



Accelerating  
Opportunity

JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

# PROMOTING PERSISTENCE THROUGH COMPREHENSIVE STUDENT SUPPORTS

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MARCH 2014



## **JOBS FOR THE FUTURE**

**Jobs for the Future** works with our partners to design and drive the adoption of education and career pathways leading from college readiness to career advancement for those struggling to succeed in today's economy.

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**Accelerating Opportunity** seeks to change the way Adult Basic Education is delivered by putting students on track to earn a postsecondary credential and providing them with the support needed to succeed. The initiative targets workers who are underprepared for today's demanding job market and builds on the legacy of JFF's innovative adult education initiative Breaking Through, as well as Washington State's I-BEST program. Accelerating Opportunity is supported by a strategic partnership of five of the nation's leading philanthropies.

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# INTRODUCTION

At Jobs for the Future, we work to expand access to college and careers for low-income and underprepared learners across the country. Many of our initiatives, including Accelerating Opportunity and Breaking Through, are focused on transforming community colleges in order to create better pathways to college credentials for nontraditional and underprepared learners. Our goal is to address the fact that many low-skilled adults and young adults in America lack the basic employability skills, literacy skills, and credentials required to compete for jobs that pay family-supporting wages. With an increasing number of employers requiring the minimum of an industry-recognized credential, certification, or postsecondary degree for good paying jobs, more nontraditional<sup>1</sup> students, including working adults, immigrants, dislocated workers, veterans, and those who struggled in or dropped out of high school, are turning to community colleges to gain the skills and education needed to qualify for those jobs. Obtaining these skills can take an exceptionally long time, especially when working full time and caring for dependents. Currently, the persistence and completion rates for underprepared adult learners—especially those starting in Adult Basic Education—are far too low:

- > In Adult Basic Education (ABE),<sup>2</sup> half of the adults who enroll in classes drop out before 35 hours or 10 weeks.<sup>3</sup>
- > In a longitudinal study of adult learners in Washington state, less than 3 percent of the adults who started in Adult Basic Education moved into credit courses and completed a community college Associate's degree.<sup>4</sup>
- > Only 5 percent of GED earners get a postsecondary credential or degree.<sup>5</sup>
- > Nearly 4 out of 10 (38 percent) of those who enroll in occupational certificate programs, and 6 out of 10 (58 percent) of those enrolling in occupational Associate's degree programs, fail to earn a credential of any type within six years.<sup>6</sup>

- > At public community colleges, only 20 percent of students earn a 2-year credential within 3 years.<sup>7</sup>
- > For students who start college requiring developmental education, fewer than 1 in 10 graduate within 3 years.<sup>8</sup>

Given these statistics, colleges and organizations like JFF have recognized that focusing on college access alone isn't enough; we need to focus on persistence and completion to ensure that adults and young adults can obtain the skills and credentials they need to be successful in the labor market. Comprehensive support services are a critical factor in improving persistence and completion.

JFF developed this paper to support the colleges we work with through Accelerating Opportunity, as well as other institutions in search of strategies to enhance their capacity to provide comprehensive supports. The goal of this paper is to provide clarity on what it means to provide comprehensive support services, share what research says about effective practice, and provide some examples of cost-effective strategies that colleges are using to provide this high level of support. We focus on the barriers faced by underprepared learners, the types of supports they need, and the challenges to providing comprehensive supports. We then explore promising strategies and provide two examples of colleges that have developed effective approaches to providing supports. Finally, we offer recommendations for improving the quality and availability of supports for underprepared learners.

### Supporting Underprepared Learners

Accelerating Opportunity and Breaking Through are two of JFF's community college-focused initiatives. Accelerating Opportunity helps low-skilled adults earn higher-wage jobs faster by combining Adult Basic Education and career and technical training into one integrated pathway and providing embedded support services to help students persist to completion. Breaking Through is focused on strengthening community college efforts to help low-skilled adults enter and succeed in occupational and technical degree programs that lead to family-supporting careers. Providing comprehensive supports is one of the initiative's four high-leverage strategies.



