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About Diversity & Democracy

Diversity & Democracy supports higher education faculty and leaders as they design and implement programs that advance civic learning and democratic engagement, global learning, and engagement with diversity to prepare students for socially responsible action in today’s interdependent but unequal world. The publication features evidence, research, and exemplary practices to assist practitioners in creating learning opportunities that realize this vision. To access Diversity & Democracy online, visit www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy.
FROM THE EDITOR

Valuing and Empowering Students from Low-Income Backgrounds

Lynn Pasquerella, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), has said that institutions of higher education should serve as “a visible force in the lives of the most disenfranchised members of society” (2017). Recalling the transformative power of the liberal education she experienced as a first-generation student from a working-class background, President Pasquerella remarked, “We are all entitled to live in our strength. We all deserve opportunities to find our best and most authentic selves” (2017).

Students from low-income backgrounds come to college with an array of strengths, including talent, insights, tenacity, and dedication to their studies, families, and communities. Yet they also face challenges on their way to finding their “best and most authentic selves”—from rising college costs, to family and work responsibilities, to the difficulty of navigating predominantly middle-class norms on campus, to basic needs insecurity. A recent national study found that 36 percent of the forty-three thousand college students surveyed had experienced food insecurity in the previous thirty days, while the same proportion had been housing insecure in the past year (Goldrick-Rab et al. 2018).

In addition, data show stark inequities between the highest- and lowest-income quartiles, including a gap of 26 percentage points in high school graduates’ college enrollment rates and a gap of 47 percentage points in attainment of a bachelor’s degree by age twenty-four (Cahalan et al. 2018).

What can educators do to empower students from low-income backgrounds to defy these odds and develop their considerable strengths? Perhaps the first step is to acknowledge that systemic barriers exist in the academy. AAC&U’s Tia Brown McNair and Susan Albertine and their fellow higher education leaders Michelle Asha Cooper, Nicole McDonald, and Thomas Major Jr. offer an eye-opening framework: rather than focusing just on what students need to do to become college-ready, educators need to ask how their colleges can become student-ready. McNair and her coauthors write that becoming a student-ready college "reframes the conversations about student success from a mindset focused on student deficits and limitations to approaches that focus on students’ assets, institutional responsibility, and personal accountability that can lead to sustainable change” (McNair et al. 2016, 75).

The contributors to this issue of Diversity & Democracy illustrate this powerful approach to systemic change. They honor and support students from low-income backgrounds as they learn to value and hone their own strengths. These educators also share strategies for changing structures and policies on campus that were developed with middle- and upper-class students in mind and that may put low-income students at a disadvantage. This issue’s authors explore ways to bring more students from low-income backgrounds to campus, facilitate open discussions about social class issues, make high-impact practices like study abroad and undergraduate research more accessible, connect students to mentors and professional networks, and reimagine financial aid and meet students’ basic needs.

By valuing students’ strengths and identifying and breaking down barriers that may stand in the way of their success, educators can begin to create more welcoming campuses and a more equitable society. As President Pasquerella points out, “Only by drawing attention to the persistent economic and cultural barriers that continue to thwart the equity imperative upon which the American Dream is built, will we be able to fulfill the true promise of American higher education” (2017).

—Emily Schuster
Editor, Diversity & Democracy

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After I graduated from high school, I boarded a plane for the first time and headed out of Michigan and off to college in Idaho, carrying only an Army duffel bag. As a first-generation college student from a low-income background, I assumed sheets and towels would come with my dorm room. I arrived on campus a day early, not knowing the residence hall would be locked. There was a phone number on the door, and some kind soul arranged for me to get into the hall early.

As I began my undergraduate studies, I was not intentional about a career path or my major—not because I wasn’t competent but because I had no idea of how the college world worked. Administrators, faculty, and staff at my college knew I didn’t have money, but no one approached me to discuss opportunities like study abroad programs or internships. It never would have occurred to me to seek out such experiences. Similarly, I was left to figure out career options mostly on my own. I pored over resources in the career center, reading about government service positions, photojournalism, and foreign ambassador jobs. However, no one I knew did any work like this, and these careers didn’t exist in my mind as possibilities.

Yet despite these barriers, college provided me with choices. Eventually, I decided to pursue my PhD, yet even into my doctoral studies, there was so much I didn’t know about the norms, language, and rules of the academy.

