Design Principles for Effective Practice

There is emerging consensus that certain design principles are critical for student success. All of these principles maximize student engagement by making it both intentional and intensive.

No matter what program or practice a college implements, it is more likely to be successful if its designers consider the following questions:

- **Does the practice help ensure that entering students get a strong start?** Helping students succeed through the equivalent of the first semester can dramatically improve subsequent success rates.

- **Does the practice integrate student support with coursework?** Students are more likely to use supports, such as skill development and supplemental instruction, if they are integrated into course requirements rather than provided separately.

- **Does the practice set high expectations and provide strong support?** Students do their best work when colleges set high expectations and provide the support students need to meet them.

- **Does the practice encourage learning in context?** People learn best when information is presented in a context relevant to them. For students, this means learning that includes authentic assignments that are related to their lives, work, and chosen educational pathways.

- **Will the practice accelerate student progress toward completion?** The more time students spend in college, the less likely they are to graduate. Approaches designed for intensive academic skill-building, self-paced mastery, and seamless pathways rather than disjointed course sequences help students progress more quickly and effectively.

- **Is the practice integrated into clear, coherent pathways for students?** These pathways give students a step-by-step roadmap to goal achievement—whether associate degree, certificate, transfer, or employment—and ensure that critical engagement opportunities are part of every student's college experience.

- **Is the practice designed for scale?** Successful programs do more than serve students well; they serve *many* students well. Given the magnitude of the challenge of increasing educational attainment, colleges should invest intentionally in practices that can be brought to scale.

- **Does the practice include strategically focused professional development?** Widespread, lasting improvement requires everyone at a college to rethink their roles and build their skills in serving students. Professional development for everyone—staff, faculty, administrators, and governing board members—is essential for effectively implementing this level of change.

The design principles are based on the Center's 2012 report, A Matter of Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success (A First Look)*; an expanded description in "Designing New Academic Pathways," by Kay McClenney and Donna Dare* (Community College Journal*, June/July 2013, 21–26); and effective practices research conducted by the Community College Research Center with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, available at http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/ publications/introduction-assessment-of-evidence.html.*