# UNDERSTANDING COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORTS

## BARRIERS AND AREAS OF NEED FOR UNDERPREPARED AND NONTRADITIONAL LEARNERS

Designing an effective model for providing student support starts with understanding the needs of students and the barriers that impede them from meeting their educational goals. Many researchers argue that if community colleges are to improve retention, they must focus on the *many* barriers to persistence that nontraditional students face.<sup>9</sup> These barriers include academic skill gaps, lack of career and college awareness, as well as financial and personal challenges.

Underprepared students will generally require academic support in order to be successful in their coursework. They also face a variety of nonacademic barriers to persistence. Many are older and are likely to have a family to support; most are juggling competing priorities that can disrupt them from achieving their education and career goals. Other barriers include:

- > Working in low-wage jobs with nonstandard work hours
- > Unstable child care arrangements
- > Inadequate health insurance and/or access to health care
- > Undependable transportation

All of these life challenges put students at risk of stopping out or dropping out of college. In fact, almost half of the students who leave adult education do so because of non-instructional factors like loss of child care, change in job, personal or family illness, change in housing, or transportation problems.<sup>10</sup>

Students may also need strong supports to gain the skills they need to succeed in college—these include time management, study skills, financial literacy, and clear career goals. In some cases, community colleges must teach students how to be responsible students and adults, how to utilize internal and external resources, how to manage their finances, and how to plan for and resolve personal crises.

## COMPREHENSIVE AND COORDINATED STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

When developing comprehensive student supports it is essential not only to address all of these barriers, but to do so in a coordinated manner. Helping nontraditional students persist in college, earn a credential, and move into good jobs requires an integrated network of academic, nonacademic, career, personal, and financial supports (see *the graphic, “Components of Comprehensive Student Supports”, on page 5*). These supports must be available to all students and tailored to address individual needs. Many colleges have a “no wrong door” approach to admission; similarly, students should be able to access the supports they need no matter what department they walk into.

Colleges must view comprehensive support services as a fundamental component of student success, with multiple offices—such as admissions, financial aid, academic support, and counseling—all working together on a common goal. A comprehensive approach to providing student supports needs to include a sense of shared responsibility for student success. This means setting up a system for regular collaboration and communication between support services staff, faculty, and external partners. All parties need to have a shared vision of how students will interact with the different support opportunities available over time, from intake to job placement. This means determining:

- > What services are mandatory, such as intrusive advising?
- > How can supportive services be more seamlessly embedded into college programs?
- > Which services need to be available at what points in students' college careers?
- > Which services should be provided by the college versus through a partner organization?

There also needs to be a common understanding of how referral and follow-up will take place, and how data will be shared across departments and with external partners.



## Components of Comprehensive Student Supports

### ACADEMIC ADVISING

- > **Purpose:** To support students in pursuing and succeeding in their academic studies
- > **Activities:** assessment of academic skill needs; meeting with academic advisors to review course selection; tutoring; supplemental coursework; access to online learning supports

### NONACADEMIC ADVISING

- > **Purpose:** To foster students' sense of connection to the college; enhance their self-confidence as members of the college community; and develop their ability to access college resources and make decisions that support their success as students
- > **Activities:** college navigation advising; time management training; study skills development

### CAREER SERVICES

- > **Purpose:** To identify student career goals; share relevant information about labor market conditions and career opportunities; ensure that students pursue coursework that facilitates achievement of their career goals; and support students in transitions into employment
- > **Activities:** career interest assessment and goal setting; work-readiness courses; resume writing workshops; mock interviews; job shadowing/internship opportunities; job placement

### FINANCIAL SERVICES

- > **Purpose:** To support students in financing their postsecondary studies; to build students' self efficacy in managing their resources for school and personal needs
- > **Activities:** financial need assessment; identification of applicable financial aid resources; access to benefits; assistance with completion of financial aid applications; financial literacy workshops

### SOCIAL SERVICES & COUNSELING

- > **Purpose:** To assist students in managing their personal lives in order to support persistence in and completion of their studies
- > **Activities:** provision of or referral to child care resources, transportation assistance, housing assistance, or mental health counseling; life skills training

# STRATEGIES FOR CREATING EFFECTIVE SUPPORTS

## DEVELOPING A SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS—WHO NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED?