Today as chancellor of the University of Michigan–Flint, I carry with me those experiences I had as a low-income student. I know that many low-income students bring fresh perspectives, heart, determination, and resilience to campus. I know that talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not.

As campuses strive to create more diverse and inclusive environments, administrators, faculty, and staff must understand the ways in which low-income students are affected by middle-class campus norms. Students from low-income backgrounds describe the burden of their own high expectations and low expectations from professors and campus personnel, pressures regarding resources, the challenges of navigating a culture they have little experience with, and the constant tension of living between two worlds. Higher education professionals must continue to push beyond the notions of “helping” low-income students overcome “their” cultural barriers. Instead, educators need to provide leadership so that students and the greater campus community see the value of the voices, experiences, knowledge, and perseverance these students bring to campus.

New Conversations about Class
It has been just over twenty years since I struggled to complete my dissertation, which focused on class issues in the academy. Since that time, many other scholars have also worked to raise awareness of issues of socioeconomic class and their implications for college students from working-class or impoverished environments.

In 2016, about 65 percent of recent high school completers from low-income backgrounds enrolled in college, compared with about 49 percent in 1996 (National Center for Education Statistics 2017). Nearly one-quarter of all undergraduates—about 4.5 million students—are first generation and low income (Engle and Tinto 2008).

The increase in numbers of low-income students, as well as faculty and staff who have been low income themselves, has led to more discussions about class issues on campus. Colleges and universities offer more courses and conduct more research on the impact of socioeconomic class on the lives of students. More students have the language and experience to provide context for understanding their own stories earlier in their college careers. More programs intentionally reach out to students from working-class and impoverished communities. In fact, in the last several years, many elite colleges have declared an interest in recruiting for socioeconomic diversity, bringing more low-income students to campus and working to develop programs to support those students. (For example, see the article on the American Talent Initiative beginning on page 11.)

Low-income students have begun to influence conversations about class and social and cultural capital (Yosso 2005), which in turn have affected policy and
program development and, in some cases, pedagogy. And while progress has been made, work remains to be done. There is a significant need for more scholarly study of the implications of poverty and class status. We are in the early stages of understanding and addressing what it means to be from groups with backgrounds other than middle or upper class on campus.

Gerda Lerner’s work on the evolution of women’s history provides a helpful lens for framing the conversations about socioeconomic class on campus (1997). Lerner describes how scholars of women’s history have challenged the conceptual framework and methods of traditional history. In turn, African American, Latina, and lesbian historians have issued a challenge to women’s history for “making false generalizations about women on the basis of studies which focused only on white heterosexual women” (xii). This is precisely the evolution necessary for providing more nuanced, informed conversations about and support for low-income students. As we examine issues of class, we must also be conscious of the intersection of class with other aspects of students’ identities and work to understand the different ways multiple identities affect students.

Border Crossings

At the end of my first semester in college, I went home to see my grandma. In my world, she was one of the smartest people I knew. During that visit, I noticed for the first time that there were words she said incorrectly. I was horrified at myself; in my own head, I kept asking, “Who do you think you are?!” I was beginning to realize how my life was changing in ways that would make me very different from my family. I do believe one can “go home again” but we also must understand that things have changed and be aware of the impact of those changes. Later in their lives, my grandparents decided to give me medical and legal power of attorney because, as they said, “you went to college.” I was grateful I could use my experience to assist them, but I was always conscious of my internal tension.

Education has long been considered a way out of poverty. However, many low-income students feel like outsiders both within the predominantly middle-class academy and within their families of origin, and there is a tension inherent in moving between the two environments. Laura I. Rendón (1992) describes her experience as that of a fronteriza, a woman who lives between two spaces, cultures, and languages. This description of “border crossers” provides another way for us to understand the experience of low-income students.

I now understand that I was living as a fronteriza, having to travel between two worlds and make space for myself in both. I don’t think any study abroad experience ever brought any greater culture shock than the life I was living every day—and yet I was only conscious of not fitting in, with no language to describe my experience.

I know many of our students are living with the concussion of this cultural collision every day. They are crossing frontiers invisible to so many of us but as stunning and foreign as far-flung travel. We need to discover ways to reframe their struggles and identify them properly as the grand adventures they are. We must encourage a conversation of exploration and understanding, one that opens ears and eyes to the frontiers of class and culture.

