SENSE 2011 and 2012 SPECIAL-FOCUS ITEMS:
PROMISING PRACTICES for COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT SUCCESS

1. (Years 2011 and 2012) At this college, I completed registration before the first class session(s).
   a. Yes; I was registered for ALL of my courses before the first class session(s)
   b. Mostly; I was registered for MOST of my courses before the first class session(s)
   c. Partly; I was registered for SOME of my courses before the first class session(s)
   d. No; I was NOT registered for ANY of my courses before the first class session(s)


Freer-Weiss’ analysis of 785 first-time student admissions files at an open-enrollment college confirms many of the trends attributed to late applicants in the community college literature. Late applicants tend to be older males who have more academic deficiencies, hold a GED rather than a high school diploma, and aspire to an associate’s rather than a four-year degree. No correlation between specific racial/ethnic identities and late application is found; however, minorities make up less than 20% of the admissions files analyzed, with the vast majority of those being African American. It is possible that more detailed information would emerge from a sample with a larger number of minority cases. A small number of cases also limits the results regarding the academic achievement of late applicants. The author does find a correlation between late enrollment and attrition, particularly for those students applying three weeks or less prior to the beginning of the academic term.


The authors compared the academic outcomes associated with early, regular, and late registration for 251 students at a west Texas community college during the fall 1998 semester. Late registration was associated with a higher rate of course withdrawals, lower semester-to-semester persistence, and a lower GPA. Both early and regular registrants showed more positive outcomes in terms of course completion, persistence, and GPA, with no clear advantage to registering early versus simply registering on time.

The Milwaukee Area Technical College is a multi-campus metropolitan institution serving a student population of 53,000, of which a high proportion are minority (44%, mainly African American and Hispanic), academically disadvantaged (37%), and/or economically disadvantaged (31%) students. The college has an open access mission and depends on enrollment-based state funding; however, concerns over late course enrollments, student difficulty in accessing financial aid, and the persistence and academic performance of late applicants led the college to implement an application deadline during the 2005-2006 academic year. Differences between early and late applicants were analyzed.

During the fall 2005 semester, 12,121 students applied prior to the application deadline, and 757 students were late applicants. Several statistically significant differences were observed between these two groups. Although there were no differences in the gender or race/ethnicity of early vs. late applicants, late applicants tended to be older, to have waited for some time after high school to apply to the college, to be part-time students, and to have a greater rate of application for financial aid. These students also had lower academic outcomes than those who registered early: their GPA was .26 lower, and 5% fewer credits were accumulated during the semester. Whereas 74% of early registrants achieved good academic standing for the semester, only 69% of late registrants did so. Early registrants also persisted at a greater rate: their term-to-term retention was 69%, while that of late registrants was eight percentage points lower. The authors note that the characteristics associated with late registrants may be tendencies of the type of student who tends to register late rather than consequences of late registration, and urge caution in concluding that increasing the proportion early registrants will automatically improve academic outcomes for those students.
2. (Year 2011) At this college, the first time I met with an advisor to help me set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them was...
   a. PRIOR to registering for classes for my first semester/quarter
   b. AFTER registering for classes for my first semester/quarter
   c. I haven’t yet met with an advisor for this purpose


ACT’s 2010 What Works in Student Retention survey was completed by Chief Academic Affairs Officers at 305 institutions. This report highlights retention-related practices respondents rated as the largest contributors to student persistence on their campuses. Nearly sixty-percent of respondents have a campus staff member dedicated to retention efforts; in the majority of cases this person is the Chief Student Affairs Officer. Respondent colleges reported a mean first- to second-year retention rate of 56% and a degree completion rate of 27%. Over half of colleges had no set retention goal and no set degree completion goal at the institutional level.

Respondents considered the level of student readiness for college work, student study skills, financial resources, student commitment to earning a degree, and student motivation to succeed as the primary factors contributing to student attrition. On the other end of the spectrum, respondents rated the largest on-campus contributors to student retention as campus reading centers/labs, tutoring centers/labs, tutoring services, assessment-based course placement, required developmental/remedial coursework, and offering an increased number of academic advisors. Colleges in the highest and lowest quartiles for student retention differed in their likelihood of offering on-campus retention-related services. Among highly-rated retention-promoting services, colleges in the highest quartile for retention rates were at least 10% more likely to offer certain specific services including reading centers/labs, comprehensive assistance centers/labs, an increased number of academic advisors, advising integrated into first-year transition programs, and required developmental coursework.


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The Community College of Denver (CCD), one of two two-year institutions selected, distinguishes itself in several areas. Assessment and advising begin for some students at local high schools, and all entering students without ACT/SAT scores or a previous college degree are required to take the Accuplacer placement test. A combination of federal and private funds supports three levels of advising for low-income, first-generation, and minority students. Student services are provided case-management style,
and are recorded in a central database. CCD offers learning communities for its first-generation students and uses grant monies to fund professional development, ensuring the quality of instruction for its first-year students. LaGuardia Community College, in Queens, New York is characterized by its innovative and interdisciplinary environment. Universal first-year practices, such as convocation, common readings, and a required new student seminar connect students to academic advisors and to the institution as a whole. Preparatory and “second-chance” programs between academic sessions allow students to strengthen skills and re-take placement tests and course exams. Learning communities foster success among developmental and ESL students; internal studies show that students are more likely to pass LaGuardia developmental and ESL courses in clusters than when taking them a course at a time. As at CCD, faculty involvement is paramount: instructors mentor students, promote the spread of new technology, and collaborate to realize new courses.


This report explores promising practices in promoting transitions from Adult Basic Education (ABE) to credit-level work. Although numerous studies point to the correlation between higher educational attainment and increased income, the majority of ABE students fail to pursue post-secondary studies, and those who do struggle to achieve and persist. Four areas of ABE practice that contribute to successful post-secondary transitions are described: organizational and administrative, program components, staff development, and instruction. Supportive organizational leadership is key, particularly in implementing short refresher courses and transition programs, identifying funding, and creating articulation agreements.

Integrating ABE course information on future earnings prospects and specific steps in the post-secondary education pathway can help adult students successfully transition. Information about the post-secondary environment can also be transmitted via orientations; mentoring and tutoring opportunities and personalized, case management-style advising. Aligned assessment is also key to facilitating the transition to post-secondary study. All too often ABE programs and community colleges rely on different assessments to measure student learning and determine course placements. A well-trained, dedicated ABE staff is key—the authors recommend employing full-time instructors for ABE and developing and compensating these educators on par with their community college counterparts in academic departments. Whenever possible, ABE curriculum should be aligned with post-secondary academics and skills. Recommendations include integrating life and study skills, career planning, and community college-level academic content into ABE courses. Course length can be modified, as in modular courses, and accelerated learning is highlighted as a “promising strategy” (p. 42) for students in ESL, GED, and vocational tracks.

