



**Editors' Note:** This edition of *UPDATE on Research and Leadership* focuses on the value of postsecondary education, from a variety of stakeholder viewpoints. The issue begins with an interview conducted with Tony Carnevale, director and research professor at the Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce. Dr. Carnevale has been widely cited for his research on labor and the workforce, including works that project the growth in jobs that will require various levels of postsecondary education. An article follows from Chris Mullin at the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC); content is drawn from a brief released by AACC in January 2013, entitled *Community College Contributions*, which focuses on three particular ways in which community colleges contribute to economic growth. OCCRL post-doctoral researcher Jason Taylor looks at a specific type of transfer – reverse transfer – and the ways in which it is valued by numerous stakeholders. OCCRL graduate research assistants Sujung Kim and Edmund Graham both have articles included here that are reprints of their briefs from *Insights on Equity and Outcomes*, which focus on barriers, opportunities, and pathways students of color (Asian American students and African American males, respectively) experience while attending postsecondary education. Finally, our director and *UPDATE* co-editor Debra Bragg identifies the many doctoral dissertations that have come out of the University of Illinois in the past couple of years which focus on topics of interest to community colleges. We appreciate the contributions of all *UPDATE* article authors, and look forward to further discussions on the value of postsecondary education.

## Valuing Credentials: An Interview with Tony Carnevale

by Collin M. Ruud, OCCRL

Tony Carnevale is the Director of the [Center on Education and the Workforce](#) at [Georgetown University](#). Dr. Carnevale has been involved in public policy and economics since the 1970s, having worked for the US Congress as a senior staff member and member of the Senate Budget Committee. He has been appointed to several roles by past US Presidents to serve on commissions, including Ronald Reagan's Commission on Productivity, Bill Clinton's National Commission on Employment Policy, and George W. Bush's White House Commission on Technology and Adult Education. Dr. Carnevale formed the Institute for Workplace Learning in 1983. Between 1996 and 2006, Dr. Carnevale worked at the Educational Testing Service as Vice President for Public Leadership. His recent report, *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018*, co-authored with Nicole Smith and Jeff Strohl, is widely cited by policy makers and researchers as an impetus behind several recent policy developments, such as the emphases on college completion and workforce outcomes. I had the opportunity to interview Dr. Carnevale on April 17, 2013.

**UPDATE:** Our upcoming issue of *UPDATE* focuses on the value of credentials, which is a major focus of higher education research. Why do you think the value of credentials is so important to stakeholders in higher education?

**Dr. Carnevale:** The value of higher education is complex. That is, there is value both in terms of the knowledge that's gained as well as the extent to which it allows people to live fully in their time. In many respects, all learning is equal, whether it's credentialled or not, but the credential has value because it signals skill, and that is its principal economic value. The whole process of credentialing is one that is largely of finding a way to count when people have achieved certain goals, whether it's introductory learning, or

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achievement of different levels of learning in a particular field of study, or mastery. It's a gauge of educational achievement, but from an economic point of view, it's largely a signal to employers that people have knowledge, skills, abilities, work values, and interests that they want to hire. Credentialing is not an uncomplicated set of metrics, but it is very useful in a broader society to the individual.

**UPDATE:** I've heard the term "the sheepskin effect" particularly in economics literature. From some of the most recent work you have been doing at the Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW), what have you and your colleagues found regarding the discernible value of a credential versus an equivalent amount of credits?

**Dr. Carnevale:** The sheepskin effect continues to hold up in our research. And in a sense, it is pure signaling. In fact, we can show that, for people with the same number of credits and essentially the same curriculum, one who gets the degree adds 5 or 6 percent to [their earnings], and that's pure signaling. That's in economic terms. The lesson learned is that people should get degrees when they're available because they do have economic value.

We find there are two or three kinds of findings with respect to credentials. Let's say, prior to 1980, it was essentially that the credential *level* mattered overwhelmingly; that is, having a high school degree mattered in the 70s and it was really the marker for an opportunity for middle-class status. About 70 percent of American workers in the workforce only had a high school degree, and most were in the middle class. If you had a bachelor's degree, you made more; if you had a graduate degree you made more than that, and there was a broad set of fields and careers you could enter. With a BA you could be a social worker, or a banker, a teacher, or a whole variety of things without much extra certification or specialization in knowledge. What happened after the 1980s was a shift away from the value of degree level towards valuing the field of study. We're more specialized than we used to be. People who get STEM majors work in STEM, those who are business majors work in business functions, people who are education majors tend to be educators, and so on.

We know that clusters of courses without credentials have value, because people get small bites of education to improve their skill for specific purposes. So, with non-credit courses or credit courses that don't lead to degrees, the data reveal clusters of courses that have value. Computer courses tend to cluster together and have value. There is a whole sector of courses now that do not lead to credentials and are even non-credit that has value. There's a question as to whether we should be funding them with public money, because generally non-credit education doesn't get public money. There are exceptions. In many states, the [federal Carl D.] Perkins money, the Career and Technical Education (CTE) money funds non-credit courses. Generally speaking, though, non-credit courses are not publicly funded. So, one view is that these are courses that ultimately ought to be combined together and turned into certificates, and

then there's an issue as to whether they ought to be offered for credit. They don't lead to a particular degree, so in the education world, they're non-credit. In the for-profit world, they turn non-credential learning into credential learning or credit learning, and thereby get funding for it, whereas colleges are reluctant to do that. There are different models there, and part of it is culture. Educators are loath to give credit or a credential if it doesn't sound like education. It's sort of the point where the workforce development aspect of postsecondary learning divides from the education aspect.

**UPDATE:** That's a big question a lot of stakeholders are dealing with right now.

**Dr. Carnevale:** My own bias is that these courses ought to be for credit. I think all learning has value, and I don't just think that as an ideological standpoint. We know from brain research and learning research that any kind of learning has the same effect on your brain, whether you study Shakespeare or you study the sequence to turn a bolt. Ultimately, you learn something, and your brain treats all that learning the same way, so that the notion that there's a higher and a lower form of learning is really not true.

**UPDATE:** One way in which your research is set apart from a lot of other research into the value of credentials is that it also looks at certificates. What has your office found in regards to how certificates are valued?

**Dr. Carnevale:** We study certificates in part because we are labor economists. We come at education with a particular set of biases; we're looking for labor market value. From looking at these data all these years we have found that a little over half the time, certificates have labor market value above the high school degree. However, if you look at the people who get certificates, you find that their test scores in their high school class are from the bottom half of the class, but they make more money than other people in the bottom half of their class. So they're better off than people with the same educational preparation as they have, but they're not as well off as the [average] high school graduate, so that raises the question, okay, is making someone better off relative to their educational preparation enough of an improvement to justify public funding? I think it is; that is, we pretty much decided in the welfare reform debate in the United States that learning that leads to work, and wages, whether it's low wage or not, has value. Working is valued over not working. If [certificates] make people better off in economic terms, I think that they have value.

**UPDATE:** In some of the work we've done at OCCRL we look at the value of associate degrees in applied science versus arts, and we see that employers have a different view of what's valuable than college administrators.

**Dr. Carnevale:** Yeah, that is a core tension, truthfully, that starts somewhere in high school, about the purposes of higher education. In a democracy, people are supposed to be educated.

Mostly you're educated because you have a right to pursue happiness. The point is, you have a right to develop yourself up to your potential in a democracy, and it's in everyone's interest to see that you do. It's one of the rights you gain as a citizen. Society has an especially strong interest, maybe not in an ethical sense, but in a practical sense. We have an interest that you get an education that gets you a job because we don't want to pay for you. When push comes to shove, and push has come to shove in policy now, the economic value tends to dominate. That causes educators some stress, and rightly so, but I think that it's inevitable that when push comes to shove and you try to decide what to do with the next dollar, the vocational purposes of education win.

**UPDATE:** To change direction a bit, major foundations and policy discussions from state to state are focusing on completion, getting people to the point of completing degrees. How connected do you think completion is to the purpose of workforce outcomes?

**Dr. Carnevale:** I think completion is very rapidly becoming the higher education community's *Potemkin Village*. I mean, it doesn't have much meaning. Completion for what? So if you can say completion, to develop human talent, or to fulfill human goals or get a job, that's great. I think the education community is one in which it's not their strong suit to say "completion for what," because there's a tendency for any industry to believe that whatever it produces has value, irrespective of its purpose, and that's just not true. That is, if you make cars, you think cars are valuable. You don't understand why you make 300 cars and they don't sell; as far as you're concerned, you made 300 more cars and that was your goal. The point is, if those cars have no use or value, then you don't really have a standard. What you're doing is you're feathering your own nest. So I think completion is something of a false god, to be honest with you. It's something that comes naturally to educators, that is, "What is it that you need to do when you go to school? You need to go to school until we say that you're done." We need to decide what this is for.

*A Nation at Risk* in 1983, which justified all this education reform, was very clear about completion for what, and they were somewhat materialist about the whole thing. I think educators won't agree with this, but basically the report said we had to improve education because we were losing our power in the world, and that we had to have a stronger education system to maintain our economic and cultural dominance. Well, educators see education in a more individual way than that. But in any event, the purpose of education reform in grade school was to learn your ABCs and learn basic math. Once you get to high school, it gets confusing, because you've learned your ABCs and you've learned arithmetic, now you're going to do algebra and calculus. Well, why? If it's not required, truthfully, to get a job or be a better person, why do you have to take calculus? The educator's answer is, because, you have to take calculus to go to college, to go to Harvard. For good reason, education is not integrated well into the rest of society. There's good and bad

in that. It means that education is a power unto itself, but at the same time, it's not clear that that serves the students or society.

