Policy Perspectives
_Baccalaureate Attainment and community college students (January 2009)_

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**Baccalaureates for community college students**

The rate of baccalaureate attainment, generally, and among under-represented minority populations is not only lower than both experts and the public find acceptable but also at a comparative level that suggests that specific populations have inequitable outcomes (See Table 1). This condition is magnified if we put community college students into the equation. Without a baccalaureate degree as one outcome of educational attainment, community college students are highly disadvantaged in their lifetime earnings and in their access to employment at many levels. This is not to say that all community college students should aspire to a baccalaureate degree and not that there are a scarcity of jobs that are reasonably well-paying that do not require a baccalaureate degree. But if only a small percentage of community college students transfer to a university—roughly 20% of the less than 50% who attend community colleges in degree track programs—and of that number just over 50% attains a baccalaureate degree, which is the general rate for public universities nationally, then this population nationally of 6.2 million who attend community colleges are severely disadvantaged. In California, the student population is 1.4 million and if the national figures hold true, then 70,000 (or 5%) of California’s 1.4 million students can hope to attain a baccalaureate degree. Of those 70,000, the gap between under-represented minority students and majority students will be wide on degree attainment. Furthermore, projections suggest that in California that by 2020 the lack of supply of an educated workforce at the baccalaureate level and beyond will have serious implications for California’s economy. Not only are those who are educated at the baccalaureate level about to retire and unlikely to be replaced by comparably educated workers but also the growing Latino population is estimated to be an undereducated one, with only 12% holding a baccalaureate degree or higher (Reed, 2008).

**Impediments for transfer students and student who transfer**

The impediments for students come in two packages: first, within their community college and second within the university. Research while not definitive does point out the considerable hurdles and environmental factors that community college students face if they want to complete programs or transfer. In particular, given its multi-purpose functions the community college cannot devote its resources to academic work or sustain a mini-university environment. Thus, both organizational actions and climate cannot and do not reflect a solely or even primarily university compatible environment. Furthermore, the students themselves, both their academic backgrounds and their interests and aspirations are not conducive to a competitive academic environment. Finally, the workforce of the community college comprised of a majority of part-time faculty and faculty and administrators, many of whom do not have a scholarly or research background and certainly...
not a doctoral degree, cannot and does not function to move all students or even the majority to a university. The university impediment has numerous manifestations. One is the bureaucratic process of transfer; another is the unfamiliar environment, particularly for first generation and low socio economic status students and often distant location, which is not compatible with many of the backgrounds of community college students. A third impediment is costs, usually well beyond what students from community colleges can afford or can rationalize especially if their family is not middle class or if they have dependents to support. As community college students they have customarily worked and attended college on a part-time basis. University programs in the main are full time programs or at least are a disadvantage to part-time students. Science and engineering programs often do not admit part-time students and do not offer classes in non-traditional formats, including evenings. This means that working students who need to attend classes late in the day or evenings are out of luck. It means as well that the talented Latina with a child and an affinity for and ability in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM) if she is going to university at all will not be enrolling in those areas.

Universities on community college campuses: Co-location

To address the transfer problem as well as the disparity between under-presented populations or low income populations and their majority and middle class counterparts, community colleges and universities have worked together to locate university centers and programs on community college campuses. In the west, both the state of Arizona and Washington are well known for these practices. Arizona Western College and North Arizona University (NAU Yuma) and Edmonds Community College and Central Washington University are two examples of what are referred to as co-located campuses. Students move from one building to another, perhaps a few hundred yards at most to mark their passage from community college programs to university programs. NAU Yuma offers a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies (including fine arts, humanities, social and natural sciences) and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. Many of the impediments already noted, such as unfamiliar environments and distance, have been eliminated.

What can be done?

California community colleges can address not only the oft cited transfer problem of low rates of students moving from community college to university but also the inadequate levels of baccalaureate attainment, particularly among lower income students. Areas of particular promise include STEM baccalaureate attainment and such an outcome will enhance university performance as well as community and state enrichment. Teacher education, business workforce preparation, and nursing are all areas where community colleges have demonstrated in other states that community colleges can provide substantial aid in baccalaureate attainment, either through co-location of campuses or through community colleges offering the baccalaureate degree independently. Furthermore, there will be a cost-benefit gain for the state with co-location as baccalaureate productivity will rise and sharing of costs between community colleges and universities will improve efficiencies. Steps to take for California include: (1) research on student baccalaureate attainment in jurisdictions where there is co-location of
campuses, (2) development of partnerships in baccalaureate programs between community colleges and universities, (3) development of suitable financing policies and practices that will be of benefit to both the community college and the university, and (4) agreements among the unions and the institutions over staffing, personnel management, and instruction.

Table 1: 6 year graduation rates of 2000-2001 freshman at 4 year institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>% graduate</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>41.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>47.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race unknown</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: U.S. Education Department)

References


*California Community College Collaborative (C4) is a research and policy center established to improve community colleges, including the quality of student learning in California’s community colleges, by providing influential data-driven research that addresses the growing diversity of students and complexity of institutional mission.*

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