Student support services are vital to the success of community colleges in serving and graduating students, and must be ready to adjust and assume new roles in their work with at-risk students. This means that community college personnel must innovate and reach beyond institutional borders, collaborating with high schools to successfully bridge students to the college, and connecting with business and community groups that can provide mentoring and scholarship opportunities. Assessment can pinpoint students most in need of intervention, and should be consistently implemented institution-wide. Placement should not be based solely on test scores – it must be validated by instructors and moderated by the background and experiences of students themselves. The purposeful use of technology, advising, and counseling allow student support services to influence and monitor registration, course attendance, and enrollment in subsequent semesters. The author discusses alternative models of orientation, such as first-semester experiences, the integration of orientation material into course syllabi, and the inclusion of family in orientation. Student support services’ traditional counseling role can and should be revised to include teaching, collaboration with faculty, career orientation, and greater accountability for student results.


Prince and Jenkins use 1996-1998 data from the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges to explore academic pathways and five-year employment outcomes for adults in the state’s two-year colleges. Their cohort of 34,956 adult entering students represented approximately one-third of entering students at the state level during the two years of this study. The majority of the cohort students were female, and approximately half were white and a quarter Latino; about two-thirds were working or seeking employment at the time of the study. The vast majority enrolled in occupational rather than academic programs.

Many of the study’s results confirmed previous findings from the literature: students with higher educational achievement at the five-year mark earned higher wages; wage gains for students who completed less than a year of coursework were negligible. In academic terms, students who indicated at the outset that they planned to attend college for at least a year were more likely to persist than those who were uncertain about how long their studies would take. Based on the economic benefits associated with completing one year of college-level courses, the authors recommend colleges strive toward helping low-skill adult students reach this milestone. Colleges should also help students bridge the gap between ABE/ESL and credit-bearing courses with information about financial aid and about the educational pathways most likely to result in economic and career gains.
2. (Year 2012) At this college, I am participating in a structured experience for new students (sometimes called a “freshman seminar” or “first-year experience”).

   a. Yes
   b. No


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In this monograph for the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), Brownell and Swaner review research on the five high-impact educational practices set forth by Kuh in 2008: first-year seminars, learning communities, service learning, undergraduate research, and capstone courses and projects. In order for practices to achieve positive student outcomes, goal-driven program design and good implementation are often more important than any specific practice; several of the studies cited by Brownell and Swaner (2010) find that purposeful content and quality instruction are what truly lead to positive outcomes.
The authors cite Barefoot’s (1992) typology of first-year seminars, noting that first-year seminars generally focus on orientation, academics, a specific discipline, or basic study skills. A number of studies link first-year seminars to positive outcomes in persistence and graduation rates, although there are gaps in the literature, particularly regarding outcomes for specific student sub-populations. Learning communities have also shown positive outcomes in the literature in terms of grades and student persistence, although there are questions about the sustainability of these results in the long term. The literature on learning communities currently includes a mix of research on different types of learning communities and different student target populations; more study needs to take place to clarify the emerging positive outcomes. Service learning is also linked to positive student outcomes in academic achievement, civic engagement, and personal growth, although the authors note that more research is needed on service learning and underserved student populations. Undergraduate research, though potentially linked to graduation rates and graduate school enrollment, is also an area for further research. The available literature on capstone courses and projects relies on student self-reports, and greater delineation of these experiences’ desired outcomes is needed. The authors close with several recommendations for strengthening the body of research on high-impact practices, among them the need to look beyond grades and persistence for other possible positive outcomes.


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This comprehensive text reviews literature on theories of student development and the ways in which college affects students’ lives. Areas of impact include intellectual, social, and emotional growth; sociopolitical change; socioeconomic and career change; and overall effects on quality of life. Topics reviewed include: computer-based instruction, which has a positive impact on student learning when compared to traditional teaching methods; active learning, which is associated with greater gains in knowledge than traditional learning methods; cooperative learning, which is more effective than competitive learning methods; supplemental instruction, which has a positive impact on student
learning and persistence. Although backed by less research than other topics, learning communities are associated with higher levels of student satisfaction and engagement with the college as well as with greater student persistence. Tentative findings also suggest greater learning outcomes for student participants in peer tutoring. Developmental education facilitates students’ adjustment to college and promotes short- and long-term persistence, particularly when begun in the first semester. Although further study on first-year seminars is needed, in the literature they are associated with increased student persistence.


This comprehensive volume on learning communities presents historical context, models and institutional examples, and information about implementing learning communities at the post-secondary level. Learning communities are presented as a student-friendly, cost-effective means of fostering liberal education and community.

There are multiple iterations of the learning community model, which involves two or more linked courses enrolling a common cohort of students. Two stand-alone courses can be linked without altering their content; freshman seminars lend themselves to this type of pairing, thus providing an ongoing orientation experience for students in the linked courses. Courses can also be linked or clustered to highlight interdisciplinary connections or to allow students to work on basic skills in one course while taking a second content-driven course. In these instances, faculty generally modify courses to utilize examples and activities relevant to the course with which theirs is paired. Team-taught learning communities involve greater levels of faculty collaboration and course modification: all courses share a common syllabus and projects and themes are comprehensive. Team-taught learning communities can include seminars, experiential learning, and service projects.

In addition to providing examples of learning community configurations and structures, the authors present possibilities for further developing learning communities in the areas of adult basic education and ESL. They also provide advice on creating and improving learning communities, emphasizing the importance of assessment, continuous improvement, and working towards scale.
3. (Years 2011 and 2012) At this college, I am participating in one or more accelerated courses/fast-track programs to help me move through developmental/basic skills/college prep requirements more quickly.
   a. Yes
   b. No


This chapter reviews the literature on developmental education in community colleges and finds that much work remains, particularly with regard to placement, student support, and understanding students who place into the lowest developmental levels. Bailey cites 2008 Achieving the Dream data and a study by Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey (2006) suggesting that more than half of community college students participate in developmental education, and notes that lack of standardization in placement tests and standards makes it plausible that the percentage of students in need of developmental education is actually higher.