I think the completion agenda is basically a dodge; there's a presumption there that completion fulfills a whole set of other goals that are only loosely tied to it. So, we could put everybody through college and they might end up unemployed. I think completion was the next stop on the train, and it retains the power of the educator over the education system, but I think truthfully that the purposes of education, especially the economic purposes, have become much more tied to goals beyond education. I think completion is really a necessary but not sufficient condition for a good education system. I mean, it just supposes that completion for its own sake is a good thing. It does do a certain amount of signaling, because it allows people to get degrees and credentials, but as we've just been saying, signaling and learning are not necessarily the same things.

I think completion is as far as educators can get with education; that is, the rest of us are going to have to build in the rest of the goals. You see that debate occurring all over the country. People want to know, other than getting a degree, what do you get for education? I think people really mean "can [I] get a job," and that is much too narrow a goal, although it is a necessary condition for human development in a capitalist society. If you can't get a job you're not going to live fully in your time. It's an instrumental goal that makes a whole lot of sense, but the goal of completion is a halfway measure, I think.

**UPDATE:** I'm curious as to where you think research about credentialing needs to go next. What are the most important research questions you think are still unanswered?

**Dr. Carnevale:** I think we need to move beyond research in these areas to the extent we can, to operational information systems. We need to stop people like me doing studies to figure out what credentials are worth. It's interesting information, but I don't know how useful it is. Somebody that is thinking about school – a student, or a parent, a legislator, or anyone who is thinking about going to any kind of educational institution to get any award or take a course – ought to know what the value of that course or program of study is, both in economic and non-economic terms. It is always easier to measure the economic outcomes, because money is the yardstick you can use to measure anything economic. Unfortunately, it reduces other things to money, but people hopefully are wiser than that. What we're struggling with now is not so much deciding from a research point of view what's valuable, it's building systems that are operational. This is why there is great importance on wage records and transcript data, to build systems that tell students before they take a particular program of study what its economic value will be. That is, you know if you're going to take "The Role of Feminism in the French Revolution," it's not going to be as valuable as engineering. We need to be more precise about that. We need to know three things. One is, does it get you a job, is it a job that you will keep, will it give you employment security? Second, how much money will you make? And finally, are you

likely to work in the field that you studied? We need to know a good deal more about the outcomes that occur after the education is done.

The focus at the moment is to learn about what happens as the education occurs, which is the educator's concern. [Outcomes] information is available, the basic feedstock, which is at the moment wage records and transcript data. Every state has this. It can tell us quite readily what the earnings returns and employability returns [are], and if we could add occupation into the wage records, we'd know whether or not you're working in a field for which you were educated. So, I think the first thing is to get past the research and start running the system. And then, the second thing is that we need a good deal more focus on deeper questions. We know the value of degree level, we know more about the value of programs of study, the differences between an engineering degree and a liberal arts degree, and the differences between various certificates. In the next 4-5 years, the Federal government will expand data collection to the point where we'll know a lot more about that, and, at one level or another, virtually all the states are looking up transcript data and wage records. So this is coming, but what we don't know are the actual competencies that people need in the labor force, and how we produce them. Educators, and all the rest of us, don't know how to do this at the moment.

We need to understand more about the interests, values, and personality traits that make you successful in a particular career. More research is being done among psychologists and economists about the relationships between personality variables and value differences associated with success in different fields. If you're going to be a doctor, we'd rather you not be so much of an entrepreneur, we'd rather you value other people's health. There's a whole level to which we're only beginning now to drill down.

Educators recognize this; look at the Common Core, for instance. They talk about "college and career ready," and they talk about these skills as dispositions, actually. So there is emerging agreement in society, that is among parents, students, legislators, and educators, that all these 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, or deeper learning, as the Hewlett Foundation calls them, are more important. We know they exist, we have a fair amount of knowledge about how they distribute by occupation, but we don't know how to teach them. So that's the deep issue, and it becomes more important in postsecondary than the prior to college, although I think it begins in high school. So that is the horizon where education research really has a job to do.

**UPDATE:** I know OCCRL's readers will be interested in knowing your next steps. What is the CEW doing, what major projects or initiatives are you engaged in, and what issues are you going to be focusing on next?

**Dr. Carnevale:** Our work tends to focus on, basically, simple supply and demand questions; that is, what kinds of education does the labor force require? So, we will continue on a biannual basis to do projections of job growth and education demand by occupation. That takes a while to do. Within that, we also look at the different degree levels and awards, and we're working with a number of states to get some kind of effective measure of non-credit education and its value. That is very cutting-edge, because the data are, by their nature, difficult to work with, but we're going to try and get some kind of fix on that, because the policy question as to what we do with non-credit education is now alive because of budget constraints. Whether government should be funding it is another issue. The Federal government talks all the time about funding preparation for industry-based certifications, and a lot of that is non-credit education.

We continue to do supply and demand by degree level, by fields of study, which tends to be more of a focus for us than other people. Beyond that, we're heavily into doing this business on measuring competencies, knowledge, skills, abilities, values, interests, and personality. That's kind of the work we're headed into for the next couple of years. It is different from things we've done before, and in a lot of ways, the way we think about that, we've drilled down from degree into field of study, and now we're going to measure competencies.

The other piece that we constantly do is we look at different student population groups, so we look at these issues by race and ethnicity, by class, and by gender, and we're actually going to publish more of that in the next year or two. Those are the three domains, people, competencies, and supply and demand, which is the way that I think about it. ♦

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# The Value of Progressing Along the Continuum of Educational Attainment

by Christopher M. Mullin, American Association of Community Colleges

**Note:** Portions of this manuscript were extracted from a more detailed AACC policy brief titled “Community College Contributions.” It is available for free in PDF format from [www.aacc.nche.edu/briefs](http://www.aacc.nche.edu/briefs)

A recent policy brief published by the American Association of Community Colleges (Mullin & Phillippe, 2013) documented some of the public and private returns provided by community colleges. It framed the community college mission, through an economic contribution lens, around three areas:

1. *The community college as a launching pad.* Community colleges serve as a starting point for students in terms of educational progression—the lockstep mentality that dominates consideration of educational attainment. They also accelerate learning through early college experiences and transfer opportunities.
2. *The community college as a (re)launching pad.* Community colleges serve as providers of knowledge and skills to members of the community when they need them, and in ways that they need them, often for those who have already been successful in college.
3. *The community college as a local commitment.* Community colleges serve local purposes, focusing on the needs and demands of the communities they serve.

For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on one aspect of the contributions community colleges make, specifically those that emerge from a progression in educational attainment.

## Progression of Educational Attainment

“Success” in postsecondary education is often considered bachelor’s degree attainment. However, there are viable college-level outcomes prior to the bachelor’s degree including, but not limited to, certificates and associate degrees (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

It would be a mistake, however, if we were to invalidate the success of students, many of whom overcome substantial risk factors for success, simply because it does not directly match such preconceptions of what a college education represents (i.e., a bachelor’s degree). At the same time, it is inconsistent with the role community colleges play in economic mobility and social justice to assert that continual educational attainment is not an important component of a family-sustaining wage and intergenerational opportunity; all students must be prepared to embark on the next step of educational attainment should they choose to pursue it.

<sup>1</sup> Ewell (2007) defined meaningful progress outcomes on the way to degree attainment that include momentum points and milestone events in addition to traditional credential attainment.

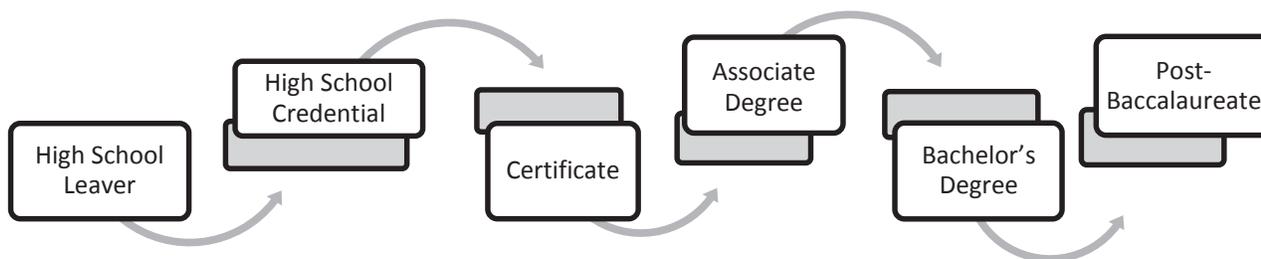


Figure 1. The Progression of Educational Attainment

This section outlines the value, in terms of private and social returns, associated with each level of attainment along the educational progression continuum. We focus on the progression of educational attainment to underscore the importance of completion at each stage of educational attainment.

