

TRANSITIONS TO COLLEGE: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

In the fall of 2003 the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) established a project entitled "Transitions to College: From Theory to Practice." This project focuses on postsecondary transition and retention successes and failures associated with America's disadvantaged youth. Lumina Foundation for Education is providing support for this effort. The project's goals are:

1. To bring together and clarify what we know about the shift from high school to college from the various streams of social science research that have looked at transition;
2. To frame and structure an agenda about what we still need to research and learn about this crucial bridge to gainful adulthood;
3. To link that agenda to policy and practice.

In order to achieve these goals, the Council organized a Committee on Transitions to College that is comprised of fourteen distinguished scholars and practitioners from a variety of disciplines and methodological backgrounds. Additionally, a Practitioners Advisory Group of four individuals with federal, state and local policy expertise is contributing to the project.

Website

The Transitions to College website, <http://edtransitions.ssrc.org>, is a location for finding academic resources on college going, as well as bulletins about pertinent workshops, conferences, and symposiums occurring across the country. It provides links to university-based research centers, national higher education centers, state and regional higher education agencies. It also holds an extensive searchable database that includes reports, policy briefs, journal articles and other records and provides direct links to the texts. Additional references and sites can be suggested by users.

Field-Based Literature Reviews

The Transitions to College Project has commissioned a number of young scholars to conduct discipline-based literature reviews of the academic work that has been done in the past twenty years on transitions to college for disadvantaged youth. The essays and bibliographies produced by these literature reviews will be offered in future months on the project website: <http://edtransitions.ssrc.org>. At this stage the bibliographies contains over two thousand entries. The disciplines reviewed are: American History, Anthropology, Demography, Economics, Education Research (K-12), Education Research (13+), Human Development, Law, Political Science, and Sociology. In addition, the project has commissioned a report on research from non-academic research institutions, termed "Fifth Sector" research,¹ covering the past six years, as well as an overview essay that synthesizes the themes emphasized across the disciplinary and field-based reviews.

¹ The term "Fifth Sector" refers to research produced by institutions or organizations that are not academic, governmental, corporate or journalistic.

Agenda for Future Research

Based on the literature reviews and deliberations over twelve months, the Transition to College Project is constructing a research agenda that points out priorities for future research in terms of under researched groups and topics dealing with students, finance, educational institutions and policies. The agenda also highlights under-conceptualized terms, under-utilized methodologies and points out gaps in data collection.

Members of the Committee on Transitions to College:

Kevin Dougherty, Teachers College
Luis Fraga, Stanford University
Margaret Gibson, University of California, Santa Cruz
Patricia King, University of Michigan
Barbara Lee, Rutgers University
Jamie Merisotis, Institute for Higher Education Policy
David Mustard, University of Georgia
Michael Nettles, Educational Testing Service
Margaret Orr, Teachers College
Julie Reuben, Harvard University
Barbara Schneider, University of Chicago
Claude Steele, Stanford University
Vincent Tinto, Syracuse University
William Trent, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Practitioners Advisory Group Members:

Jacquelyn Belcher, Georgia Perimeter College
Gordon Davies, National Collaborative for Postsecondary Education Policy
Alfred Herrera, UCLA Center for Community College Partnerships
Alice Ilchman, Jeanette K. Watson Fellowship Program

List of Field-Based Literature Review Essays:

Overview

“Field Review Essays: Thematic Considerations”
Vivian Louis, Harvard

Anthropology/Ethnography

“Transitions to College: Anthropological and Ethnographic Studies”
Jill Peterson Koyama, Teachers College

Demography

“The Transition to College from a Demographic Perspective: Past Findings and Future Possibilities”
Vida Maralani, UCLA

Economics

“Economics Literature Review”
Bridget Terry Long, Harvard

Education Research K-12

“K-12 Experiences and College Transition: The View from Educational Research”

Anne-Marie Nunez, UCLA

Education Research Postsecondary

“Transition to College: The Higher Education Literature”

Deborah Carter, University of Michigan, Sara Rab, University of Wisconsin and

Rachelle Winkle, Indiana University

History

“Transitions to College: History Literature Review”

Scott Gelber, Harvard

Human Development

“Human Development and Transitions to College: Increasing Success for At-Risk Youth”

Anastasia Hansen, University of Minnesota

Law/Legal Studies

“Review of the College Transition Literature in Law”

Jesse Perez Mendez, Indiana University

Political Science

“Political Science Literature Review”

Hawley Fogg Davis, University of Wisconsin

Sociology

“A Review of the Transition to College Literature in Sociology”

Ruth Lopez Turley, University of Wisconsin and Regina Deil-Amen,

Pennsylvania State University

Non-academic Research

“A Review of Fifth-Sector Reports: 1998-2004”

Derek Price

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