Bailey highlights multiple gaps in the research on developmental education. The effect of developmental education on students is difficult to measure among differences in placement, programming, and students themselves. Statewide studies of developmental education are inconclusive as to developmental education’s effect on students. The most reliable results relate to students at the developmental/non-developmental margin; few look at the effects of developmental education on students placing into its lowest levels. While developmental education can be improved by integrating mandatory assessment, counseling, and specialized programs such as learning communities, there is little direct evidence of the effectiveness of such programs, leading Bailey to note that it may be just as beneficial to allow developmental students to simply enroll in credit level courses.

While Accuplacer and Compass are the tests most commonly used to place students in developmental education, assessment and placement policies vary at the state and institutional levels. There is little correlation between placement test scores and later educational outcomes, and Bailey suggests that the scope of placement testing should be widened from a narrow focus on mastery of skills within a sequence to a broader view of whether students possess the abilities needed to succeed in college. Bailey recommends moving past a developmental/non-developmental dichotomy toward a model of supports for all students. His final recommendation also relies on a somewhat untested approach, that of accelerating developmental education for students with the largest skill deficiencies.


At least half of community college students will enroll in a developmental course, yet as the authors’ work with 2003-2007 Achieving the Dream data reveals, the pathways through developmental education are complex and include multiple stopping-out points. Records from 57 colleges in seven states show that only 33% of students referred to developmental math and 46% of those referred to
developmental reading complete their developmental sequence. This is, in part, because almost one in three students referred to developmental education never enroll in a developmental course, opting instead for the first credit-level, or gatekeeper, course in their area of remediation. Seventy-two percent of these students will pass the gatekeeper course, compared to only 27% of those who enroll in a developmental course prior to attempting the gatekeeper.

The authors find a veritable “developmental ‘obstacle course’” facing students (p. 267), many who stop out of their developmental sequences do so without having ever failed or withdrawn from a developmental class; others complete their developmental sequences but simply fail to enroll in the next-level gatekeeper course. Although no data on accelerated or fast-track developmental education are presented, the authors suggest accelerated remediation as one possible solution to the lengthy and incomplete pathways revealed by this study.


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Recent trends in developmental education include a move towards accelerated models in which courses are redesigned to facilitate earlier student entry into college-level courses. Edgecombe reviews studies on different developmental education models. The recent shift toward accelerated developmental education and the local, small-scale nature of implementation means that many of the results of the studies reviewed suffer from small sample sizes, questions about the reliability and validity of results, and uncertainty over the long-term retention of materials learned under the accelerated model.

Course formats reviewed include: compressed models, in which two sequential courses are taken in one semester rather than two; paired courses, in which the same cohort of students enrolls simultaneously in two related courses, one developmental and one credit-bearing; and curricular redesign, in which course content is revised and reorganized to eliminate redundancies and maximize the use of classroom time. Other methods for moving developmental students more quickly toward mastery and credit accumulation include mainstreaming students into credit-level courses while offering supplemental supports such as labs and extra class meetings. Contextualization is another option, and incorporates basic skills instruction into vocational courses on an as-needed basis. Many of these models are prefaced on the idea that traditional developmental education covers too much, and that, for the sake of expediency, developmental students should be taught only those skills needed to allow them to succeed in the courses required for their degree program.

This comprehensive review also covers the areas of assessment and placement, student recruitment, faculty resistance, and financial stability, among others. The piece concludes with a call for further research to build upon the “promising, though not plentiful” evidence currently available on accelerated developmental education (p. 35).


This report outlines the framework for the Jobs for the Future/Achieving the Dream Developmental Education Initiative. The initiative unites community colleges and policy makers in Connecticut, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia with the shared purpose of improving developmental education outcomes in their states and institutions. Actors have committed to engage improvement efforts with attention to data and performance measurement, developmental education innovation and redesign, aligned pre-k –16 expectations, assessment and placement, and finance.


Developmental programs are necessary in post-secondary education, yet the institution of developmental education has long been criticized for its lack of standardization, positive student outcomes, and critical self-assessment. Regardless of arguments about where and when remediation
should take place, the bulk of developmental education takes place in community colleges, and at least half of the students entering two-year colleges do so with deficiencies in basic skills. Standardized tests are typically used to place students into developmental education, and according to 1996 NCES figures, 75% of community colleges say that remedial courses are required for students who test into them. However, placement requirements are often not firm enough, and the authors recommend making both assessment and placement truly mandatory. Other recommendations include increasing structure and support within developmental programs. Orientation should be required, and mentoring, tutoring, and activities fostering personal connections between students and the college need to be integrated into institutions’ developmental programs. Connections between students and the college should ideally be established before the post-secondary years, with institutions reaching out to high schools and junior high schools when possible. Outcomes for developmental students can also be improved by monitoring enrollment to ensure that students are entering classes in which they can be successful. Late registration should be abolished, the number of hours working students can take each semester should be limited, and students should be prevented from simultaneously enrolling in developmental and college-level courses in the same skill area. The authors encourage implementing innovative supports like learning communities, supplemental instruction, and short-term preparatory courses, while underscoring the importance of investing in quality faculty and evaluating program outcomes.


At the time of writing, at least 250 colleges and universities in the United States offered accelerated learning courses, the majority of them geared towards working adults. As a departure from the traditional paradigm for college courses, accelerated learning is the subject of a number of questions and doubts: does it signify a “commodification of learning” (p. 7)? Are quality and quantity of materials sacrificed in order to save time? What are the effects of accelerated courses on student retention of learning? A review of the literature suggests that time is one of many factors needed for learning to take place. The author cites several studies suggesting equal or even greater learning outcomes for students in accelerated courses; however, it is important to note that most of these studies do not employ like comparisons: adult students in accelerated courses are compared to traditional students in semester-long versions of the same course. It is also important to note that most of the courses cited in this article come from college- and university-level undergraduate business management programs.


This volume on best practices in the community college highlights examples from finalists for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. The prize honors exemplary efforts to promote degree completion and transfer; ensure equitable student outcomes, use assessment to improve learning, and work with the labor market prospects of students in mind.