### Earning a High School Credential

By 2018, 28% of all jobs will require a high school diploma (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). In fall 2010, 7.4% of adults aged 18 to 24 did not have a high school diploma or its equivalent (Snyder & Dillow, 2012). In addition, approximately 93 million adults in the United States lack basic literacy and numeracy skills (Kanter, 2012).<sup>2</sup> There is a need to increase the attainment of those without a high school credential; the necessary first step is getting these individuals a high school diploma or its equivalent. For those students who initially enrolled in a community college in the 2003–04 academic year without having earned a high school credential, only one in five earned a credential or was still enrolled after 6 years. Conversely, students who entered a community college with a high school diploma fared much better in college: 35.5% earned a credential and 19.6% were still enrolled after 6 years (NCES, 2012b).

While the low success rates of students who enter college without a high school diploma, certificate, or equivalency is not surprising, it is also unacceptable. There are efforts underway, such as Washington's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) and Minnesota's FasTRAC program, which

<sup>2</sup> The estimate was derived from a National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) First Look report published by the NCES (Kutner, Greenberg, & Baer, 2006).

promote success by contextualizing learning for students who show an ability to benefit from postsecondary education. Elementary and secondary schools have made the admirable commitment to implement common core standards and have partnered with higher education institutions to reconceptualize the way instruction is delivered in order to close persistent attainment and achievement gaps.

In addition, 691,296 students took the General Educational Development (GED; GED Testing Service, 2012) test in 2011, many at community colleges. The reasons students take the GED test are numerous, but the three most frequently cited are for personal satisfaction (47.8%), to get a better job (38.6%), and to attend a community college (31.0%; GED Testing Service, 2012). There are substantial economic returns to increasing an individual's level of attainment to obtaining a high school equivalency. Data indicate the financial impact of becoming a high school graduate, or its equivalent, on the student is a 41% increase in median weekly earnings compared to those without a high school diploma, a decrease in unemployment from 14.1% to 9.4%, and a 54% increase in taxes paid (see Table 1).

### The Impact of Earning a Certificate

It is projected that by 2018, 17% of all jobs will require a certificate or some college (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). This projection emphasizes that certificates have a substantial place in the postsecondary education landscape. Community colleges, and higher education in general (Horn & Li, 2009),

Table 1. Changes in Earnings, Estimated Taxes Paid, and Unemployment Associated with Each Change in Educational Attainment

Highest Level of Attainment	Weekly Earnings (2011)		Estimated Annual Taxes Paid (2011)		Unemployment Rate (2011)
	Median	% Increase from Prior Level	Amount	% Increase from Prior Level	
Less than High School	\$451	—	\$4,679	—	14.1%
High School or Equivalent	\$638	41%	\$7,330	54%	9.4%
Certificate/Some College	\$719	13%	\$8,949	18%	8.7%
Associate Degree	\$768	7%	\$9,435	8%	6.8%
Bachelor's Degree	\$1,053	37%	\$13,527	45%	4.9%

Sources: Baum, Ma, & Payea (2010); BLS (2012a).

Notes: Annual taxes paid were estimated by determining taxes as a percent of earnings for data presented in Figure 1.1 of Baum, Ma, & Payea (2010). The rates were then applied to median weekly earnings in 2011 reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2012a) after earnings were annualized (by multiplying by 52). These data present best estimates, tax rates may have changed.

have witnessed a significant increase in certificates, particularly among students of color. In 2009–10, community colleges awarded more than 425,000 certificates, constituting 40% of all credentials they awarded (Mullin, 2011). In terms of all postsecondary education (public and private), community colleges awarded 38% of all certificates in 2009–10.<sup>3</sup>

Regrettably, estimating the economic contribution of certificates is difficult. Reasons for this include, but are not limited to, that they are not currently included in international comparisons of educational attainment (Mullin, 2010) and only one government survey contains information on certificate attainment (Carnevale, Rose, & Hanson, 2012).<sup>4</sup> An analysis by Carnevale, Rose, and Hanson (2012) suggests that calculations of our nation's educational attainment would be increased by 5% if certificates were included in that count (with good reason; those with certificates had earnings 20% above those of the average high school graduate). Additionally, like other forms of educational attainment, certificates may not be the “highest level attained” and therefore may have been earned but are “trumped” by subsequent levels of education.

An estimate of the financial impact on the student of earning a certificate, by equating it to the level of “some college,” is a 13% increase in median weekly earnings compared to those with a high school diploma, a decrease in unemployment from 9.4% to 8.7%, and an 18% increase in taxes paid (see Table 1).<sup>5</sup> The economic returns of these awards may be substantial: 23% of bachelor's degree holders earn *less* than those with a license or certificate but not an associate degree (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011).

As mentioned earlier, community colleges are not the only institutions that award certificates. A study published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; Ifill & Radford, 2012) compared workforce outcomes for students who started at community colleges, for-profits, and private institutions. It found median earnings for certificate completers who started at community colleges were the highest of all comparable sectors of higher education. Furthermore, certificate completers were the most likely to believe their education helped them advance in their career, be satisfied with their job, and believe they had opportunities to apply their education at work.

<sup>3</sup> These data come from an AACC analysis of Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System data (NCES, 2012a).

<sup>4</sup> This issue has been under examination by a federal interagency workgroup since the winter of 2009. The Expert Panel to Support Federal Measures of Workforce Education and Credentialing was created to further facilitate this work; Mullin is affiliated with this panel (see <http://www.nces.ed.gov/surveys/gemena>).

<sup>5</sup> Carnevale, Rose, & Hanson (2012) found certificates holders earned 20% more, on average, than high school-educated workers. Because their analyses do not include the metrics discussed in this section, we apply the more conservative estimate reflected by “some college” in this brief.

## The Impact of Earning an Associate Degree

The next step on the path of educational progression is the associate degree. On average, the benefits of continued educational progression accrue to the individual and society on earning an associate degree after having earned a certificate. It is projected that, by 2018, 12% of all jobs will require an associate degree (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Associate degrees are often an unsung hero of postsecondary education. In fact, between 1970 and 2005, associate degrees were the fastest-growing type of degree earned (Hauptman, 2011), growing at twice the rate of bachelor's degrees. Furthermore, 25% of those with bachelor's degrees earn less than those with associate degrees (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011). More than 630,000 associate degrees were awarded by community colleges in 2009–10 (Mullin, 2011), representing 76% of all associate degrees in 2009–10.

There is significant financial impact for those who earn an associate degree on, for both the student and society. In 2011, median weekly earnings increased 7%, unemployment decreased from 8.7% to 6.8%, and taxes paid increased 8% increase when students moved from earning a certificate to earning an associate degree (see Table 1).

Like certificates, community colleges do not monopolize the associate degree market. A recent study published by the NCES (Ifill & Radford, 2012) found associate degree earners who started at a community college, compared to other institution types, earned more, and were the most likely to believe their education helped them advance in their career and to be satisfied with their job.

## The Impact of Earning a Bachelor's Degree

As demand for postsecondary education increases and the capability of institutions in other sectors to meet the need diminishes, community colleges are again stepping in to meet the needs of their communities. In 2009–10, public community colleges awarded 8,466 bachelor's degrees. The financial impact of earning a bachelor's degree on the student is a 37% increase in median weekly earnings, a decrease in unemployment from 8.7% to 6.8%, and a 45% increase in taxes paid as compared to associate degree earners (see Table 1).

## Conclusion

The data provided in this section demonstrate the private and social economic benefits associated with reaching each level of attainment.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the economic rewards, it may be worth noting that success breeds success, and the act of acknowledging

<sup>6</sup> There are any number of ways to calculate economic benefits, each way containing its own analytical assumptions and limitations. The methods presented in this brief are the most straightforward and commonly cited, albeit reframed as educational progression rather than being independent of each other. Readers interested in a more complex analysis of economic modeling for labor market and nonlabor market returns to postsecondary education are referred to McMahon (2009).

success through the awarding of a credential signifies the value of the student and validates his or her efforts. While the goal is to provide the opportunity for all students to excel at all levels of education, waiting to validate the effort and experiences of students with multiple risk factors associated with completion until they earn a bachelor's degree many years later is outdated and invalidating.

In sum, each step along the continuum of educational attainment provides economic returns to both society and the individual. As we move forward in our dialogue about the value of education, it serves us all well to remember the value of each step of attainment. At the same time we must also realize that the opportunity to attain higher levels through associate degrees, "regular" and applied baccalaureate degrees, and graduates studies no matter where one starts is what makes America's system unique and critically important. ♦

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# The Potential Value of a Reverse Transfer Associate Degree: Diverse Values and Perspectives

by Jason L. Taylor, OCCRL

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Higher education scholars have studied student transfer for decades, and a massive body of knowledge has accumulated about transfer students, state transfer policies, support services for transfer students, and transfer patterns. Situated in this body of work is the phenomenon of “reverse transfer.” In her seminal piece on transfer student patterns, Townsend (2001) defined reverse transfer students as “four-year students who transfer to two-year colleges” (p. 33). This definition implies that students begin at a four-year institution and physically transfer to a two-year institution, including transferring credits from the four-year institution to the two-year institution. This is the predominant definition of reverse transfer in the literature (also see Townsend & Denver, 1999), but is not the definition relevant to this article.