As campuses strive to create more diverse and inclusive environments, administrators, faculty, and staff must understand the ways in which low-income students are affected by middle-class campus norms. More than ever, we need to use our privilege as faculty and administrators to create what Rendón calls a “new consciousness,” building a space that heals and “connects diverse cultures, languages, realities, and ways of knowing” (1992, 20).

Focusing on Assets

When I started college, I knew nothing about the environment, norms, or structures of the academy. In spite of being an
outsider, I was able to craft a successful academic career and receive an excellent liberal arts education while participating in student government, writing for the student newspaper, and playing intercollegiate sports. One strength I possessed—which I only learned to value much later—was the ability to connect to different people and help them come together. Today, my friends still tell a story about the first week of college when I went door to door through the residence hall inviting everyone to meet for pizza that evening, and about three-quarters of my peers showed up.

If students are unfamiliar with the college environment, it doesn’t mean they are “deficient”; it simply means they bring different experiences that are often undervalued or invisible in the academy. Though things are changing, much of the literature about low-income students is still deficit based, focusing on what students need to “overcome” or the ways in which they need support on campus. Historically, there has been little written from an asset-based perspective about what low-income students add to a campus environment. Often those who have been marginalized bring a critical consciousness (Freire 1970), resilience, and different perspectives and ways of knowing. As Saundra Gardner writes, “By learning to value the ways in which we [people from working-class backgrounds] are different from many of those in academe and by actualizing the creative potential of our ‘outsider within’ status, we will have fully claimed ourselves” (1993, 56).

Imagine if we started by recognizing the knowledge and resilience that low-income students demonstrate. Going to school part-time while working, supporting families, and struggling with border crossings teaches tenacity. Imagine if we honored these students’ success in joining the academic community and acknowledged that their resilience is transferrable to their performance in the academy—and that while the rules of the higher education game might be different, they can be learned and navigated. When students understand that the academy is not neutral in its values, they can approach the cultural and social norms of the university as another subject to learn instead of a personal deficit to overcome.

Creating space for low-income students to make sense of their experience, to negotiate the contradictions and tensions of their different worlds, and to see their skills of resilience and persistence as transferrable to the academy will be helpful to the students and will also help build a richer campus environment. Recent resources offer useful, fresh dives into the research, programs, and outcomes for both first-generation and low-income students (e.g., Whitley, Benson, and Wesaw 2018; Jehangir, Stebleton, and Deenanath 2015).

Restructuring Policies and Practices

When I was an undergraduate, an incident during registration almost stopped me from attending college. The memory is still vivid. After standing in line for several hours, I got to the final station. The staff member reviewing my documents told me I could not complete registration because I didn’t have a home address. It was true; I was an emancipated minor and didn’t have a home. After she told me three times that I couldn’t register, I finally just made up an address, and she signed off.

Colleges and universities must examine the ways the academy and campus cultures are shaped by systemic, unacknowledged middle-class values. Many policies and practices at colleges and universities affect low-income students differently. For example, nearly every campus on which I have served has required students who want to register for a full class to show up the first week and wait for a space to open. That is much easier for students who live on campus and/or have the resources to do this. If a student is working or commuting to campus, this process is very disruptive. We could use technology to create wait-lists instead.

The literature makes clear that the experience of low-income students
and supporting their peers than professional staff on their own. We should offer these student advisors some form of remuneration—such as book or tuition scholarships or even opportunities like study abroad that low-income students may otherwise be unable to take advantage of.

In general, it is important to realize that low-income students need resources and invitations. For example, many low-income students may not have traveled out of their town or state and would never consider studying abroad. Making scholarships available is one thing, but planting and nurturing the possibility for the students is another.

Finally, administrators, faculty, and staff must understand how social and cultural capital shape students’ lives. Low-income students frequently do not have access to professional networks or family friends in the corporate world who can help them find internship opportunities. They probably have not sat around a dinner table listening to how people acquired skills or experiences to build their resumes. They may not be able to afford unpaid internships or study abroad experiences. That is not going to change overnight. So beyond providing first-generation or low-income programs that focus heavily on navigating the university environment, administrators, faculty, and staff must think more broadly about the kinds of experiences that will follow students into their first jobs, such as navigating cocktail parties or networking at after-work gatherings. In a recent article, Laura Pappano describes the dilemma low-income students face as they leave college: “Think money for apartment security deposits and work wardrobes. There’s no access to professional networks and little advice to weigh career options” (2018, 3).