A comprehensive approach to providing student support requires collaboration across multiple departments as well as external partners.

**Academic Advising:** Academic advising is a “developmental process, which assists students in the clarification of their life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of these goals.”<sup>11</sup> The academic advisor assists students with selecting courses or programs and developing a plan for overcoming any academic skills gaps.

**Nonacademic Advising:** Students require more than academic skills to successfully make their way through college. Nonacademic advisors (often called navigators, coaches, or transition coordinators) build working relationships, solve problems, and help students while they learn to self-navigate the college environment. In addition to having a dedicated individual for nonacademic support, strategies like learning communities, college success courses, and peer mentoring programs increase student persistence by creating support networks that strengthen motivation and that provide access to information and resources that promote college success.

**Career Services:** Career service departments provide career counseling as well as assistance with job search and placement. Career counseling strengthens motivation

and persistence by helping students develop career plans with short- and long-term goals that connect to employment and career advancement. Career services departments connect students to apprenticeships, internships (paid or unpaid), and job shadowing to provide students the opportunity for experiential learning, which can reinforce classroom learning and clarity of career goals. Additionally, career services departments can connect students directly to employers and assist with job placement.

**Financial Services:** Although community college tuition and fees are significantly lower than those at four-year public institutions, many students, especially those with families, often struggle to pay for costs not covered by financial aid, scholarships, or grants. For many nontraditional students, attending college is viewed as an added expense that can put be off when unexpected financial emergencies arise. Many community colleges provide emergency grants and vouchers that can help students out with unforeseen problems. Some colleges also offer financial literacy courses that can equip students with skills to make more informed and beneficial financial decisions. Many colleges are now setting up systems to assist students with access to public benefits<sup>12</sup> (such as food stamps or WIA funds) through eligibility screenings, often through partnerships with One-Stops or organizations like Single Stop USA.<sup>13</sup>

**Counseling:** Comprehensive social supports can include mental health counseling or crisis intervention, often provided by advisors, navigators, or case managers who identify student needs and direct them to sources of emotional, financial, or cultural support. These services are often provided by community-based organizations and social services agencies

**Workforce Investment Boards and One-Stop Career Centers:**<sup>14</sup> Workforce Investment Boards provide workforce development leadership in their communities: they govern and oversee the federal and state resources that support the network of One-Stop Career Centers and other education and training investments in their regions. One-Stops Centers<sup>15</sup> are locations where a wide range of employment, training, and career education program services are available to employers, workers, and jobseekers. The Centers' core services include: outreach, intake and orientation, initial assessment, determination of eligibility for additional services, job search and placement assistance, career counseling, and labor market information.

## DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

Given the limited resources available to community colleges to provide comprehensive support services, colleges and programs must identify cost-effective strategies for meeting student support needs. Rather than attempting to provide all services internally, programs should utilize existing partnerships and/or build new ones to help supplement their capacity and to provide supports. Community-based organizations can offer a range of support services for students, including assistance with housing, child care, transportation, and mental health counseling.<sup>16</sup> While

community-based organizations face similar challenges in terms of limited resources, colleges and CBOs can work together to raise funds and identify efficiencies. Local One-Stop Centers may provide career-related services, such as career exploration, job search, and resume writing. Locating One-Stops on college campuses helps to reduce transportation barriers for students and facilitates coordination between One-Stop and college support staff. Bringing staff from supporting partner organizations together periodically can help foster better communication and stronger linkages among organizations and more effective referrals for students. By forming partnerships with employers, state organizations, and community-based organizations, colleges can improve access to resources for students and draw on the strengths of organizations to provide support to students.