Recently, the term “reverse transfer” has been adopted in institutional practice (Ekal & Krebs, 2011) and state policy (Bautsch, 2013), referring to a different phenomenon than Townsend (2001) described. This new reverse transfer definition focuses on students who physically transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution who do not earn an associate degree; then credits earned at the four-year institution are transferred back to the two-year institution for degree conferral. As Bragg, Cullen, Bennett, & Ruud note, “In this model, it is the credits that are reverse transferred rather than the students” (p. 20). This model happens in two-steps: 1) students transfer from the two-year to the four-year institution; and 2) credits transfer from the four-year to the two-year institution to fulfill associate degree requirements. It is this model of “reverse transfer” being pursued by 12 states as part of the “Credit When It’s Due” (CWID) initiative funded by five private foundations (see [http://www.luminafoundation.org/newsroom/news\\_releases/2012-10-10.html](http://www.luminafoundation.org/newsroom/news_releases/2012-10-10.html)).

This article focuses on the specific idea of reverse transfer relevant to CWID and considers why reverse transfer may or may not be a valuable endeavor from four different perspectives. The perspectives examined include: student, institution (community colleges and universities), system (the educational system), and employer. Because this form of reverse transfer is relatively new, this discussion is framed from the perspective of the ‘potential’ value of the associate degree (or lack thereof) and addresses several primary hypotheses that form the basis for reverse transfer implementation. Some counter-examples are also provided that address ways in which the value of reverse transfer might be challenged. As the research partner for

the CWID initiative, the OCCRL research team<sup>1</sup> will, through the course of this research project, directly address many of the hypotheses discussed in this article and contribute to the evidence base on transfer. Further, there are many dimensions of these perspectives worthy of exploration, but only a few of the most salient perspectives are reviewed here.

## Students

The value of the reverse transfer associate degree (referred to as “RT associate degree”) to students is arguably the most important. There are at least two ways in which this type of degree is valuable. First is the notion that the associate degree is a milestone during the progression to a bachelor’s degree and that receipt of an RT associate degree after transfer can motivate students to persist toward the bachelor’s degree. This logic is partially supported by descriptive data suggesting that a higher proportion of transfer students with an associate degree also receive a bachelor’s degree, relative to students who do not obtain an associate degree before transfer (National Student Clearinghouse, 2012). Most studies that predict transfer student degree attainment point to the importance of students’ academic history, demographic characteristics, and the university environment (Bailey & Weininger, 2002; Koker & Hendel, 2003; Wang, 2009) and many do not account for the relative influence of an associate degree. Very few studies have examined the relative predictive power of the associate degree on bachelor’s degree attainment after controlling for other variables (see, for example, Ehrenberg & Smith, 2004). None of these studies, however, address the relative influence of students’ associate degrees *after transfer* on bachelor’s degree attainment. Program data from a pilot program between El Paso Community College and The University of Texas at El Paso show that transfer student retention increased 9% between fall 2009 and fall 2010 (Ekal & Krebs, 2011). These data are promising but they do not suggest a causal relationship, especially since the University of at Texas El Paso also improved transfer student services during this same time period.

A second hypothesis pertains to providing credentials to students who drop out after transfer and do not complete a bachelor’s degree. If students do not earn a bachelor’s degree at a university and if they fulfilled associate degree requirements, it would seem logical that having an associate degree that is recognized and valued would benefit them in the labor market. Indeed, labor market data show that students with an associate

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<sup>1</sup> OCCRL’s CWID research team consists of Debra D. Bragg, Principal Investigator, and researchers Cari Bishop, Julia Panke Makela, Collin M. Ruud, and Jason L. Taylor.

degree have higher lifetime earnings, on average, than students with some college but no credential (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011). Thus, students receiving a RT associate degree who do not earn a bachelor's degree are likely to experience higher lifetime earnings than those students who drop out of a four-year institution with no credential.

Although these are two plausible reasons to believe the RT associate degree is valuable to students, there is potential that students may not receive the associate degree when given the option. For example, an important aspect of reverse transfer policy that is being adopted by states that are participating in Credit When It's Due (CWID) is whether students will opt-in or opt-out of the reverse transfer process. Will students who attend institutions participating in CWID want an RT associate degree simply because they are eligible to receive it? For various reasons (e.g., financial aid eligibility, cost, status of degrees), students may or may not decide to accept a degree en route to the baccalaureate.

## Community Colleges

From an institutional perspective, there would appear to be value to community colleges in the implementation of RT associate degree programs and policies. The first and most obvious is the contribution to the college completion agenda (including state and national goals). That is, awarding RT associate degrees can boost institutional attainment of college completion goals. From this perspective, the value of RT associate degrees to community colleges is potentially significant because awarding degrees to transfer students aligns with institutional (and state) priorities related to college completion. Related to this is the state policy context surrounding performance-based funding. Depending on states' performance funding formulas, conferring more associate degrees via reverse transfer may improve institutional performance and create financial advantages under states' performance-based funding models. For example, if RT associate degrees advantage community colleges operating under new performance-based funding formulas, then reverse transfer may be of value to community colleges. However, there is also potential for performance-based funding to unsettle cooperative arrangements between community colleges and universities that are needed to award RT associate degrees, since incentivizing community colleges without recognizing the role of universities in awarding RT credit does not distribute the benefits equitably. Several states associated with CWID are working actively to identify ways to distribute the benefits of performance-based funding to their two- and four-year partners equitably and fairly.

A final hypothesis from the institutional perspective is the potential value to institutional morale and the desire of community colleges to see their students' success realized after students leave the community college. Despite the strong legacy of community colleges' transfer function, these institutions are often criticized for their low associate degree completion rates, which

do not account for students who transfer out before receiving a degree. The implementation of RT associate degree policies is an opportunity for community colleges to see their students' success realized in the form of a credential as well as receive credit for their contribution to students' completion.

Whereas there is potential value to students who begin their higher education at community colleges, we do not yet fully understand how and to what extent reverse transfer efforts impact students' degree completion and contribute to institutional- and state-level college completion goals. How many students will benefit from RT associate degrees in the states participating in CWID? According to a 2009 report from the Census Bureau, approximately 21% of the population 25 years and over have some college but no degree, which translates into about 43 million people (United States Census Bureau, 2009). These large numbers suggest many students have college credits with no credential, and while the proportion of these students who have engaged in transfer and acquired sufficient credits to qualify for an associate degree is unknown, some may be candidates for RT associate degrees.

Further, many institutions, states, and accrediting agencies have policies and practices related to 'residency requirements' that require a minimum number of credits be earned from a single institution in order for that institution to confer a degree. Assuming this residency requirement applies to RT associate degrees, students will need to meet this residency requirement to be awarded an RT associate degree from a sending community college. Institutions involved in CWID states are working cooperatively with accrediting agencies to determine how best to satisfy these requirements to award RT associate degrees.

## Universities

The institutional value of the RT associate degree to universities rests primarily on the assumption that receiving an associate degree contributes to students' persistence and completion at the university. If this assumption holds true, universities will likely benefit from higher bachelor's completion rates for transfer students, an outcome that similarly aligns with the institutional, state, and national policy goals previously mentioned. This is an area where states' performance-based funding models can incentivize four-year institutional performance relative to RT associate degrees. Related, universities might also value the greater number of transfer student enrollments that accompany implementation of RT associate degree policies, with a promise of making credits count for students and potentially enlarging the overall pool of transfer students (assuming universities have the capacity and desire for a larger pool of transfer students).

Despite the potential value to universities mentioned above, states' performance-based funding policies may disincentivize the extent to which universities desire to participate in RT associate degree programs. For example, if universities do not receive 'credit' for their contribution to students' RT associate degrees,

why should they participate? Indeed, a theme emerging from the initial qualitative data analysis of the OCCRL team is the notion of ‘who gets credit?’ From this perspective, the name “Credit When It’s Due” applies credit not only to students but to institutions as well, especially in the larger political climate of institutional accountability and transparency. If students are awarded an RT associate degree as a result of a package of credits that is accumulated from both the sending community college and the receiving university, this is a situation that lends itself well to the argument that both community colleges and universities should receive credit for degree conferral.

## The Educational System

The previous discussion of who gets credit leads naturally to the value of RT associate degrees to the educational system. That is, the implementation of RT associate degree policies has potential shared value to a state educational system. In a recent blog post, Debra Bragg observed the potential value of CWID to the educational system and the potential to improve state transfer and articulation policy overall. She notes that, “[T]he potential benefit from CWID is not merely the credentialing function that it intends to improve – which is no small matter, of course – but in the potential of CWID to have larger and longer-term effects on transfer overall” (Bragg, 2013).

Recent evidence from the National Student Clearinghouse and a Project on Academic Success at Indiana University shows that, among a cohort of students who first entered college in fall 2006, approximately one third of the students changed institutions (i.e., transferred) during a five-year period (Hossler et al., 2012). In other words, many students are mobile in their post-secondary experience. State transfer and articulation policies and general education policies have arguably nurtured this mobility through incremental policy changes that have eased the transfer of general education credits, improved the transfer of discipline-specific pathways, promoted transfer students’ standing at receiving universities, created transfer-friendly websites and online student portals, and generally made it easier for students to transfer credits among institutions (for example, see Kisker & Wagoner, 2012; Rifkin, 1996; Roksa & Keith, 2009). Whereas these policies have arguably promoted transfer for students who begin at a community college, they may have unintentionally disincentivized student completion of the associate degree at the community college. From a systems perspective, RT associate degrees address this completion and credentialing gap.