The low-income students who fill the seats of our classrooms offer depth, insights, and knowledge to the academic community. It is up to all of us in higher education to make certain our colleges and universities are ready and able to support students as they achieve success.

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Bridging the Divide: Addressing Social Class Disparities in Higher Education

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The system of higher education in the United States is highly stratified, with social class divides at nearly every touchpoint of students’ educational experiences. Decisions about whether to attend college are often based on students’ social class—manifested in students’ preparation for higher education, ability to afford tuition, and familial expectations or support. Decisions about where to attend college are further suffused with class-based connotations associated with institutional prestige and rigor.

Social classes are defined as social categories that include measures of socioeconomic status interwoven with social forces such as power, culture, prestige, and socialization (Soria 2018). Students from lower social class backgrounds face significant structural challenges in higher education compared with their middle- and upper-class peers. We need to acknowledge and address these disparities to create welcoming, inclusive, accessible campuses where students from all social class backgrounds can thrive.

Disparities by Class
Structural disparities among students from different class backgrounds start early and run deep. Even as high school sophomores, students from high socioeconomic status backgrounds (as measured by parents’ occupations, parents’ education, and family income) are more than twice as likely to expect to earn advanced degrees as students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (52 percent compared with 22 percent). High school seniors from high socioeconomic status backgrounds are much more likely to obtain college information from their parents (76 percent compared with 46 percent of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds) and are four times more likely to score in the highest quartile for reading and mathematics achievement. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to drop out of high school without earning a high school diploma (7 percent) or complete only a high school degree (21 percent) compared with students from high socioeconomic status backgrounds (1 percent and 3 percent, respectively) (National Center for Education Statistics 2015).

All those factors culminate in greater structural advantages for students from high socioeconomic status backgrounds, rendering higher education complicit in an ongoing system of classism. The direct effects of systemic classism are striking: 60 percent of students from high socioeconomic status backgrounds earned a bachelor’s degree or higher within eight years of enrollment, compared with just 14 percent of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (National Center for Education Statistics 2015).

A Look at Community Colleges
Even within the more affordable and accessible two-year public community colleges, students from lower social class backgrounds are less successful than students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds. Although nearly half of dependent college students who are first-generation or from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds enroll in two-year public colleges (National Center for Education Statistics 2016), only 14 percent of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds earn an associate’s degree in six years, compared with 20 percent of students from high socioeconomic backgrounds (Ma and Baum 2016).

For many high-income students, community college is a stepping stone to a four-year degree; however, community college is a stopping point for many low-income students. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds who first enroll in community colleges are twice as likely to earn a four-year degree as students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who first enroll in community colleges (34 percent compared with 15 percent) (National Center for Education Statistics 2015). Overall, students from low-income backgrounds are much more likely to attend institutions that have lower graduation rates for all students (Nichols 2015), compounding the barriers they face.

Acknowledging Social Class Differences
To disrupt the trends that perpetuate privilege among the middle and upper classes, we need to first acknowledge that class power and classism permeate the academy. Social class affects every student, whether positively or negatively. While campuses have devoted significant resources to diversity-related efforts, including creating multicultural student centers, hiring chief diversity officers, and offering courses on cultural identities, those endeavors rarely focus on social class as a critical element of individuals’ identities.

Claims that students should be able to graduate from college by their own efforts constitute microaggressions for students marginalized by social class. Such claims are laden with assumptions that students who do not graduate must not possess the grit, skills, intelligence,
or drive to overcome hurdles. We perpetuate class privilege when we neglect to recognize the intersectional effects of social class on students’ experiences. Instead, we should be honoring the strengths of students from lower social class backgrounds, including their resiliency, insights into issues of equity and justice through their lived experiences, and values of interdependence—being responsive to the needs of others, working cooperatively, and giving back to their communities or families (Stephens, Fryberg, and Markus 2012)—especially at a time when collective action is essential to resolving social issues. The focus on independent agency in higher education often negates the interdependent cultural orientations of low-income students and has a detrimental impact on their academic performance (Stephens et al. 2012).