Well-defined college and career pathways, careful progress monitoring, and committed instructors are all key to success. Developmental education is important to this equation as well, but in light of its poor track record, developmental education is being re-thought, with models such as accelerated, emporium, and modular courses currently implemented at prize-winning institutions. Levels of success, however,
vary. Students in emporium developmental courses earn higher test scores than their counterparts in normal accelerated courses, but in some cases both models produce similar course retention rates. Students in the CUNY system’s accelerated developmental pilot reach greater proficiency than their peers in regular developmental education courses; however, instructors in the program receive special training which may be critical to the accelerated program’s higher success rates. New developmental models necessitate new questions, such as how well current placement tests align to new courses, and how institutions can properly train and staff developmental programs in the face of late enrollment by large portions of developmental students. Some colleges have successfully paired remedial and credit-level courses and offer refresher courses prior to placement testing, particularly for adult learners returning to the classroom. The k-12 educational system can be a model for the community college with its emphasis on self-assessment, continuous improvement of teaching, student-centered methodologies, and teacher accountability for student results. College leadership is important in encouraging an institutional culture of self-study and accountability and in connecting programs to local labor market needs.
At this college, my instructors clearly explained a class attendance policy that specified how many classes I could miss without penalty.

a. ALL of my instructors explained a class attendance policy
b. MOST of my instructors explained a class attendance policy
c. SOME of my instructors explained a class attendance policy
d. NONE of my instructors explained a class attendance policy


Proposing a positive relationship between class attendance and academic performance makes sense: students who attend class engage with course material regularly and often, and do so through different modalities than peers who cram before exams and rely solely on books or online content. To see whether this logic is backed by research, Crede, Roch, and Kieszczynka perform a meta-analysis of articles mentioning a correlation between class attendance and class grades or GPA. The studies included in this analysis took place between 1927 and 2009 and include data from 28,034 post-secondary students. After considering several possible relationships among attendance, student characteristics, and grades, the authors find that both student characteristics and attendance are important contributing factors to course outcomes.


The author studied the relationships among prior academic record, college course attendance, course grade, and college grade point average using data from 263 University of Minnesota General College students. All students were enrolled in a spring semester introductory biology course at the General College, which prepares students who have not met all of the University of Minnesota’s admissions requirements for eventual transfer to the four-year university. Among the majority of participants, prior academic record and attendance were only weakly correlated; only those students with the highest academic precedents tended to attend class more regularly. However, regardless of academic precedents, low class attendance was strongly correlated with low GPAs in the first semester and poor grades in the biology course in question, suggesting the importance of class attendance in academic performance.


This study of class attendance among undergraduates in the University of Florida’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences shares the results of a survey of student attendance patterns and reasons students do not attend class. Over 90% of students agreed that the primary reason they miss class is because the instructor does not take attendance. The following two reasons were personal, and related to emergencies (the second most common reason) or illness (third most common reason). Other factors related to instructional quality also appeared among the top ten reasons students miss class, including instructors who do not know the course content (number six); the availability of course material...
elsewhere, particularly online (number nine); and poor lecture quality (number ten). These findings led the authors to recommend that instructors take several steps to improve attendance in their courses, including recording attendance for every class period, knowing presenting course materials clearly, and planning quality course sessions.
5. (Year 2012) I became aware that I was required to take a placement test (ACCUPLACER, ASSET, COMPASS, etc.) at this college:
   a. More than a month before taking the test
   b. About 1 to 4 weeks before taking the test
   c. About 1 to 6 days before taking the test
   d. The same day I took the test
   e. Not applicable; I did not take a placement test


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Well-defined college and career pathways, careful progress monitoring, and committed instructors are all key to success. Developmental education is important to this equation as well, but in light of its poor track record, developmental education is being re-thought, with models such as accelerated, emporium, and modular courses currently implemented at prize-winning institutions. Levels of success, however, vary. Students in emporium developmental courses earn higher test scores than their counterparts in normal accelerated courses, but in some cases both models produce similar course retention rates. Students in the CUNY system’s accelerated developmental pilot reach greater proficiency than their peers in regular developmental education courses; however, instructors in the program receive special training which may be critical to the accelerated program’s higher success rates. New developmental models necessitate new questions, such as how well current placement tests align to new courses, and how institutions can properly train and staff developmental programs in the face of late enrollment by large portions of developmental students. Some colleges have successfully paired remedial and credit-level courses and offer refresher courses prior to placement testing, particularly for adult learners returning to the classroom. The k-12 educational system can be a model for the community college with its emphasis on self-assessment, continuous improvement of teaching, student-centered methodologies, and teacher accountability for student results. College leadership is important in encouraging an institutional culture of self-study and accountability and in connecting programs to local labor market needs.
6. (Years 2011 and 2012) While I was in high school, besides taking the SAT or ACT, I completed this college’s placement test (ACCUPLACER, ASSET, COMPASS, etc.) to assess my academic skills in reading, writing, and/or math.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. I don’t remember


This chapter reviews the literature on developmental education in community colleges and finds that much work remains, particularly with regard to placement, student support, and understanding students who place into the lowest developmental levels. Bailey cites 2008 Achieving the Dream data and a study by Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey (2006) suggesting that more than half of community college students participate in developmental education, and notes that lack of standardization in placement tests and standards makes it plausible that the percentage of students in need of developmental education is actually higher.

Bailey highlights multiple gaps in the research on developmental education. The effect of developmental education on students is difficult to measure among differences in placement, programming, and students themselves. Statewide studies of developmental education are inconclusive as to developmental education’s effect on students. The most reliable results relate to students at the developmental/non-developmental margin; few look at the effects of developmental education on students placing into its lowest levels. While developmental education can be improved by integrating mandatory assessment, counseling, and specialized programs such as learning communities, there is little direct evidence of the effectiveness of such programs, leading Bailey to note that it may be just as beneficial to allow developmental students to simply enroll in credit level courses.

While Accuplacer and Compass are the tests most commonly used to place students in developmental education, assessment and placement policies vary at the state and institutional levels. There is little correlation between placement test scores and later educational outcomes, and Bailey suggests that the scope of placement testing should be widened from a narrow focus on mastery of skills within a sequence to a broader view of whether students possess the abilities needed to succeed in college. Bailey recommends moving past a developmental/non-developmental dichotomy toward a model of supports for all students. His final recommendation also relies on a somewhat untested approach, that of accelerating developmental education for students with the largest skill deficiencies.

This volume presents thirteen institutions identified in 2002 as “institutions of excellence” in recognition of their work with first-year students. Selected institutions offer holistic, multi-faceted first-year programming; use data to inform decision making; and extend services to a large portion of their entering students—particularly those from underserved populations. Strong administrative leadership and inter-departmental faculty and staff involvement in first-year efforts are other cornerstones of the work highlighted here.