## Employers

A final perspective of relevance is the value of the RT associate degree to employers. Presumably, the value of an associate degree is evidenced by the labor market preference given to potential employees with associate degrees relative to potential employees with some college and no degree. Referred to as the

‘sheepskin effect,’ data suggest that the labor market payoffs are higher for students with an associate degree relative to those with the same number of credits but no degree (Kane & Rouse, 1995). The value is also evidenced by employers’ preferences for the knowledge, skills and dispositions associated with completion of a college credential. In an unpublished Lumina Foundation report based on focus groups with employers and educational leaders, numerous employers perceived the additional value of an associate degree relative to students with some college but no degree. The logic, so it is argued, is that by receiving a degree, associate degree holders demonstrate a commitment to establishing and achieving goals, and they display a strong work ethic that is valued by U.S. employers.

## Concluding Thoughts

There are several ways in which states’ reverse transfer policies could manifest in the next few years, and the educational community is poised to see how this ‘reverse transfer’ innovation impacts students, community colleges, universities, the educational system, and employment. This impact will partially reflect the extent to which value is derived from these diverse stakeholders. As with any social policy, the potential effects cannot be precisely predicted but several hypothesis associated with reverse transfer are intriguing and worthy of attention. Of course there are also potential drawbacks that could disincentivize two- and four-year institutions from participating and discourage students from receiving RT associate degrees. Our OCCRL team will continue to explore and test these hypotheses as we proceed with our CWID research, including understanding how states’ implementation approaches to reverse transfer may influence the impact of reverse transfer policies and practices on students’ collegiate experiences and educational and employment outcomes. ♦

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# Rethinking Asian American Students' Educational Pathways

by Sujung Kim, OCCRL

**Editors' Note:** This article is a copy of a brief released by Ms. Kim as part of the Insights on Equity and Outcomes series released by OCCRL's Pathways to Results Project. You may access the brief directly at <http://occrll.illinois.edu/files/Projects/ptr/insights3/pdf>

Among the nearly 30,000 Asian American students<sup>1</sup> who were enrolled in public higher education institutions in the Fall 2010 in Illinois, more than half were enrolled in public community colleges (Illinois Board of Higher Education, 2011). Despite these large numbers, little is known about these students. Stereotypical views of Asian American students portray them as extraordinarily bright and exceptionally hard working. Like any stereotype, there is some truth to this perception; however, many Asian American students face difficulties attending college due to their low-income status and differences in cultures and languages from other student populations attending college. Although many of these students would benefit from additional support to attend college, Asian American students tend not to be considered a minority group that needs special support services under Affirmative Action (Suzuki, 2002). Rather, they are seen as the model minority (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2008; Suzuki, 2002), which leads a wide range of stakeholders, including high school and college counselors and instructors, to overlook their special circumstances. In order for these students to experience success in college and career pathways, their special circumstances need to be understood and addressed (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2008).

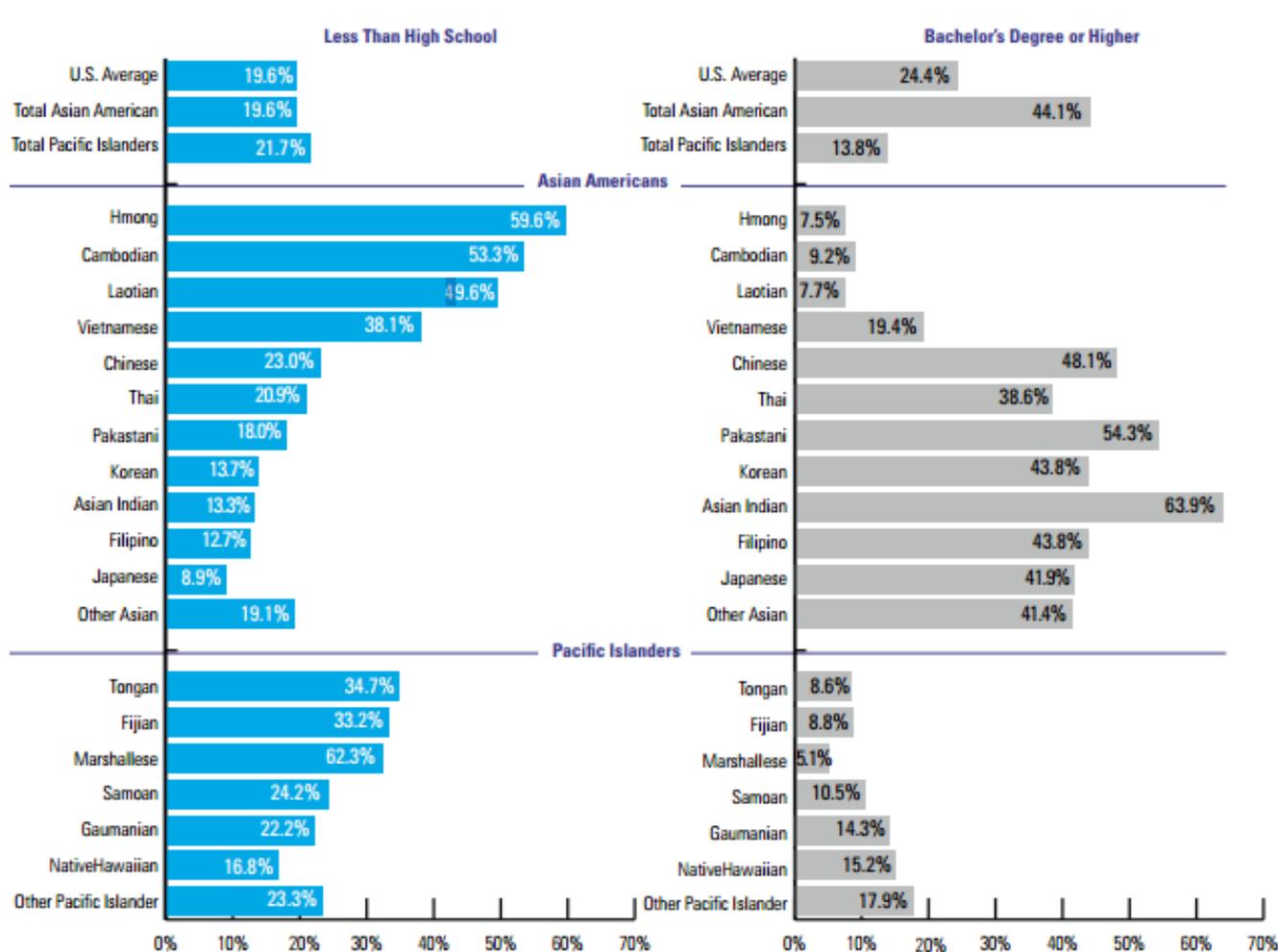
To raise awareness of institutional supports that Asian American students need to navigate their chosen pathways, I first examine the myth of the "model minority", which is a significant bias that contributes to the neglect of services for Asian American students. Second, I discuss unique features of social capital within institutional settings and ethnic communities that would benefit Asian American students and their families. By social capital, I am referring to social networks that are linked to important education information on institutional supports and opportunities (Bourdieu, 1985; Portes, 2003). These networks are highlighted because of their potential to impact the academic and career success of Asian American students.

<sup>1</sup> In the data book published by the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), the category of Asian students based on "race or national origin" indicates Asian Americans. Non-resident aliens are reported separately.

## The Myth of "Model Minority"

The myth of the "model minority" suggests Asian Americans are a very successful minority group in terms of their academic achievement and social upward mobility, regardless of their socio-economic status. Their hard work and high value for education contributes to this stereotypical perspective. As the result, all groups of Asian American students, including those who have low-income immigrant parents, are regarded as being successful in assimilating into society, including assimilating into college. However, numerous researchers (Ancheta, 2000; CARE, 2008; Chon, 1995; Lee, 1996; Lew, 2003, 2007; Louie, 2001; Pang, Kiang, & Pak, 2004; Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999; Yang, 2003) show that Asian Americans' lives are far more diverse and complicated than is commonly understood. The view that all Asian Americans move up the social and economic ladder is very problematic. In fact, there is no single Asian experience, so the monolithic image of one "model minority" should not be applied to all Asian Americans.

Figure 1 shows the range of educational attainment among various Asian American sub-groups is large. The average percentage of the US population that is 25 years and older that has less than high school diploma is 19.6% compared to the average percentage of 59.6% for Hmong, 53.1% for Cambodian, 49.6% for Laotian, 38.1% for Vietnamese, 23% for the Chinese, and 20.9% for Thai students. Also, the percentage who earned a Bachelors' degree or higher is lower among the Hmong (7.5%), the Cambodian (9.2%), the Laotian (7.7%), and the Vietnamese (19.4%) students than the US average (24.4%). Taking these statistics into account, we can see how the "model minority" stereotype does not accurately reflect the educational attainment of sub-groups of Asian American students.



Note: Percent distribution of population 25 years and older.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Summary File 1, 2000.