After naming social class as a predominant diversity issue, administrators, staff, and faculty can help students identify how social class shapes their experiences. Faculty, staff, and administrators who promote middle-class cultural expectations for educational success—including independence and the ability to challenge conventions and engage confidently in situations of academic ambiguity—unwittingly construct a hidden curriculum that can seem foreign to low-income students (Stephens, Markus, and Phillips 2014) and can exacerbate their feelings that they are “imposters” (Soria 2015). Naming these issues as class-based—attributing differences in students’ collegiate experiences to their social class backgrounds—and providing students with examples of strategies to mediate those experiences can help reduce social class achievement gaps (Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin 2014).

Engaging students in understanding the roots of their social class differences can be empowering for all students, who can benefit from hearing diverse perspectives and appreciating differences (Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin 2014). Highlighting differences based on social class in a constructive manner can challenge the middle- and upper-class norms of higher education institutions and disrupt the ways in which those assumptions stigmatize lower-class cultures, ways of knowing, and experiences. As they have overcome social and economic obstacles on their educational journeys, students from lower social class backgrounds demonstrate the type of tenacity vital to communities, campuses, and the workforce. Furthermore, online schools that employ a majority of adjunct faculty. We must address classism at all institutional levels to help all students thrive.

Creating Welcoming, Accessible Campuses

One way to normalize social class differences is to ask faculty and staff who identify as coming from first-generation or low-income backgrounds to share their personal experiences navigating higher education systems with students in class or in advising meetings. Faculty and staff may not only develop deeper connections with first-generation or low-income students who can see them as models of success, but may also foster inclusive environments by improving all students’ comfort with social class differences.

Students from lower social class backgrounds deserve more formal opportunities to legitimize their presence on campus. Institutions should create centers or student organizations to connect students with peers and institutional agents (including academic advisors, student affairs professionals, and faculty); provide support and resources; and empower students to organize for change. When low-income and first-generation students feel validated in the academy, they may be less isolated, more confident (especially in their academic abilities), and more likely to achieve success (Rendón 1994). These formal spaces can make students feel
valued for their presence, a critical factor because students from lower social class backgrounds are more likely to experience a negative campus climate for social class than their peers (Soria 2012). As an example of such a space, the Working Class Student Union at the University of Wisconsin–Madison is a student-led collective that advocates for institutional change, provides resources to students, and educates the university on the benefits of social class diversity.

We must also attend to the overwhelming cost of college attendance for students from low-income backgrounds. Over 50 percent of low-income students who chose not to enroll in college indicated that they made this decision because they could not afford to attend (National Center for Education Statistics 2006). However, significant numbers (15 to 37 percent) of low-income and first-generation students did not apply for financial aid even when they enrolled in higher education (National Center for Education Statistics 2016), suggesting that more work is needed to connect students to financial aid opportunities. In addition, institutional agents should connect low-income students to meaningful, higher-wage employment on- or off-campus and offer programs such as free book rentals that can save costs for all students.

There are additional costs of college attendance: over 50 percent of low-income students reported that they chose not to attend college because they needed to help support their families (National Center for Education Statistics 2006). For many low-income and first-generation students, earning a degree means disconnecting from family members and home communities. Structured opportunities to help low-income students integrate their families into their college life may include family events with free childcare, heavily discounted lodging or travel costs, free career development events, or networking opportunities to connect low-income students and their families with college staff or faculty. Better yet, we should honor parents’ rich skills and abilities by inviting them to teach as something. For instance, when I was a first-generation college student and an undergraduate resident assistant, I invited my mother to teach my residence hall students first aid and CPR. This small gesture validated my mother’s skills and lessened the educational divide between us.

There is no one solution to better support students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds—a constellation of activities is required to combat the effects of societal and institutional classism. We need to recognize the systemic ways in which we are overlooking a large contingency of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, even amid our efforts to support equity and diversity, and we need to give voice to those students and honor their strengths.

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[VALUING STRENGTHS, FOSTERING SUCCESS]

Achieving Equity and Excellence at Colleges and Universities with High Graduation Rates: Early Lessons from the American Talent Initiative

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The notion that quality in undergraduate education should transcend sector and segment—from community colleges and regional public universities to state flagships and Ivy League schools—is undisputed. However, college ranking systems sometimes equate quality with spending and selectivity rather than with ensuring success for a wide variety of students. Consequently, in colleges and universities with the highest graduation rates, diversity and equity issues have often taken a backseat to other priorities.