The Community College of Denver (CCD), one of two two-year institutions selected, distinguishes itself in several areas. Assessment and advising begin for some students at local high schools, and all entering students without ACT/SAT scores or a previous college degree are required to take the Accuplacer placement test. A combination of federal and private funds supports three levels of advising for low-income, first-generation, and minority students. Student services are provided case-management style, and are recorded in a central database. CCD offers learning communities for its first-generation students and uses grant monies to fund professional development, ensuring the quality of instruction for its first-year students. LaGuardia Community College, in Queens, New York is characterized by its innovative and interdisciplinary environment. Universal first-year practices, such as convocation, common readings, and a required new student seminar connect students to academic advisors and to the institution as a whole. Preparatory and “second-chance” programs between academic sessions allow students to strengthen skills and re-take placement tests and course exams. Learning communities foster success among developmental and ESL students; internal studies show that students are more likely to pass LaGuardia developmental and ESL courses in clusters than when taking them a course at a time. As at CCD, faculty involvement is paramount: instructors mentor students, promote the spread of new technology, and collaborate to realize new courses.


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Well-defined college and career pathways, careful progress monitoring, and committed instructors are all key to success. Developmental education is important to this equation as well, but in light of its poor track record, developmental education is being re-thought, with models such as accelerated, emporium, and modular courses currently implemented at prize-winning institutions. Levels of success, however, vary. Students in emporium developmental courses earn higher test scores than their counterparts in normal accelerated courses, but in some cases both models produce similar course retention rates. Students in the CUNY system’s accelerated developmental pilot reach greater proficiency than their peers in regular developmental education courses; however, instructors in the program receive special training which may be critical to the accelerated program’s higher success rates. New developmental models necessitate new questions, such as how well current placement tests align to new courses, and how institutions can properly train and staff developmental programs in the face of late enrollment by large portions of developmental students. Some colleges have successfully paired remedial and credit-level courses and offer refresher courses prior to placement testing, particularly for adult learners returning to the classroom. The k-12 educational system can be a model for the community college with its emphasis on self-assessment, continuous improvement of teaching, student-centered methodologies, and teacher accountability for student results. College leadership is important in encouraging an institutional culture of self-study and accountability and in connecting programs to local labor market needs.
7. (Year 2011) Before enrolling at this college, I used online or printed materials provided by the college to help me prepare ON MY OWN for this college’s placement test(s) (ACCUPLACER, ASSET, COMPASS, etc.).
   a. Yes, AND I found them to be very helpful
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This report explores promising practices in promoting transitions from Adult Basic Education (ABE) to credit-level work. Although numerous studies point to the correlation between higher educational attainment and increased income, the majority of ABE students fail to pursue post-secondary studies, and those who do struggle to achieve and persist. Four areas of ABE practice that contribute to successful post-secondary transitions are described: organizational and administrative, program components, staff development, and instruction. Supportive organizational leadership is key, particularly in implementing short refresher courses and transition programs, identifying funding, and creating articulation agreements.

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The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) supports the implementation of summer bridge programs at community colleges across the state to boost the college readiness of developmental education students. TCHEB funded a summer bridge program at 22 community colleges in the state beginning in 2007. The program’s four components include: accelerated instruction, information about college, academic support, and student stipends.

This evaluation, conducted by the National Center for Postsecondary Research, shares 2009-2010 findings on the TCHEB summer bridge model with data from 1,318 students who entered college in the fall of 2009; a second report will include data from the 2010-2011 academic year. At each of the eight community colleges participating in this study, developmental students were randomly assigned to either a program group, which participated in a THECB-based bridge program in the summer of 2009, or a control group, whose members received their colleges’ normal developmental education services. Although participants from the program and control groups were equally likely to enroll in fall and spring courses during the 2009-2010 academic year, summer bridge program students were more likely to enroll in college-level courses during the academic year, and more likely to pass college-level math and writing courses during the fall 2009 semester.


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7. (Year 2012) Before enrolling at this college, I prepared for this college’s placement test (ACCUPLACER, ASSET, COMPASS, etc.) in the following way:

a. On my own using online or printed materials provided by the college
b. Participating in a brief (8 hours or less), intensive brush-up/refresher workshop
c. Participating in a multi-day or multi-week brush-up/refresher program (often held during the summer before fall enrollment)
d. I did not do anything to prepare for this college’s placement test
e. Not applicable; I did not take a placement test


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8. (Year 2012) If I used resources from this college or one of the college’s brush-up/refresher experiences I found it:
   a. Very helpful
   b. Helpful
   c. Somewhat helpful
   d. Not helpful
   e. Not applicable; I did not use this college’s test prep resources


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work with high school and post-secondary officials in all fifty states, APASS compiled a list of academic pathways and assessed their availability and use with underserved students across the country.

The Advanced Placement (AP) program is currently implemented in all fifty states; students in the program can receive post-secondary credit by passing standardized exams in a number of subject areas. Bridge programs provide students extra academic preparation to facilitate their transition to college-level coursework, but implementation tends to be local or tied to a specific post-secondary institution rather than statewide. College-level examination programs are available at many community colleges and allow students to test out of courses by demonstrating mastery of subject matter typically taught in the first two years of college. Dual credit, dual enrollment, and concurrent enrollment offer college credits for courses taken while in high school. Although such programs are present in all fifty states, they may not be available at high schools serving low-income and minority students. Distance learning programs are also widespread, and deliver instruction to remote students, usually via the internet, and can be blended with other pathway models, such as dual enrollment, dual credit, GED, and bridge programs. Early and middle college high schools are often located on community college campuses and offer a rigorous curriculum and college-level materials, allowing students to work towards both a high school diploma and an associate’s degree simultaneously. Many GED, Adult Basic Education, and ESL programs are offered as bridge to college programs and are key pathways to the community college for underserved student populations. The International Baccalaureate (IB) program prepares high school juniors and seniors for college-level work, and while widespread, is not often used as a pathway for underserved students at the state level. Tech Prep is a federally funded program integrating academic and vocational studies, generally through two years of high school and two years of post-secondary education.


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encouraging an institutional culture of self-study and accountability and in connecting programs to local
labor market needs.
9. (Year 2011) Before enrolling at this college, I participated in a multi-day or multi-week brush-up/refresher program (often held during the summer before fall enrollment) designed to help me prepare for this college's placement test(s) (ACCUPLACER, ASSET, COMPASS, etc.).
   a. Yes, AND I found it to be very helpful
   b. Yes, AND I found it to be somewhat helpful
   c. Yes, AND I found it to be not helpful
   d. No
   e. Not applicable; I did not take a placement test


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9. (Year 2012) I was TOLD that I was REQUIRED to take a developmental/basic skills/college prep course in my first semester/quarter, and I...
   a. DID enroll in MORE THAN ONE of these courses
   b. DID enroll in ONE of these courses
   c. DID NOT enroll in any of these courses
   d. Not Applicable


This comprehensive study of remedial coursework and post-secondary outcomes uses National Educational Longitudinal Study 1998 (NELS:88) data and high school and college transcript data to analyze patterns of credit accumulation and graduation. Data provided information on students’ high school preparation and performance, SES and demographics, and college outcomes during the eight and a half years following their high school graduation. The authors test hypotheses regarding remediation and academic outcomes using three types of statistical models, making their results more robust than others in the literature.