Figure 1. Educational Attainment among Asian Americans, 2000

## The Definition of Social Capital

Social capital can be broadly understood in two different settings: (a) in school settings, and (b) within communities. Boudieu (1985) defines capital as “accumulated labor and has a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being” (p. 241). In this vein, first, social capital at educational institutions can be defined as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248). Extending this concept to Asian American students and their parents, social capital in school settings then works as a direct channel to access important educational information, resources and supports. Moreover, Bourdieu (1985) observes that social capital is not freely given in the form of membership in a school setting, rather it requires efforts by institutional personnel to establish social networks with students and their parents. As such, students’ and parents’ access to resources and information is expanded through social networks formed with the assistance of school counselors, instructors, and/or administrators.

At a community setting, Coleman (1988) defines social capital as consisting of “closed systems of advantageous networks in a community, which allow parents to establish norms and reinforce each other’s sanctioning of the children” (p. 241). Furthermore, based on their research on a Chinese American community, Coleman and Hoffer (1987) denote the significance of strong social closure that ties the members of a community to observe certain social norms and rules. Within a community exhibiting closure, Coleman and Hoffer claim that social capital works as a public good, which benefits all members of the community. However, without social closure, there is no active interaction between parents and their children, and/or other community members. Moreover, there is no exchange of educational information or advice on parenting among community members. For this reason (and others mentioned earlier), it is important to understand Asian American students’ and their parents’ social networks both in the school setting and within their ethnic communities.

### Reexamination of Asian Americans’ Social Capital

Karp, O’Gara, and Hughes (2008) point out that although community colleges provide low tuition and open access to postsecondary educational opportunities, especially to those students with low socio-economic status, gaps in educational opportunities still exist. When students drop out or withdraw from their programs of study, it is easy to blame the students rather than the system that failed to meet their needs. Asian American students and their parents who have limited social networks within high schools and community colleges have difficulty accessing even the most basic information and transition services from high school and community college personnel (Kao, 2007; Karp, O’Gara, & Hughes, 2008; Lew, 2003, 2007; also see Abelmann, 2009; Sohn & Wang, 2006). Regarding this, Karp, O’Gara, and Hughes (2008) explain that, when the relationship between students and institutional personnel (i.e. counselors, instructors, administrators, and other staff) is depersonalized, students tend to receive poor information.

Because their connections to educational resources are often weak, Asian American students and their parents are often depend on social networks operating within co-ethnic communities to get academic and career information (Abelmann, 2011; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999; Yang, 2003). Notwithstanding the benefits of their ethnic networks, researchers point out that access to relevant information varies according to students’ socio-economic status (Abelmann, 2011; Lee, 1996; Lew, 2007). For example, among Korean American students who are considered a group having a high percentage of B.A. degrees (see figure 1), low-income Korean American students had substantially different experiences with academic achievement and social networks than students from (upper) middle-class families. Lew’s study (2007) of Korean immigrant youths in a GED program in New York showed these youths had to take care of academic decisions by themselves. Their

parents lacked economic resources, hampering their capability to get educational and career information and limiting the time they spent supporting their children’s education. Lew (2007) mentioned that “poor Korean immigrant youths lacked strong social capital and ties to co-ethnic networks that sanction social norms which might be beneficial for their academic success” (p. 379).

With respect to careers, rather than pursue careers that interest them, middle-class Asian American students tend to follow their family’s career choices, or follow older counterparts among their family members or within their ethnic communities (Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999). Thus Tang, Fouad and Smith suggest that counselors need to consider Asian American students’ family backgrounds and understand parental expectations and family obligations. Moreover, qualitative research on Chinese Americans and Korean Americans shows that low-income students struggle with low-academic achievement and even drop out of high school (Book, 2004; Lee, 1996; Lew, 2007). Again, these findings contrast with stereotypes of Chinese Americans and Korean Americans who are thought to be universally successful in their academic achievements and upward social mobility.

### Conclusion

In this brief, I examined the myth of “model minority” pertaining to Asian American students, which undermines their diversity. The paper also points to problems that Asian Americans experience due to their lack of social networks, and it discusses the differences that sub-groups of Asian American students experience with respect to their social networks within ethnic and socio-economic groups.<sup>2</sup> Overall, it is important for high school and community college personnel to recognize the diversity of the Asian American student population, their lack of social networks in educational settings, including high schools and community colleges, and the impact of the students’ socio-economic status on their academic success and career choices. ♦

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<sup>2</sup> However, there is very limited research which examines the differences of social capital between low-income and upper/middle-class Asian American families.

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# Barriers to Retention and Degree Completion of African American Males in Illinois

by Edmund Graham III, OCCRL

**Editors' Note:** This article is a copy of a brief released by Mr. Graham as part of the Insights on Equity and Outcomes series released by OCCRL's Pathways to Results Project. You may access the brief directly at <http://occrll.illinois.edu/files/Projects/ptr/insights2.pdf>

## Introduction

Elimination of equity gaps and increasing academic outcomes are growing priorities in higher education. A substantial amount of the onus to address equity gaps and outcomes is being placed on community colleges as they have been a point of access into postsecondary education for traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations for many years. President Barack Obama has expressed his interest in closing equity gaps and increasing academic outcomes by setting a lofty goal for community colleges to produce five million additional graduates by the year 2020 (Obama & Biden, 2010). The Lumina Foundation has a goal to increase the number of individuals with high quality college degrees and credentials to 60% by the year 2025 (Mertsosis, 2008). The state of Illinois has also joined in the quest to increase academic outcomes by 60% by the year 2025 via Complete College America. It is evident that there are commitments to eliminating gaps in equity and increasing academic outcomes and using community colleges as a means to do so.

## Purpose

This brief focuses on equity gaps and outcomes for African American males in community colleges in an effort to inform practitioners implementing Pathways to Results (PTR) on ways to eliminate barriers and ultimately assist these students through college to degree completion. National statistics show about 70% of high school students enroll in some sort of postsecondary education or training within two years of completing high school, with only about half of those students actually completing a credential (Bragg & Durham, 2012). Those percentages decrease substantially when looking at African American males, with approximately 35-50% enrolling in college and only half of those completing (Strayhorn, 2011). According to Advance Illinois (2012), African Americans accounted for only 9% of all Illinois community college graduates, whereas White students accounted for 24%. Although this information is not disaggregated by gender, African American men were awarded half the amount of degrees in 2008, 2009, and 2010 as their female counterparts in the state of Illinois (Illinois Board of Higher Education, 2012). In that same report, 63% of first-year African American students were taking developmental courses, whereas 43% of White students were taking developmental

courses (Advance Illinois, 2012). Because racial and gender gaps continue to widen between African American males and other groups, it is necessary that attention is given to this underrepresented population of students.

## Challenges and Barriers Faced by African American Males

Because African American males are more likely to pursue higher education via community colleges than other types of postsecondary institutions (Harper & Griffin, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012; Wood & Turner, 2011), it is important to understand the challenges and barriers that affect their access and ability to persist through to degree completion. African American males encounter myriad barriers to access, many of which are related to social capital, family responsibility, and the internalization of negative stereotypes (Harper & Griffin, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012; Wood & Turner, 2011). Given the life challenges many of these students face before entering college, it is important that these students not be characterized from a deficit perspective. By identifying their assets and finding ways to leverage resources to cultivate the skills and knowledge they bring to the postsecondary setting, educators can close equity gaps and assist these students to complete their college degrees. In better understanding the barriers that African American males face, practitioners can begin to develop interventions that are relevant and meaningful to supporting the success of this population of students.

## Social Capital

There is a significant relationship between socioeconomic status and college aspirations (Harper & Griffin, 2011; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, Perna, 2008; Strayhorn, 2009). Although it is not exactly clear to these authors how socioeconomic status (SES) impacts aspirations and enrollments, evidence shows a correlation between admission behaviors and access trends (Harper & Griffin, 2011; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Strayhorn, 2009). Using a criterion often used to define SES, parent's income and education, African Americans lag behind their White counterparts. African Americans experience disparities in homeownership and wealth accumulation, owning fewer homes with lower median values. They are outnumbered by Whites almost 3 to 1 in non-inherited wealth (Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009).

Additionally, neighborhoods occupied by African Americans are often located in districts with lower per-student expenditures (Harper & Griffin, 2011). Students with higher SES backgrounds have access to more social capital and are provided valuable information and assistance that facilitates their college preparation and competitive advantage. This social capital provides students with college-going advantages, including access to tutors, counselors, college visits, and advanced college preparatory courses (Harper & Griffin, 2011; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Strayhorn, 2009). Students from higher socioeconomic families are more likely to be able to pay for college whereas students from lower socioeconomic families are more likely to share the cost with parents or assume the entire cost of college, especially in the current economic climate when tuition is rising so rapidly (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008).

### Family Responsibility

Family responsibility has been shown to have an impact on Black males' ability to persist at community colleges (Strayhorn, 2012). Those responsibilities can consist of children and other dependents, parents and siblings, even ancestors and non-biological family members (Strayhorn, 2011; Wood 2012). Wood (2012) found that the odds of Black males dropping out of community colleges due to family responsibilities were 394% greater than their White counterparts and 453% greater when controlling for variables, such as age, full-time status, college grade point average (GPA), etc. Those odds are consistent with Strayhorn's (2012) finding that Black males value family, and that conflicting responsibilities between family and school contribute to their stopping out to tend to family responsibilities. Although Black males are more likely to identify family responsibility as a reason for dropping out, they are less likely to do so if they persist past their first year (Wood, 2012). Knowing this, it is imperative that resources are made available early in the college experience to assist Black males with their family responsibilities.