## REDUCING BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Most community colleges do offer student services such as financial aid assistance, academic advising, tutoring, career services, and the use of computer labs and libraries. And local community-based organizations often offer services as well. However, just having services available is often not enough for nontraditional students to succeed; recent research from the Center for Community College Student Engagement shows that only a small fraction of students take advantage of the various services that colleges offer.

Researchers have noted that the organization of student support services often assumes that students possess sufficient “knowledge, social skills and motivation” to seek out and make use of support services, yet this assumption may not be valid.<sup>17</sup> Many students lack social networks or family members with college experience to provide them with information to support their navigation of the college environment. One of the biggest challenges to providing students with the support they need is that services are disconnected—even located in multiple buildings across campus—and a lack of coordination can leave students unclear on where to go for the help they need. Some services may not be available at times convenient for nontraditional or part-time students. Both students and faculty may not even be aware of the services available, and simply referring students to existing supports and assuming they will take advantage of them may not lead students to access the opportunities and resources available.

Researchers conclude that disadvantaged students may benefit from what is termed “intrusive advising,”<sup>18</sup> which may include “structured meetings with advisors, mandatory activities such as academic planning, and close tracking of student success.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, citing the limited numbers of students actually accessing support services offered by community colleges, ongoing research by the Center for Community College Student Engagement underlines the need for colleges to go beyond offering optional supports to students and instead *require* their participation in promising activities like success courses, academic goal setting and planning, tutoring, and supplemental instruction.<sup>20</sup> By building services into the structure

of programs, students are connected to services through required activities. For example, mandatory student success courses “introduce new students to college life, help them learn about the college’s services, and give them tools to approach the decisions and responsibilities that they will face as college students.”<sup>21</sup> A study by the Community College Research Center (CCRC) found that community college students in Florida who completed a student success course (known there as a “student life skills” course), were more likely than non-completers to earn a community college credential, transfer to the state university system, or remain enrolled in college after five years.<sup>22</sup> Another study in South Texas explored the impact of the Beacon Program, designed to bring information on available tutoring services directly to students in remedial math classes.<sup>23</sup> The study showed that the intervention increased students’ use of tutoring services and reduced class withdrawal rates. Among part-time students, who made up half of the participants, the program increased math class pass rates.

## STRENGTHENING NONACADEMIC SUPPORTS

To be successful within community college, nontraditional students can require a range of nonacademic supports. The CCRC has explored this area of supports and identified four mechanisms that can help to improve student persistence and credential completion:<sup>24</sup>

1. Creating social relationships through activities that help students interact with professors and classmates in meaningful ways to foster the development of strong relationships. These activities help students feel that they belong in a college environment and provide improved access to information and resources.
2. Clarifying aspirations and enhancing commitment through activities that help students develop clear goals and understand how postsecondary learning can help in achieving those goals. These activities help students to become or remain committed to reaching their goals through their college education.
3. Developing college know-how through activities that help students learn about the cultural and procedural demands of college life. These activities help develop skills such as time management, study skills, resume writing, and how to access student services.
4. Making college life feasible through activities that meet students’ needs as they arise over time. These supports can help address challenges that arise from the need to balance work, family, and school (e.g., child care needs, financial issues).

In their most recent research in this area, CCRC has offered additional insights to strengthen nonacademic supports through an approach they label “SSIP: Sustained, Strategic, Intrusive and Integrated, and Personalized.”<sup>25</sup> Sustained supports take into account the fact that students encounter challenges throughout their college career,

so supports should follow them through their college experience. Sustaining supports requires a strategic use of college resources, employing approaches such as success courses and online advising systems and differentiating when and how students receive services based on their needs. Supports that are intrusive and integrated are offered to all students whether or not they recognize their need for them. Integration of supports can be supported by assigning advisors to particular departments and having student services and faculty work together to design ways of contextualizing nonacademic skills in academic settings. Personalized supports take into account the differing needs of students at different points in time. CCRC recommends an approach that uses online advising to track academic progress and alerts advisors when students reach key points in their pathways and may require more individualized attention.

