” process to understand what was being taught before deciding on strategies for change. By

mid-2011, the team had identified some key problems, including gaps between high school and college expectations in math and writing.

Oregon received a Core to College grant in late 2011. Funded by a group of major foundations, the grant is intended to foster alignment between secondary and postsecondary sectors, based on the Common Core and related assessments. With grant support, the Tillamook Bay group worked with mathematics education faculty at Oregon State University and linked with another local partnership involving Lane Community College, the University of Oregon, and high schools in Eugene.

The Lane and Tillamook Bay teams recruited faculty from seven postsecondary institutions to examine the alignment of Common Core math standards with college algebra courses. This crosswalk led to a shift in THS math teaching—and more broadly, a shared understanding of the proficiencies needed for students to be successful at the postsecondary level. In 2011, another team including TBCC faculty and THS teachers undertook a similar process for college writing. By 2012-13, *none* of the THS scholarship recipients needed remediation in either math or writing.

Currently, 73 California community colleges use 11th grade Early Assessment Program (EAP) results to place students into college-level math and English. Now the state is part of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, one of two multi-state consortia funded by the U.S. Department of Education to develop assessment systems aligned to the Common Core State Standards.

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When the new K-12 Common Core assessments are implemented in 2014-15, the state will modify the EAP to use the new 11th-grade college-readiness assessment. Ideally, colleges and universities will then accept the new assessment as evidence that high school students are ready (or not) for college-level coursework. This transition is the product of a statewide collaboration involving the community college chancellor's office and Board of Governors, the state's Board of Education and Department of Education, and other system stakeholders.

The Lone Star State is not among the 45 that have adopted the Common Core. So initiatives such as Gulf Coast Partners Achieving Student Success (Gulf Coast PASS), supported by the Houston Endowment Inc., take on heightened significance. Involving eight community colleges and 11 partner school districts in the Houston Gulf Coast area, the initiative focuses on college readiness and school-to-college transitions. Major components include developing the capacity to track students across sectors, identifying key loss points and misalignments, cross-sector faculty-to-faculty work on curriculum alignment, and continued emphasis on the improvement of developmental education.

From Boutique Programs to Design for Scale

What stymies many efforts to strengthen student experiences and college completion rates are the financial and political challenges of moving improvements to scale. Here again, examples of college-level initiatives and results both bring hope and take away excuses.

Kingsborough Community College (NY) has demonstrated the effectiveness of placing students in learning communities in their first semester. The approach entails student cohorts taking linked courses at both the developmental and college level; coordinating courses and assignments; and enhancing and integrating student supports such as counseling, college success strategies, tutoring, and textbook vouchers.

According to the latest external evaluation report (Sommo, et al, 2012), results from random assignment/control-group studies indicate that after six years, more students in the program (35.9 percent) than in the control group (31.3 percent) had earned a degree from any postsecondary

institution. Further, total credits earned increased over the six-year period. And finally, the report indicates that the cost per degree earned was lower for program participants than for the control-group students.

Kingsborough's learning community initiative has been strongly faculty-driven, with strong administrative support. Especially remarkable is the college's commitment to making a first-semester learning community the experience for *most* Kingsborough students, not just for a fortunate few.

Meanwhile Houston Community College (TX), which enrolls more than 60,000 credit students, designed a student-success course as part of its work in ATD, with a pilot on one of its 23 campuses. Evaluation led to improvements and expansion until results were sufficiently convincing to support the decision to scale up across the system.

Now all new and transferring students who have earned fewer than 12 semester hours take that course. The college has tracked generally upward trends in fall-to-fall retention rates—particularly for African-American and Hispanic students who began in developmental education.

From Teaching to Learning

The 21st Century Commission's report calls not just for more certificates and degrees but for *quality* in the credentials awarded. One strategy, initially set forth in design of the Community College Voluntary Framework of Accountability (AACC, 2012), is use of the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) as a framework for defining and assessing student learning outcomes in community colleges.

The DQP defines what students completing associate, bachelor's, and master's degrees should know and be able to do. It describes levels of competence in five areas: broad integrative knowledge, specialized knowledge, intellectual skills, applied learning, and civic learning.

The Lumina-funded DQP Project in Oregon (<https://oregondqp.org/>) is an effort involving the state's 17 community colleges and all seven institutions in the Oregon University System. In closely related work, 22 community colleges nationwide are involved in Developing a Community College Student Roadmap: From Entrance to Engagement in Educational Achievement and Success, a MetLife Foundation-funded project led by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).