Just over half of two-year participants in the study took remedial coursework during college, with the vast majority taking between one and three remedial courses. While one in two low-income students took developmental courses, one in four students from the highest income quartile also enrolled in developmental education. Analysis of high school urbanicity and rigor of high school preparation also showed diversity in the backgrounds of developmental students. Comparing students of similar backgrounds, the authors find that students who enroll in two-year colleges are more likely to take remedial courses than their peers at four-year institutions, and black students are significantly more likely than similar whites of similar backgrounds to enroll in developmental education. Some students, regardless of developmental status, do appear less likely to graduate college: low-income students, students with poor high school preparation, and black students do have lower graduation rates than others in the study. In fact, when developmental and non-developmental students with similar background characteristics are compared, developmental students are more likely to accumulate credits and to graduate. Likewise, developmental students are no more likely to stop out of college than their peers.


At least half of community college students will enroll in a developmental course, yet as the authors’ work with 2003-2007 Achieving the Dream data reveals, the pathways through developmental education are complex and include multiple stopping-out points. Records from 57 colleges in seven states show that only 33% of students referred to developmental math and 46% of those referred to developmental reading complete their developmental sequence. This is, in part, because almost one in three students referred to developmental education never enroll in a developmental course, opting instead for the first credit-level, or gatekeeper, course in their area of remediation. Seventy-two
percent of these students will pass the gatekeeper course, compared to only 27% of those who enroll in a developmental course prior to attempting the gatekeeper.

The authors find a veritable “developmental ‘obstacle course’” facing students (p. 267), many who stop out of their developmental sequences do so without having ever failed or withdrawn from a developmental class; others complete their developmental sequences but simply fail to enroll in the next-level gatekeeper course. Although no data on accelerated or fast-track developmental education are presented, the authors suggest accelerated remediation as one possible solution to the lengthy and incomplete pathways revealed by this study.


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Prince and Jenkins use 1996-1998 data from the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges to explore academic pathways and five-year employment outcomes for adults in the state’s two-year colleges. Their cohort of 34,956 adult entering students represented approximately one-third of entering students at the state level during the two years of this study. The majority of the cohort students were female, and approximately half were white and a quarter Latino; about two-thirds were working or seeking employment at the time of the study. The vast majority enrolled in occupational rather than academic programs.

Many of the study’s results confirmed previous findings from the literature: students with higher educational achievement at the five-year mark earned higher wages; wage gains for students who completed less than a year of coursework were negligible. In academic terms, students who indicated at the outset that they planned to attend college for at least a year were more likely to persist than those who were uncertain about how long their studies would take. Based on the economic benefits associated with completing one year of college-level courses, the authors recommend colleges strive toward helping low-skill adult students reach this milestone. Colleges should also help students bridge the gap between ABE/ESL and credit-bearing courses with information about financial aid and about the educational pathways most likely to result in economic and career gains.
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The authors examine performance and persistence among three groups of students at the College of Lake County: skill-deficient students who complete remediation during the fall 1992 to fall 1994 terms, skill-deficient students who fail to complete remediation during this period, and students who showed no deficiencies at start of the study. Performance, measured in terms of credits attempted, credits earned, and grade point average, is similar for non-deficient and remediated students over the course of the study, although the grade point average of remediated students is slightly lower than that of non-deficient students. Non-remediated students, in contrast, show lower levels of all three performance measures. Persistence is highest among remediated students, followed closely by non-deficient students, with non-remediated students again trailing behind. Although the authors recommend requiring that students begin developmental courses during their first semester in college because of the association between beginning remediation early and completing the developmental sequence, they note that the term in which students remediate actually has no effect on persistence.

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10. (Year 2011) Because my placement test results indicated that I needed to take at least one developmental/basic skills/college prep course, I was...
   a. TOLD that I was REQUIRED to take MORE THAN one of these courses in my first semester/quarter
   b. TOLD that I was REQUIRED to take ONE of these courses in my first semester/quarter
   c. TOLD that I should or could take one of these courses, but I was NOT required to in my first semester/quarter
   d. Not applicable; my placement test results did not indicate that I needed to take any of these courses
   e. Not applicable; I did not take a placement test


This comprehensive study of remedial coursework and post-secondary outcomes uses National Educational Longitudinal Study 1998 (NELS:88) data and high school and college transcript data to analyze patterns of credit accumulation and graduation. Data provided information on students’ high school preparation and performance, SES and demographics, and college outcomes during the eight and a half years following their high school graduation. The authors test hypotheses regarding remediation and academic outcomes using three types of statistical models, making their results more robust than others in the literature.

Just over half of two-year participants in the study took remedial coursework during college, with the vast majority taking between one and three remedial courses. While one in two low-income students took developmental courses, one in four students from the highest income quartile also enrolled in developmental education. Analysis of high school urbanicity and rigor of high school preparation also showed diversity in the backgrounds of developmental students. Comparing students of similar backgrounds, the authors find that students who enroll in two-year colleges are more likely to take remedial courses than their peers at four-year institutions, and black students are significantly more likely than similar whites of similar backgrounds to enroll in developmental education. Some students, regardless of developmental status, do appear less likely to graduate college: low-income students, students with poor high school preparation, and black students do have lower graduation rates than others in the study. In fact, when developmental and non-developmental students with similar background characteristics are compared, developmental students are more likely to accumulate credits and to graduate. Likewise, developmental students are no more likely to stop out of college than their peers.


At least half of community college students will enroll in a developmental course, yet as the authors’ work with 2003-2007 Achieving the Dream data reveals, the pathways through developmental education are complex and include multiple stopping-out points. Records from 57 colleges in seven
states show that only 33% of students referred to developmental math and 46% of those referred to developmental reading complete their developmental sequence. This is, in part, because almost one in three students referred to developmental education never enroll in a developmental course, opting instead for the first credit-level, or gatekeeper, course in their area of remediation. Seventy-two percent of these students will pass the gatekeeper course, compared to only 27% of those who enroll in a developmental course prior to attempting the gatekeeper.