## CREATING A CONTINUUM OF SUPPORTS ACROSS THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Student needs vary throughout their college experiences; as such, they need different supports at different phases. A coordinated approach to providing comprehensive supports takes into account the students' needs from entry to exit. As the diagram shows, for each type of support the different activities vary as students progress through the pathway and ultimately into the labor market.

## Components of a Continuum of Supports across the Student Experience

	INTAKE/GETTING STARTED	PATHWAY	COMPLETION/EMPLOYMENT
ACADEMIC ADVISING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Academic skills assessment</li> <li>&gt; Review prior education Discuss learning needs and academic pathway options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Course selection</li> <li>&gt; Tutoring and supplemental support</li> <li>&gt; Monitoring academic progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Review programs of study and options for continuing education</li> </ul>
NONACADEMIC ADVISING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Needs assessment</li> <li>&gt; Introduction to available college resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Provide guidance in navigating the college</li> <li>&gt; Build student success skills</li> <li>&gt; Refer students to other supports as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Ensure students have necessary personal and professional skills, such as time management and organization.</li> </ul>
CAREER SERVICES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Interest inventory</li> <li>&gt; Career exploration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Provide opportunities for internships or job shadowing</li> <li>&gt; Ensure the selected pathways are a good fit for students' interests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Connect students with employers, provide guidance on resumes, interview; ensure work-readiness skills</li> </ul>
FINANCIAL SERVICES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Help applying for financial aid and scholarships</li> <li>&gt; Screening for benefits eligibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Ongoing assistance with financial aid</li> <li>&gt; Financial literacy and planning</li> <li>&gt; Access to emergency funds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Ensure students can manage finances, pay back loans</li> </ul>
SOCIAL SERVICES & COUNSELING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Assess other social service needs, such as assistance with child care or counseling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Counseling and support as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Make sure students are aware of the resources available after graduation</li> </ul>



# CASE PROFILES

## COORDINATED SUPPORT SERVICES AT OWENSBORO COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE

The Workforce Solutions unit at Owensboro Community and Technical College in Kentucky provides a range of training opportunities, serving students coming from Adult Basic Education, as well as dislocated workers and incumbent trainees. The unit serves as an umbrella encompassing adult education services, Accelerating Opportunity, and other workforce development programs, as well as continuing education, ready-to-work training for TANF recipients, and customized business training. Over the last 10 years, as Workforce Solutions has moved beyond offering continuing education and business training to serve increasing numbers of nontraditional adult students, the college recognized the need to establish stronger student supports, especially as students prepared for transitions to work or college.

### PROVIDING A WIDE RANGE OF SUPPORTS

The goal of student services in the Workforce Solutions unit is to get students college and/or workforce ready, according to their personal goals. The unit provides a range of supports, including:

- > **Academic**, to get students ready to navigate college processes
- > **Financial**, to acquaint students with financial aid opportunities and assist them with applications
- > **Personal**, providing community referrals to address health and family issues

- > **Career exploration**, using partnerships with local community partners around resume writing, mock interviews, and job exploration through electronic media.

## DESIGNATED SUCCESS COACH

To enhance the supports available to students, Workforce Solutions put in place the position of Success Coach: one full-time individual devoted to working one-on-one with students to get them ready for college. Previously the college had seen that if students didn't have a designated individual following their progress, they could get lost in the system and fail to achieve their learning goals. The Success Coach is familiar with all of the programs available to students through Workforce Solutions and can thus help direct students to appropriate opportunities. As students prepare to pursue college studies, the coach helps them get started with classes, meet with faculty and advisors, fill out financial aid applications, explore course options, and visit college campuses to become oriented.

## COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

The Workforce Solutions unit works closely with traditional student services within the college through the START Center. The START Center is located on the main campus in the Student Campus Center along with the financial aid office, the placement testing center, book store, and the student cafeteria/lounge. It is the central location for students to register for classes, meet with an advisor, apply for financial aid, and take the COMPASS placement test. The Workforce Solutions unit offers college-prep services and intensive student services to prepare students for a successful transition from Workforce Solutions to the START Center. Workforce Solutions and START Center staff work together and make referrals to each other based on student need, and share a hand-off process when students transition from the Workforce Solutions unit to the college. The START Center employs two coaches—one focusing on health care careers and the other on technical careers—to work with students. Staff in each center are cross-trained to have a working knowledge of the other services offered so they can direct students appropriately. Staff meet regularly to exchange information and participate in quarterly training sessions. In addition, college staff meet quarterly with outside partner organizations whose services supplement those offered on campus.

The college used participation in Breaking Through (a Jobs for the Future initiative) as a catalyst for change and has remained committed to streamlining and improving its traditional support services. Getting to the current level of coordination has required effort, persistence, and the support of progressive leadership in student services and the workforce division. One important step in the process was to explore what was official policy and procedure, versus the staff's traditional ways of doing things, and to work through changing habits and routines. Another important element was having champions—someone in a respected leadership position to inform others about the work and who endorsed the changes coming about.

Although making changes to student support services has taken time, the college values the benefits for students and staff of no longer working in silos.

## NORTH SHORE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A COLLEGE-WIDE EMPHASIS ON COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORTS

At North Shore Community College in Massachusetts, students are supported in multiple ways, including supports that are embedded in the pathway as well as Achievement Coaches to provide more proactive advising. There is a college-wide emphasis on coordinating and sustaining supports as a way to ensure student success.

NSCC began developing its comprehensive support services as part of its work in the Breaking Through initiative, which focused on contextualized coursework in early child care education for English language learners. The college created a support system that includes contextualized curriculum, intrusive advising, student cohorts, and Achievement Coaches. It has since expanded this model to other career areas, such as health care and criminal justice. Today, comprehensive supports extend to students in credit and noncredit short-term training.

### SINGLE POINT-OF-CONTACT

One of the most valuable elements of NSCC's support services has been the use of Achievement Coaches, who provide a single point of contact through which students can access services within the college, and who therefore serve as an important means for the coordination of services at the college and its partner organizations. Achievement Coaches are spread throughout the college and generally fall under the auspices of a particular program. As part of Breaking Through, for example, the Achievement Coaches served as intrusive advisors, helping students complete their contextualized English courses and following them with additional support into their first credit level class. They tend to have expertise in particular academic areas, such as medical or legal studies.

### ONGOING, EMBEDDED SUPPORTS

Through their efforts to strengthen support service offerings, staff at NSCC have come to recognize the importance of repeated efforts, rather than a "one shot" approach, to keep students aware of the services offered. Staff aim to reach out to students as early on as possible, and in an "intrusive" way. Moreover, the college recognizes the value of personal connections between students and individual staff. Staff work to have a lot of face-to-face contact with students; even email messages sent to large groups of students come from a particular individual like the Director of Student Support and Advising, whom students can ask for by name in seeking

answers to questions or referrals to services. Staff recognize that students are much more apt to approach a particular individual, rather than just an office, for help.

## CREATING COMMUNITY

The college views contextualized courses as a form of support in themselves, as they tend to be smaller in size and allow the forging of closer relationships between students and faculty, as well as other students. Through the TRIO program, which targets low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities, the college offers linked learning courses (one per semester), which function as a learning community as the same group of students attends both classes. Faculty coordinate curriculum, and TRIO staff work closely with both the faculty and students throughout each semester to monitor course performance and develop strategies for academic and personal success.

## COORDINATED EFFORTS

In building its supports, NSCC has made a conscious effort to involve faculty so that they have a sense of potential student needs, are aware of the resources available to students, and can thus act as additional coaches to support the persistence of their students. Support services staff connect with faculty through regular division meetings, and make additional efforts to reach out to adjunct faculty to keep them informed of service options and how to connect students with them. Even faculty who are involved in smaller targeted programs are made aware of the larger set of services offered within the college and community.