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Building on AAC&U's work on liberal education, the Roadmap Project calls for cross-division collaboration, program integration, learning outcomes assessment, and the implementation of high-impact practices. Student e-portfolios are among the tools employed by participating institutions.

Technology: From Administrative Support to Student Support

Emerging technologies often are touted as *the* answer to the complex challenges confronting community colleges. In fact, they can be an important *part* of the answer, particularly when the focus shifts from purely administrative functions to support for student progress and success.

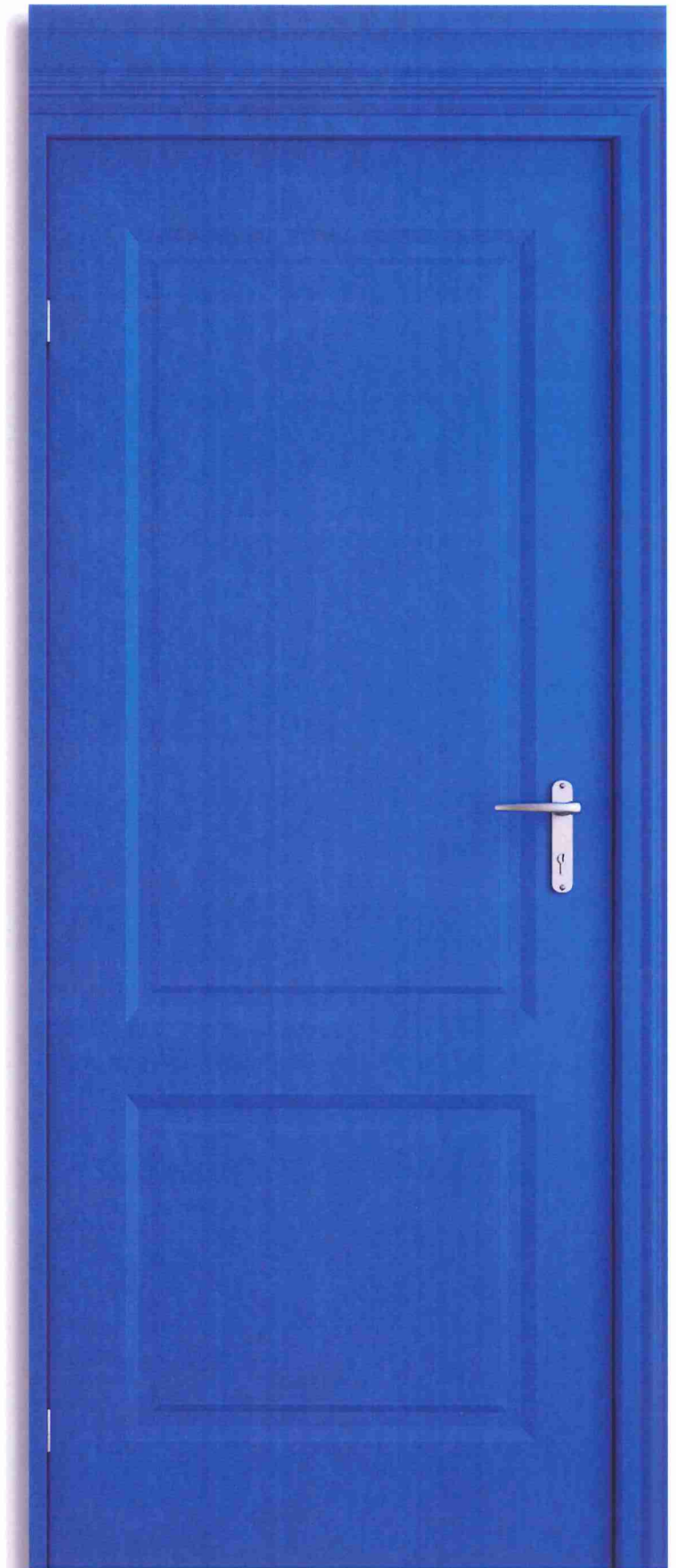
One of Sinclair Community College's (OH) CBD priorities is to create "ideal pathways" for full- and part-time students by documenting the most efficient journey through a degree program and to graduation. Using Sinclair's new MAP (My Academic Plan) software (<http://www.sinclair.edu/semesters/map/index.cfm>), students and their advisors, with faculty involvement, create individual academic plans.