### Internalization of Negative Stereotypes

Along with the aforementioned barriers, African American males are often labeled with negative connotations, such as "at-risk", disadvantaged, endangered, and in crisis (Harper & Griffin, 2011; Strayhorn, 2009). They often lack access to, are not informed of, or are discouraged from taking advanced level courses in high school, especially in math and science (Harper & Griffin, 2011; Rowan-Kenyon, et al., 2008; Strayhorn, 2009), which contributes to the characterization of Black males as being under or unprepared to handle college level coursework. Frequent negative encounters can cause African American men to internalize such stereotypes that result in regression and apathy toward the educational system (Steele, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). This internalization manifests in "self-defeating" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 359) and "self-threatening behavior" (Steele, 1997, p. 614), which negatively impacts their ability to persist.

### What Can Practitioners Do?

Practitioners should be intentional in addressing issues of equity. They should implement initiatives and deploy resources in ways that can positively impact student outcomes. There are several ways practitioners can assist African American males in overcoming barriers.

1. Create an early detection or warning system (Wood, 2012) by collaborating with institutional personnel (e.g., faculty, administrators, counselors) to identify signs of departure and ensure that resources are available to help these students to overcome barriers and persist.
2. Consider bridge programs, pre-entrance counseling, and mandatory orientations (Strayhorn, 2009; Wood, 2012) to aid in setting student expectations for college. These programs and activities often begin by assessing where students are before they enter college, orienting them to the academic process (e.g., registration, financial aid, time management, etc.), and acclimating them to the culture of the institution, department, or specific program.
3. Provide additional resources such as childcare, evening and weekend tutoring and advising (Strayhorn, 2011). Doing so can help student affairs personnel assist in eliminating barriers for those students whose family commitments and schedules conflict with accessing these services during regular business hours.
4. Offer training to faculty who may not have experience in working with racial and ethnic minorities (Wood & Turner, 2011). Faculty can help to reduce the effects of stereotype threat by proactively engaging and encouraging African American males early on and consistently throughout their postsecondary education experiences.
5. Develop formal or informal mentoring programs (Wood, 2012). The mentoring of African American males not only assists in reducing stereotype threat, but also contributes to the development of self-efficacy through building meaningful relationships between African American males, faculty and other students.

Without pointed efforts to reduce equity gaps in education, African American males will continue to lag behind. However, practitioners can begin to close equity gaps by being intentional in their efforts, working collaboratively with different institutional personnel, and remaining consistent in their efforts to recruit, retain and ultimately assist these students through college to degree completion. ♦

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## Recent Doctoral Research on Community Colleges

by Debra D. Bragg, OCCRL

The College of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has a long history of preparing doctoral students and researchers who investigate critical issues facing community colleges. The following abstracts summarize the research of nine recent doctoral graduates and address issues pertaining to faculty, students and the curriculum. Readers are encouraged to contact the authors directly to receive additional information about these studies or related manuscripts and resources.

### Considering Practitioner Influence on Student Success: Exploring Community College Faculty Funds of Knowledge

Michael Babb, Ed.D.

In the context of persistently low retention rates for underrepresented students of higher education, the role of the practitioner in the academic success scholarship is largely understudied. There is comparatively little scholarship on the ways in which the practitioner influences the student's experiences in college and therefore influences their outcomes. This study addresses this knowledge gap by conducting research at the community college, often the institution of choice for underrepresented students, which explores faculty (the practitioner who most often engages with the student in the academic setting) perceptions and ideas of the essential knowledge needed to be a community college instructor and the ways in which it includes students. The research design is qualitative multiple case study using cross-case data analysis. The study was conducted at a Midwestern community college and through purposeful criterion and snow-ball sampling nine full-time faculty members were identified and successfully recruited to participate. The study used funds of knowledge, a framework located in the sociocultural scholarship of teaching and learning, which provides for the social construction of knowledge in the educational environment. Data collection methods included face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, observation of the classroom setting, and review of syllabi. Two findings emerged out of the analysis of data and themes that reveal perceptions of essential knowledge of community college faculty. The first finding reveals, paradoxically, that while faculty perception of essential knowledge includes ability to meaningfully engage students, they often have an inability to do so. The second finding reveals that faculty perception of essential knowledge includes predispositions about students that seem to formulate out of the local context. The third finding goes to the ways in which faculty knowledge is formed. This finding reveals the local context of faculty exerts a significant influence on the development of their funds of knowledge.

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### "First I'd Put Some Windows In This School": A Critical Race Ethnography of the Illinois College and Career Readiness Pilot Program

Erin L. Castro, Ph.D.

In 2007, the Illinois General Assembly passed The Illinois College and Career Readiness (CCR) Pilot Program (Public Act 095-0694) in an attempt to reduce statewide remediation at the community college level and address the misalignment between high school graduation expectations and the requirements to be successful in college and career. In this dissertation I investigate the relationship between one pilot site, Shawnee Community College, and one of its chronically underserved partner high schools, Cairo Junior and Senior High School (CJSHS). Using critical race ethnography and methodology influenced by feminist epistemology, I seek to understand how students, faculty, and staff experience life at CJSHS in order to contextualize program implementation. The objectives of this study are to examine how the community of CJSHS understands programming intent on assisting students in preparation for postsecondary education and documenting the extent to which the program is grounded in the lived realities of the community. Using critical race theory, I show how the rationale that students "lack motivation" is rooted in cultural deficit ideology and argue that policymakers and practitioners need to understand the historicized and racialized contexts into which policies intervene. Using extensive observations, individual and focus group interviews, as well as historical, legal, and educational documents from local, state, federal, philanthropic, and Civil Rights agencies, I document how, while not explicit in the policy itself, the Illinois CCR Pilot Program became racialized in its reception at CJSHS, thereby posing challenges to successful policy implementation for students. I document how structural, institutional, and logistical barriers pose challenges for students in their ability to participate in the Program, and demonstrate how a history of educational neglect contributed to the ways in which the school community came to view education policies and education buildings with suspicion over time. I argue that the Intervention Program was not grounded in reality of CJSHS because it did not account for the educational experiences of the school community and therefore, future efforts need to be more energetic, purposeful, engaged, and reality-

based. Moreover, they must acknowledge that students of color living in poverty are at a disadvantage in achieving readiness for college and career not because of something they did, but because of what they have been denied.

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### **Community College Faculty Attitudes and Concerns about Student Learning Outcomes Assessment**

*Janet S. Fontenot, Ed.D.*

The purpose of this study was to identify the attitudes and concerns community college faculty have about student learning outcomes assessment and to further explore the relationship between these factors and faculty levels of involvement in assessment activities. Combining the conceptual frameworks of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) and the framework developed by the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement Project, an online survey was developed to measure the attitudes, concerns, and levels of involvement in student learning outcomes assessment of full-time Illinois community college faculty. The sample for the study was full-time teaching faculty employed at four Illinois community colleges participating in the Higher Learning Commission's Academy for Assessment of Student Learning. A Principal Component Extraction with Varimax Rotation was conducted on the constructs of faculty attitudes and levels of involvement. These PCs were used as variables for the multivariate analysis. Principal components associated with the faculty attitudes construct were Benefits and Reluctance. The principal components identified for the involvement construct were Classroom or Instruction, Institutional, and External Involvement. Demographic variables of tenure status, academic discipline, and number of years employed at the institution were examined to identify any differences that may occur between faculty in these groups. Results indicated faculty were moderately involved in student learning outcomes assessment at the classroom or instructional level but their involvement declined at the institutional level and with external assessment activities. Moderate to weak relationships were identified in faculty attitudes toward the benefits of assessment based on the academic discipline in which faculty members perform their primary teaching responsibilities. This result suggests there are differences between the hard-pure (e.g., biology, chemistry, math) and both the soft-pure (e.g., communications, English, psychology, social sciences) and soft-applied disciplines (e.g., accounting, business, allied health, education) on the subscales of Classroom or Instructional and Institutional involvement. Faculty teaching in the hard-pure discipline reported lower levels of involvement in student learning outcomes assessment at the classroom or instructional and institutional

levels than faculty teaching in the soft-pure or soft-applied disciplines. The hard-pure discipline also reported lower levels of involvement for the Institutional subscale. Faculty concerns about assessment were categorized using the CBAM protocol suggested by Hall et al. (1973) and the responses were categorized primarily as Stage 2, personal concerns; Stage 3, management concerns; and Stage 4, consequence concerns. Findings showed faculty were concerned about the amount of time it takes to conduct assessment, the perception that assessment was being conducted primarily to meet compliance mandates, and a distrust of how assessment results were used within the institution. These concerns were not related to demographics of tenure status, academic discipline, and number of years employed at the institution.