## A SUSTAINED COMMITMENT TO STUDENT SUPPORTS

As the college has strengthened its student supports and shown their contribution to student completion, the administration has integrated student supports and advising into the college's strategic plan, in support of goals pertaining to student completion. Such a move will likely contribute to the enhancement and sustainability of student support offerings. In addition, while coaches are generally funded through grants and individual program budgets, the college has recently decided to fund two such positions through its regular operating budget and house them in the Student Support and Advising division. This move by the college reflects the value that the school has seen in having designated, skilled staff tasked with making individual connections to students in order to support their continuation and completion of their studies. In the next year, the college plans to develop regular mechanisms to bring all coaches together to foster information exchange, professional development, and the sharing of effective practices.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Implementing a comprehensive support services model is complicated: it requires coordination and collaboration across multiple departments and agencies, and the model has to be flexible enough to adapt to students' unique needs. But by investing time and resources into student supports colleges can ensure that students get off to a strong start, make steady progress, and ultimately complete their programs and successfully enter the labor market. To help community colleges increase the impact of their support service models, we offer the following recommendations:

## **Provide a comprehensive set of supports for underprepared and nontraditional students.**

Consider the full range of potential student needs and offer a mix of services that address students' academic, personal, financial and other nonacademic needs.

## **Make supports an integral part of the program model.**

Just making supports available isn't enough—the students who most need the help tend to be those least likely to seek it out. The range of supportive services needs to be embedded into the program model itself—for example, by building financial literacy and career exploration directly into a required orientation course, or by requiring that students meet with advisors prior to registering for classes and designated points in their studies.

## **Develop partnerships to complement college support resources.**

Establish partnerships with local entities, such as community-based organizations and One-Stop Career Centers, to provide personal, career-related, and other types

of student support. Develop regular mechanisms for communication among entities to exchange information, promote the quality of services, and support students' following through on referrals.

### **Coordinate the provision of support service offerings among entities.**

Ensure that services are coordinated so that the staff and entities involved are aware of other support opportunities, as well as their own contribution to the larger set of services. Avoid unnecessary duplication of services and ensure that students, regardless of where they seek to access services, receive consistent messages about the opportunities and resources available. Consider co-locating services to facilitate coordination and student access.

### **Communicate the availability of support services to students and faculty.**

Use multiple avenues of communication with students—such as orientation, in-class presentations, individual and group advising sessions, electronic messaging—to reach out to students with information on available support resources. Take advantage of opportunities to meet with faculty and staff in regular departmental meetings and cross-department exchanges to make faculty aware of the opportunities and resources available to support students.

### **Reduce barriers to student access to services.**

Bring information and nonacademic supports directly to students through classes, orientation, and other opportunities for contact with students. Take an “intrusive” approach to services, making advising sessions and student success classes required elements of the student experience. Consider the schedules of part-time students who may also have work and family responsibilities to facilitate their access to services at convenient times and venues.

### **Keep in mind the value of relationships in supporting students.**

Whether through the use of success coaches, regular advising sessions, or learning communities, the creation of relationships to staff, faculty, and other students helps students feel a connection to the institution and a sense that someone else is invested in their success. Develop ways for students to establish and sustain such relationships as part of the student experience.

### **Work to ensure adequate resources for support service provision.**

Braid funding sources and explore means of reducing costs, such as online advising systems. Balance students' need for individualized attention with possibilities for group activities, which can both save costs and foster connections among students. Gather data on the use and effectiveness of student supports to help build institutional support for funding them from regular budgets.

# ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Nontraditional students are defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) as students who identify as one or more of the following: do not immediately attend college after graduating high school, attend college only part time, work 35 or more hours a week, are financially independent, have children or dependents other than their spouse, are a single parent, or have a GED.

<sup>2</sup> The Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Department of Education, defines Adult Basic Education as “instruction designed for an adult who has minimal competence in reading, writing, and computation, is not sufficiently competent to meet the educational requirements of adult life in the United States, or is not sufficiently competent to speak, read, or write the English language to allow employment commensurate with the adult’s real ability.”