The authors find a veritable “developmental ‘obstacle course’” facing students (p. 267), many who stop out of their developmental sequences do so without having ever failed or withdrawn from a developmental class; others complete their developmental sequences but simply fail to enroll in the next-level gatekeeper course. Although no data on accelerated or fast-track developmental education are presented, the authors suggest accelerated remediation as one possible solution to the lengthy and incomplete pathways revealed by this study.


This report outlines the framework for the Jobs for the Future/Achieving the Dream Developmental Education Initiative. The initiative unites community colleges and policy makers in Connecticut, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia with the shared purpose of improving developmental education outcomes in their states and institutions. Actors have committed to engage improvement efforts with attention to data and performance measurement, developmental education innovation and redesign, aligned pre-k –16 expectations, assessment and placement, and finance.


Prince and Jenkins use 1996-1998 data from the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges to explore academic pathways and five-year employment outcomes for adults in the state’s two-year colleges. Their cohort of 34,956 adult entering students represented approximately one-third of entering students at the state level during the two years of this study. The majority of the cohort students were female, and approximately half were white and a quarter Latino; about two-thirds were working or seeking employment at the time of the study. The vast majority enrolled in occupational rather than academic programs.

Many of the study’s results confirmed previous findings from the literature: students with higher educational achievement at the five-year mark earned higher wages; wage gains for students who completed less than a year of coursework were negligible. In academic terms, students who indicated at the outset that they planned to attend college for at least a year were more likely to persist than those who were uncertain about how long their studies would take. Based on the economic benefits associated with completing one year of college-level courses, the authors recommend colleges strive toward helping low-skill adult students reach this milestone. Colleges should also help students bridge
the gap between ABE/ESL and credit-bearing courses with information about financial aid and about the educational pathways most likely to result in economic and career gains.


Developmental programs are necessary in post-secondary education, yet the institution of developmental education has long been criticized for its lack of standardization, positive student outcomes, and critical self-assessment. Regardless of arguments about where and when remediation should take place, the bulk of developmental education takes place in community colleges, and at least half of the students entering two-year colleges do so with deficiencies in basic skills. Standardized tests are typically used to place students into developmental education, and according to 1996 NCES figures, 75% of community colleges say that remedial courses are required for students who test into them. However, placement requirements are often not firm enough, and the authors recommend making both assessment and placement truly mandatory. Other recommendations include increasing structure and support within developmental programs. Orientation should be required, and mentoring, tutoring, and activities fostering personal connections between students and the college need to be integrated into institutions’ developmental programs. Connections between students and the college should ideally be established before the post-secondary years, with institutions reaching out to high schools and junior high schools when possible. Outcomes for developmental students can also be improved by monitoring enrollment to ensure that students are entering classes in which they can be successful. Late registration should be abolished, the number of hours working students can take each semester should be limited, and students should be prevented from simultaneously enrolling in developmental and college-level courses in the same skill area. The authors encourage implementing innovative supports like learning communities, supplemental instruction, and short-term preparatory courses, while underscoring the importance of investing in quality faculty and evaluating program outcomes.


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10. (Year 2012) Based on my academic goals at this college, I believe it will take me about this long to reach them:
   a. Less than 1 year
   b. 1 to 2 years
   c. 3 to 4 years
   d. More than 4 years
   e. I don’t know


ACT’s 2010 What Works in Student Retention survey was completed by Chief Academic Affairs Officers at 305 institutions. This report highlights retention-related practices respondents rated as the largest contributors to student persistence on their campuses. Nearly sixty-percent of respondents have a campus staff member dedicated to retention efforts; in the majority of cases this person is the Chief Student Affairs Officer. Respondent colleges reported a mean first- to second-year retention rate of 56% and a degree completion rate of 27%. Over half of colleges had no set retention goal and no set degree completion goal at the institutional level.

Respondents considered the level of student readiness for college work, student study skills, financial resources, student commitment to earning a degree, and student motivation to succeed as the primary factors contributing to student attrition. On the other end of the spectrum, respondents rated the largest on-campus contributors to student retention as campus reading centers/labs, tutoring centers/labs, tutoring services, assessment-based course placement, required developmental/remedial coursework, and offering an increased number of academic advisors. Colleges in the highest and lowest quartiles for student retention differed in their likelihood of offering on-campus retention-related services. Among highly-rated retention-promoting services, colleges in the highest quartile for retention rates were at least 10% more likely to offer certain specific services including reading centers/labs, comprehensive assistance centers/labs, an increased number of academic advisors, advising integrated into first-year transition programs, and required developmental coursework.


This report explores promising practices in promoting transitions from Adult Basic Education (ABE) to credit-level work. Although numerous studies point to the correlation between higher educational attainment and increased income, the majority of ABE students fail to pursue post-secondary studies, and those who do struggle to achieve and persist. Four areas of ABE practice that contribute to successful post-secondary transitions are described: organizational and administrative, program components, staff development, and instruction. Supportive organizational leadership is key,
particularly in implementing short refresher courses and transition programs, identifying funding, and creating articulation agreements.

Integrating ABE course information on future earnings prospects and specific steps in the post-secondary education pathway can help adult students successfully transition. Information about the post-secondary environment can also be transmitted via orientations; mentoring and tutoring opportunities and personalized, case management-style advising. Aligned assessment is also key to facilitating the transition to post-secondary study. All too often ABE programs and community colleges rely on different assessments to measure student learning and determine course placements. A well-trained, dedicated ABE staff is key—the authors recommend employing full-time instructors for ABE and developing and compensating these educators on par with their community college counterparts in academic departments. Whenever possible, ABE curriculum should be aligned with post-secondary academics and skills. Recommendations include integrating life and study skills, career planning, and community college-level academic content into ABE courses. Course length can be modified, as in modular courses, and accelerated learning is highlighted as a “promising strategy” (p. 42) for students in ESL, GED, and vocational tracks.


Student support services are vital to the success of community colleges in serving and graduating students, and must be ready to adjust and assume new roles in their work with at-risk students. This means that community college personnel must innovate and reach beyond institutional borders, collaborating with high schools to successfully bridge students to the college, and connecting with business and community groups that can provide mentoring and scholarship opportunities. Assessment can pinpoint students most in need of intervention, and should be consistently implemented institution-wide. Placement should not be based solely on test scores—it must be validated by instructors and moderated by the background and experiences of students themselves. The purposeful use of technology, advising, and counseling allow student support services to influence and monitor registration, course attendance, and enrollment in subsequent semesters. The author discusses alternative models of orientation, such as first-semester experiences, the integration of orientation material into course syllabi, and the inclusion of family in orientation. Student support services’ traditional counseling role can and should be revised to include teaching, collaboration with faculty, career orientation, and greater accountability for student results.


