

Benefits Access for College Completion

Innovative Approaches to Meet the Financial Needs of Low-Income Students

Benefits Access for College Completion (BACC) was designed to help colleges develop new policies that increase low-income students' access to public benefits—easing their financial burden to allow them to finish school and earn postsecondary credentials.

After accounting for financial aid, the average full-time community college student had more than \$6,000 in unmet need in 2012-2013. Students' ability to meet their financial needs often determines whether they can attend and complete college. While rising tuition costs get a lot of attention, there are many other costs that make attendance and completion difficult. For low-income community college students juggling work, studies, and family responsibilities, the combination of financial aid and access to benefits (such as food stamps, health insurance, energy assistance, and child care subsidies) can be pivotal to increasing graduation rates.

Colleges participating in BACC have developed and institutionalized scalable, sustainable organizational and funding policies and practices that connect low-income students to an array of public benefits.

Each college has developed a plan that integrates screening and application assistance for public benefits with other services like financial aid counseling and registration. As part of that effort, colleges have deepened their working relationships with state and local human services agencies. Strategies include:

- Developing new campus centers and expanding existing ones that focus on helping students get the financial resources they need to complete college;
- Identifying innovative financing strategies to fund benefits screeners and facilitators on campus;
- Building information about publicly available supports into orientation and financial aid conversations through existing meetings with college advisors;
- Integrating existing online benefits screening tools into on-campus activities;
- Raising awareness among faculty, staff, and students of the existence of these supports; and
- Helping counselors and other direct service staff provide technical support to students.

Participating colleges include: Cuyahoga Community College (OH), Gateway Community and Technical College (KY), LaGuardia Community College (NY), Lake Michigan College (MI), Macomb Community College (MI), Northampton Community College (PA), and Skyline College (CA).

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