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### **The Impact of Credit-Based Transition Programs on Changing the Educational Aspirations of High School Seniors**

*Wendy Lou Howerter, Ed.D.*

This correlational study samples twelfth grade (senior) students in one central Midwest high school and examines their participation in credit-based transition programs and their changes in educational aspirations. Surveys and community college data are used to collect quantitative data to address six research questions. Using Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) College Choice Model and Hossler and Stage's (1992) focus on the predisposition phase, the researcher studied the impact of participation in credit-based transition programs during the senior year in high school. Controlling for initial senior-year aspirations and participation in dual credit during the junior-year in high school along with other variables known to influence educational aspirations, final senior-year aspirations were compared for students participating in academic dual credit and CTE dual credit, and non-participants. Descriptive analysis of student characteristics by type of dual credit participation and non-participation is presented. Multiple linear regression including interaction effects for gender and race/ethnicity with participation in senior-year dual credit (academic dual credit or CTE dual credit) was used to determine if aspirations could be changed during the senior year while controlling for student characteristics, significant others' influence, and extracurricular activities. Results showed female students and non-white students benefit most from participating in senior-year CTE dual credit. Parents' education was a significant variable in the model. Interaction terms for income status with participation in senior-year dual credit were not significant variables in the model. Results provide insights into the relationship of student

participation in credit-based transition courses and student educational aspirations, which is important to policy makers, education professionals, parents, and students.

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### **The Role of Signaling from a Student Standpoint on Math Remediation in the Transition from High School to Community Colleges**

*Jervaise Simpson McDaniel, Ed.D.*

The purpose of this study is to obtain the perspective of students attending a rural community college in a Midwestern state regarding why they were placed into a remedial algebra course when enrolling directly out of high school. The study uses the concept of signaling to examine how students interpret signals from sources such as counselors, teachers, peers, and policies. Understanding how students use the plethora of signals sent from various sources, including what they discern to be signals, may help community colleges address the growing problem of remediation. This study has implications for K-12 and higher education by shedding light on the information students use to prepare for college.

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### **College Teaching Behaviors of Community College Faculty**

*Ryen Nagle, Ed.D.*

Teaching behaviors of faculty are important for community college students who rely on the faculty-student interaction for academic integration to the institution, which itself is crucial to student persistence. Researchers John Braxton and Alan Bayer documented a set of teaching performance norms among community college faculty. However, their sample did not represent the nearly two-thirds of faculty teaching in community colleges as part-time faculty, faculty teaching career and technical education (CTE) courses in the community college, or the growing number of secondary teachers serving as dual credit faculty. In fact, the various studies of teaching norms across higher education have only focused on faculty in full-time, tenure-line roles (or graduate assistants aspiring to such positions) and have not accounted for the well-documented restructuring of the faculty profession. This study addressed these shortcomings through a cross-sectional administration of the Collegiate Teaching Behaviors Inventory instrument to full-time, part-time, and dual credit faculty in three Illinois community colleges with membership in the National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment

Partnerships. A factor analysis was used to ascertain normative patterns of college teaching behaviors espoused by faculty, analysis of variance was employed to study differences in norm espousal across faculty type and academic discipline, and a multiple regression analysis was used to study the effect of pertinent individual faculty characteristics. The findings of the study demonstrate higher espousal levels and partial overlap in the types of norms held by the full range of community college faculty as compared to previous studies on college teaching norms. Within the different faculty groups of the community college, individuals from high school teaching backgrounds and CTE faculty tended to sanction norms at higher levels than other groups. However, variables such as the context in which one primarily teaches (dual credit or non-dual credit), level of highest degree earned, and years of teaching experience in different contexts were related to levels of faculty espousal of teaching performance norms. Collectively, the findings of the study (a) offer evidence which sometimes support and sometimes conflict with norm espousal theories developed by John Braxton and Alan Bayer, (b) point to new areas for future research on community college faculty teaching behaviors, and (c) highlight areas of difference and similarity across the range of community college faculty for use in developing intra- and inter-institutional collaboration and development efforts.

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### **The Impact of Motivational Messages on Student Performance in Community College Online Courses**

*Cathy A. Robb, Ed.D.*

The purpose of this experimental study was to determine whether motivational emails sent from an instructor to student had an impact on performance in an online course, with student performance measured by course completion and course performance as evidenced by final course grade. The sample for the study was students enrolled in 12 online classes offered by one community college during the spring 2009 semester. These students were randomly assigned to two groups, a control group and an experimental group, and both groups were sent five motivational email messages from the faculty member teaching the course. Keller's (2006b) Course Interest Survey (CIS) was administered electronically to measure student motivation. The CIS instrument was modified so that the experimental group received six open-ended questions concerning the impact of the motivational messages on their course performance. Principal components analysis was used to determine whether the constructs originally associated with the CIS, specifically Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction (ARCS) model

(Keller, (1983), were confirmed, and results showed that the constructs were not confirmed. Consequently, a new Feedback, Instructor Techniques, Goals, and Interest (FIGI) model emerged that represented the constructs of motivation for students enrolled in the community college online course. The FIGI model, unlike the ARCS model, represented both extrinsic and intrinsic student motivation. Chi-square and t-tests were used to determine whether there were significant associations or significant differences between the experimental and control groups on: background variables used to describe the students and control for differences, the intervening variable as measured by the mean CIS score and sub-scores, and the two dependent variables of mean final grade, and proportion of completers. A multiple regression was conducted to assess the extent to which the FIGI subscales predicted final grade, and a logistic regression was conducted to assess the extent to which the FIGI subscales predicted course completion, after controlling for demographic and educational variables. The findings showed students participating in an online course benefited from the treatment. Results showed a higher proportion of the experimental group were successful completers of the online course than the control group. Results also showed a significant difference in final course grade and CIS scores for the experimental and control group, with final grades of the experimental group exceeding the control group. A multiple regression showed a significant effect for the Goals subscale on predicting final grade, controlling for demographic and educational variables. This was the first empirical study to use emailed motivational messages and the CIS, supplemented with open-ended questions, at a community college. The results provide valuable insights into how email can be used in community college online classes to motivate students and enhance their course performance. An important development of the study is the identification of the FIGI motivation model showing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the context of students' receiving motivational email messages. This study should be replicated at other community colleges that offer online courses to further explore the FIGI subscales and determine their impact on course completion and performance.

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### **Information Mismatch: What International Students Thought Their Community College Experience Would be Like**

*Gloria F. Shenoy, Ph.D.*

International students' main information source about the community college is word of mouth from family and friends, agents,

and online sources. Little is known about what prospective students are learning during these interactions. Through interviews with 15 students and an ethnographic content analysis of student-mentioned websites and documents, I examined what international students thought their community college experiences would be like and what led them to these expectations. Using the theory of chain migration from college choice and the theory of imperfect information from behavioral economics, I explored how students found out information about two community colleges in Texas. Insights offered by the international students who I interviewed revealed a mismatch of expectations and experiences involving the community colleges they attended, including misinformation about classes (e.g. what is a credit hour, option of choosing classes, classroom norms), school procedures (e.g. having to take placement tests, implications of remedial and developmental classes, how to transfer), and relationship dynamics (e.g. possibly being burdensome on host family, difficulty in making friends). Moreover, I found students chose Dallas area community colleges because they had a family member living in the community and these individuals, who I called "anchors," helped the prospective students apply to and attend the schools. Sometimes students came with little information, such as only images from movies and television shows. This research contributes to the practice of recruiting international students and to researchers' understandings the ways prospective international students obtain information about the community college. Ultimately, the results contribute to the policies and actions community college personnel can take to help international students to more appropriately match their expectations of the community college to the experiences they aspire to have as a student attending a community college in the United States. By exploring ways to make relevant information known to international students, community colleges can help students form more accurate expectations which may more closely match their experiences.

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### **Community College Dual Credit: Differential Partnership and Differential Impacts on College Access and Completion**

*Jason L. Taylor, Ph.D.*

This study examines the impact of dual credit policy at the time dual credit was beginning to take hold in Illinois, using a large cohort of students (n=41,737) who completed high school in spring 2003. The research sought to answer critical questions about the average outcomes of students participating in dual credit and the average outcomes of sub-samples of students of color and low-income students participating in dual credit. It relies on theoretical constructs associated with Perna and Thomas' Conceptual Model of Student Success and uses a descriptive and quasi-experimental design. Propensity score matching, a robust technique for reducing bias using observational data, is used to estimate the impact of student participation in community college dual credit courses during the senior

year of high school on two outcomes: college enrollment and college completion. Inspired by John Rawls' theory of justice as fairness, the differential impacts of dual credit participation are examined on sub-samples of students of color and low-income students. To do this, and to determine if there is effect heterogeneity in the estimates, propensity score matching is used to analyze results for the sub-samples of students of color and low-income students. Results show the impact of community college dual credit taken during the senior year of high school has a statistically significant impact on students' chances of enrolling in college and completing college, on average. Results of the propensity score matching analysis also suggest that, on average, dual credit students of color and low-income students are more likely to enroll in college and complete college compared to the matched sample of non-dual credit students of color and low-income students. However, using Rawls' (1999) notion of justice as fairness and his difference principle as a standard, the existing dual credit policy in Illinois does not benefit students of color and low-income students equally. That is, relative to the average of the full matched sample of dual credit students

that consists mostly of White middle- and upper-income students, the sub-samples of underserved students participating in dual credit do not access college and complete college at the same rates. Results of this study provide baseline data for the effectiveness of Illinois' dual credit policy, but the policy landscape has changed since 2002-2003. The results suggest that dual credit policy has benefits for students but falls short when data are analyzed using Rawls' fairness principle. Future research should replicate this study using more recent data to examine how and if policy changes since 2002-2003 have impacted the effect of dual credit.

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