A pathway template is a key tool when building or modifying a MAP. The template not only outlines the ideal course sequencing for each Sinclair degree program but also captures faculty advice at any point along the path. That advice in turn assists academic advisors as they meet with students.

Currently, over 10,000 students are using their MAPs to guide their course registrations and to stay on track. While it is too early to rigorously ascertain their impacts on retention and completion, preliminary indications are that MAPs are having a significant positive effect.

As Sinclair was implementing MAP for its own students, the college decided to extend access to the software through the Student Success Plan Open Source effort (<http://www.studentsuccessplan.org/>). MAP will be available as an open-source tool in late summer 2013, and plans already are underway for implementation at six other CBD colleges.

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Funding: From Enrollment to Performance Incentives

The foreseeable future has arrived. Responding to a variety of forces—the high stakes involved in increasing college completion, the escalating costs of college attendance, and intensified accountability demands—state legislatures across the country are considering or passing legislation to institute or strengthen the performance-based funding of higher education. The 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges also emphasized that new approaches to public funding must “include provisions for *making student success and college completion matter*, incorporating incentives for community colleges to preserve access and continue serving high-risk and traditionally underserved students” (AACC, 2012, p. 29).

Among states leading the way, according to the Center for American Progress (Maio, 2012), are these:

- Ohio: the 5 percent of higher education funding based on performance in 2012 is expected to increase to 30 percent by 2015, using formulas that reward success in serving high-risk students; other changes are anticipated.
- Indiana: 5 percent of the state’s 2011-2013 higher education budget is based on performance indicators, including the number of degrees awarded, low-income students’ degree completion, and the number of community college transfers.

- Tennessee: the proportion of the state’s higher education funding tied to performance is expected to reach 80 percent over several years; indicators include the completion of developmental courses, retention, and degree attainment.
- Washington: community and technical colleges earn supplemental funding through accrual of “achievement points” based on improvement in scores on basic skill tests; progress in developmental education; completion of a college-level math course; attainment of 15 and 30 college credits; and completion of apprenticeship programs, certificates, and degrees.


HARD CHOICES AHEAD

Community colleges face a long list of hard questions:

- Whom are they going to serve?
- What are their priorities?
- What outcomes will they seek?
- To whom and to what missions, programs, or services will they say “No” or “Sorry, but not any longer”?
- How will they reallocate limited resources to bring effective educational practices to scale?
- How will they ensure equity in educational outcomes?
- How will faculty associations and collective bargaining units contribute to the redesign of students’ educational experiences?

- How will adjunct faculty be prepared for and involved in the work ahead?
- Will leaders at all levels commit to engaging in the courageous conversations that must provide answers to these questions? (AACC, 2012, p. 21)

Describing examples of progress, even as they reflect substantial change, may have the effect of understating the mag-

nitude of the challenge confronting community colleges. The institutions are generally familiar with—and often skilled at—the process of instituting a change here and an innovation there. But now they are called to dramatically redesign themselves, their missions, and their students’ educational experiences. Those who rise to the challenge will find their rewards not in dollars or prestige but in improved human lives, stronger communities, and a reclaimed American dream. 

RESOURCES

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Princess Noura University (PNU), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)
Valencia College (VC)

Valencia College will provide the services necessary to review, validate, develop as needed, and suggest recommendations for development and improvement for five proposed specialization programs including: Business Administration, Business Technology, Marketing, Web Design, and Programming with C. The process of review, validation, development, and recommendations will be conducted by a Valencia College Taskforce Team. The Team will include college administration, faculty and staff which includes expert faculty with extensive teaching and workplace experience in the related field of study. Administrative and professional staff has extensive experience and responsibility for program development, program review, and processes for continuous program improvement in career and workforce education at Valencia College.

The services will include activities and functions to ensure each program's quality of content, relevancy, and consistency that will provide meaningful and relevant learning opportunities for students in each of the fields of study. Also, the process will include Valencia College's practice in the process of program development by reviewing the program content with same and/or similar programs offered at Valencia as well as with other accredited community colleges in Florida.

In addition, Valencia College will provide services for the design and development of the Mission and Vision Statements and a Strategic Plan for the new, all female, community college within the Princess Noura University. The process will be conducted by a Valencia College Team. The Team will include college administrators and professional staff including experts with extensive experience in academic affairs, student affairs and services, planning, evaluation, institutional and strategic planning, program development, articulation, institutional research, and evaluation. The services will include activities and functions to ensure quality of content, relevancy, and consistency that will provide meaningful and relevant mission and vision statements and a comprehensive strategic plan.