<sup>3</sup> J.P. Comings, A. Parrella, & L. Soricone. 1999. *Persistence Among Adult Basic Education Students in Pre-GED Classes*. Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

<sup>4</sup> D. Prince & D. Jenkins. 2005. *Building Pathways to Success for Low Skill Adult Students: Lessons for Community College Policy and Practice From a Statewide Longitudinal Tracking Study*. New York, NY: CCRC.

<sup>5</sup> GED Testing Service: <http://www.gedtestingservice.com/uploads/files/95f7a61fdb34260dd41d1914a89ddd0.1MB>

<sup>6</sup> Demos, Graduated Success report, February 2010 (sponsored by Gates)

<sup>7</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. Digest of Education Statistics, Table 341: [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_341.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_341.asp)

<sup>8</sup> Complete College America. 2012. *Remediation: Higher Education’s Bridge to Nowhere*. Washington, DC: Author.



- <sup>9</sup> T. Bailey & M. Alfonso. 2005. *Paths to Persistence: An Analysis of Research on Program Effectiveness at Community Colleges*. New Agenda Series. Vol. 6. Indianapolis, IN: Lumina Foundation for Education.
- <sup>10</sup> Comings, Parrella, & Soricone (1999).
- <sup>11</sup> D.S. Crockett. 1985. "Academic Advising." In L. Noel, R. Levitz, D. Saluri, & Associates, eds. *Increasing Student Retention*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, p. 284.
- <sup>12</sup> See, for example, CLASP's Benefits Access for College Completion initiative: [http://www.clasp.org/issues/pages?type=work\\_supports&id=0009](http://www.clasp.org/issues/pages?type=work_supports&id=0009)
- <sup>13</sup> <http://www.singlestopusa.org/program/community-colleges/>
- <sup>14</sup> List of Workforce Investment Boards: <http://www.servicelocator.org/wibcontacts/default.asp>
- <sup>15</sup> Map to locate centers by state: <http://www.doleta.gov/usworkforce/onestop/onestopmap.cfm>
- <sup>16</sup> See also the Workforce Strategies Initiative's Courses to Employment toolkit for more information on college/community-based organization partnerships: <http://www.aspenwsi.org/resource/c2e-partnership-tools/>
- <sup>17</sup> M.M. Karp, L. O'Gara, & K.L. Hughes. 2008. *Do Support Services at Community Colleges Encourage Success or Reproduce Disadvantage? An Exploratory Study of Students in Two Community Colleges*. CCRC Working Paper No. 10. New York, NY: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- <sup>18</sup> N. Grubb. 2006. "'Like, What Do I Do Now?' The Dilemmas of Guidance Counseling." In *Defending the Community College Equity Agenda*, T. Bailey & V.S. Morest, eds. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- <sup>19</sup> Karp, O'Gara, & Hughes (2008), p. 23.
- <sup>20</sup> Center for Community College Student Engagement. 2013. *A Matter of Degrees: Engaging Practices, Engaging Students (High Impact Practices for Community College Student Engagement)*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.
- <sup>21</sup> E.Z. Rutschow & E. Schneider. 2011. *Unlocking the Gate: What We Know About Improving Developmental Education*. New York, NY: MDRC.
- <sup>22</sup> M. Zeidenberg, D. Jenkins, & J.C. Calcagno. 2007. *Do Student Success Courses Actually Help Community College Students Succeed?* CCRC Brief No. 36. New York, NY: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- <sup>23</sup> K.F. Butcher & M.G. Visser. 2013. "The Impact of a Classroom-Based Guidance Program on Student Performance in Community College Math Classes." *Educational evaluation and Policy Analysis*. Vol. 35, No. 3.

<sup>24</sup> M.M. Karp. 2011. *Toward a New Understanding of Nonacademic Student Support: Four Mechanisms Encouraging Positive Student Outcomes in the Community College*. CCRC Working Paper No. 28, Assessment of Evidence Series. New York, NY: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University.

<sup>25</sup> Community College Research Center. 2013. *What We Know About Nonacademic Student Supports*. New York, NY: Author.





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