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working or seeking employment at the time of the study. The vast majority enrolled in occupational rather than academic programs.

Many of the study’s results confirmed previous findings from the literature: students with higher educational achievement at the five-year mark earned higher wages; wage gains for students who completed less than a year of coursework were negligible. In academic terms, students who indicated at the outset that they planned to attend college for at least a year were more likely to persist than those who were uncertain about how long their studies would take. Based on the economic benefits associated with completing one year of college-level courses, the authors recommend colleges strive toward helping low-skill adult students reach this milestone. Colleges should also help students bridge the gap between ABE/ESL and credit-bearing courses with information about financial aid and about the educational pathways most likely to result in economic and career gains.


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11. (Year 2011) I was TOLD that I was REQUIRED to take a developmental/basic skills/college prep course in my first semester/quarter, and I...
   a. DID enroll in MORE THAN ONE of these courses
   b. DID enroll in ONE of these courses
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   d. Not Applicable


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11. (Year 2012) I feel that I am on track to reach my academic goals at this college within my expected time frame.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Not sure
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree


ACT’s 2010 What Works in Student Retention survey was completed by Chief Academic Affairs Officers at 305 institutions. This report highlights retention-related practices respondents rated as the largest contributors to student persistence on their campuses. Nearly sixty-percent of respondents have a campus staff member dedicated to retention efforts; in the majority of cases this person is the Chief Student Affairs Officer. Respondent colleges reported a mean first- to second-year retention rate of 56% and a degree completion rate of 27%. Over half of colleges had no set retention goal and no set degree completion goal at the institutional level.

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12. (Years 2011 and 2012) Someone at this college contacts me if I am struggling with my studies to help me get the assistance I need.

a. Yes  
b. No  
c. Not applicable; I have not experienced academic difficulties at this college


ACT’s 2010 What Works in Student Retention survey was completed by Chief Academic Affairs Officers at 305 institutions. This report highlights retention-related practices respondents rated as the largest contributors to student persistence on their campuses. Nearly sixty-percent of respondents have a campus staff member dedicated to retention efforts; in the majority of cases this person is the Chief Student Affairs Officer. Respondent colleges reported a mean first- to second-year retention rate of 56% and a degree completion rate of 27%. Over half of colleges had no set retention goal and no set degree completion goal at the institutional level.

Respondents considered the level of student readiness for college work, student study skills, financial resources, student commitment to earning a degree, and student motivation to succeed as the primary factors contributing to student attrition. On the other end of the spectrum, respondents rated the largest on-campus contributors to student retention as campus reading centers/labs, tutoring centers/labs, tutoring services, assessment-based course placement, required developmental/remedial coursework, and offering an increased number of academic advisors. Colleges in the highest and lowest quartiles for student retention differed in their likelihood of offering on-campus retention-related services. Among highly-rated retention-promoting services, colleges in the highest quartile for retention rates were at least 10% more likely to offer certain specific services including reading centers/labs, comprehensive assistance centers/labs, an increased number of academic advisors, advising integrated into first-year transition programs, and required developmental coursework.


This volume presents thirteen institutions identified in 2002 as “institutions of excellence” in recognition of their work with first-year students. Selected institutions offer holistic, multi-faceted first-year programming; use data to inform decision making; and extend services to a large portion of their entering students—particularly those from underserved populations. Strong administrative leadership and inter-departmental faculty and staff involvement in first-year efforts are other cornerstones of the work highlighted here.

The Community College of Denver (CCD), one of two two-year institutions selected, distinguishes itself in several areas. Assessment and advising begin for some students at local high schools, and all entering students without ACT/SAT scores or a previous college degree are required to take the Accuplacer placement test. A combination of federal and private funds supports three levels of advising for low-
income, first-generation, and minority students. Student services are provided case-management style, and are recorded in a central database. CCD offers learning communities for its first-generation students and uses grant monies to fund professional development, ensuring the quality of instruction for its first-year students. LaGuardia Community College, in Queens, New York is characterized by its innovative and interdisciplinary environment. Universal first-year practices, such as convocation, common readings, and a required new student seminar connect students to academic advisors and to the institution as a whole. Preparatory and “second-chance” programs between academic sessions allow students to strengthen skills and re-take placement tests and course exams. Learning communities foster success among developmental and ESL students; internal studies show that students are more likely to pass LaGuardia developmental and ESL courses in clusters than when taking them a course at a time. As at CCD, faculty involvement is paramount: instructors mentor students, promote the spread of new technology, and collaborate to realize new courses.


Student support services are vital to the success of community colleges in serving and graduating students, and must be ready to adjust and assume new roles in their work with at-risk students. This means that community college personnel must innovate and reach beyond institutional borders, collaborating with high schools to successfully bridge students to the college and business and connecting with community groups that can provide mentoring and scholarship opportunities. Assessment can pinpoint students most in need of intervention, and should be consistently implemented institution-wide. Placement should not be based solely on test scores: it must be validated by instructors and moderated by the background and experiences of students themselves. The purposeful use of technology, advising, and counseling allow student support services to influence and monitor registration, course attendance, and enrollment in subsequent semesters. The author discusses alternative models of orientation, such as first-semester experiences, the integration of orientation material into course syllabi, and the inclusion of family in orientation. Student support services’ traditional counseling role can and should be revised to include teaching, collaboration with faculty, career orientation, and greater accountability for student results.


Prince and Jenkins use 1996-1998 data from the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges to explore academic pathways and five-year employment outcomes for adults in the state’s two-year colleges. Their cohort of 34,956 adult entering students represented approximately one-third of entering students at the state level during the two years of this study. The majority of the cohort students were female, and approximately half were white and a quarter Latino; about two-thirds were working or seeking employment at the time of the study. The vast majority enrolled in occupational rather than academic programs.

Many of the study’s results confirmed previous findings from the literature: students with higher educational achievement at the five-year mark earned higher wages; wage gains for students who
completed less than a year of coursework were negligible. In academic terms, students who indicated at the outset that they planned to attend college for at least a year were more likely to persist than those who were uncertain about how long their studies would take. Based on the economic benefits associated with completing one year of college-level courses, the authors recommend colleges strive toward helping low-skill adult students reach this milestone. Colleges should also help students bridge the gap between ABE/ESL and credit-bearing courses with information about financial aid and about the educational pathways most likely to result in economic and career gains.