Selective colleges and universities increasingly understand, however, that the pursuit of excellence must include efforts to increase student diversity and equity in educational outcomes. They recognize the research demonstrating that pipelines of talented students have gone untapped, that demographics of prospective students are shifting, and that diversity can improve the quality of learning in higher education and innovation in the workplace. Despite decades of inertia on the issue, we are optimistic that selective colleges and universities—as a sector—are approaching an inflection point.

Our optimism stems from early learning from the American Talent Initiative (ATI). Launched in 2016 as a Bloomberg Philanthropies–supported collaboration co-managed by the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program and Ithaka S+R, ATI brings together colleges and universities that lead the nation in graduation rates (with six-year graduation rates above 70 percent) to expand opportunity for talented students from lower-income backgrounds. To build momentum and promote accountability, the more than one hundred ATI-member institutions have coalesced around a common goal: by 2025, to educate an additional fifty thousand low- and moderate-income students each year. While much work must be done to achieve this goal, the early results are promising. Just two years after its launch, ATI announced that between academic years 2015–16 and 2017–18, member institutions had enrolled an additional 7,291 undergraduates who qualified for Pell Grants—federal aid awarded to students with the highest financial need (Pisacreta, Schwartz, and Kurzweil 2018).

Importantly, to sustain momentum and contribute to the goal, each member has made specific commitments, accompanied by concrete plans. Nearly all these plans address diversity and equity issues related to students of different income levels, races, and ethnicities, as well as veterans and other groups traditionally underserved at selective institutions. While ATI focuses on socioeconomic diversity, these early learnings are relevant to efforts to improve diversity and equity for multiple student populations.

Motivations for Advancing Diversity and Equity

By joining ATI, selective colleges and universities are helping change the conversation about the role of the institution in improving access and opportunity. Not long ago, colleges and universities typically explained inequities in access and attainment across income levels as an unavoidable byproduct of other inequities, including disparities in K–12 schooling, inadequate wages, and diminishing public spending on tuition assistance. While in some cases this narrative endures, many institutions now recognize that they can make a difference—that they must take responsibility not only for increasing diversity by ensuring access for highly qualified students from traditionally underrepresented groups but also for advancing equity in outcomes by transforming their policies and practices to give all students the academic and nonacademic supports they need to succeed.

Recent research supports this view, showing that student access and success depend on the actions of colleges and universities, not merely the characteristics of students and society. The Equality of Opportunity Project demonstrates that similar colleges achieve very different rates of social mobility for students (Chetty et al. 2017). Research conducted to award the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence shows that some two-year institutions achieve higher and more rapidly improving success rates for students from lower-income and minority backgrounds than do others (Wyner 2014).

For years, higher education leaders and practitioners have assumed that there are not enough lower-income students capable of excelling at highly selective colleges, notwithstanding the growing number of high school...
graduates from families with incomes in the bottom quintile who are progressing to postsecondary education (National Center for Education Statistics 2017). But recent research has proven that there are many highly capable, low-income students who are not applying to these schools. A study by Hoxby and Avery (2013) demonstrated that nearly 40 percent of the top achievers, according to high school grade point average (GPA) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, come from families in the bottom half of the income distribution. The study also found that, each year, approximately 12,500 of these students do not apply to a single selective institution.

More than 80 percent of incoming US community college students—who disproportionately hail from low- and moderate-income families—intend to attain a bachelor’s degree eventually. However, only 14 percent of community college students receive a bachelor’s degree within six years of community college entry (Jenkins and Fink 2016). Even top students could use more support navigating the transfer pathway. Each year, more than fifty thousand lower-income community college students with top grades do not go on to pursue a bachelor’s degree. Approximately fifteen thousand of those students have GPAs higher than 3.7, indicating the potential to succeed at competitive colleges and universities (LaViolet et al. 2018).

College leaders, faculty, and practitioners are paying attention to evidence that diverse classrooms and workforces strengthen outcomes. Research on the value of diversity to all college students—in fostering not just open minds but also skills—has informed the legal battle on affirmative action and institutions’ work at the intersection of educational quality and equity (Wells, Fox, and Cordova-Cobo 2016; Gurin et al. 2002). A Gallup-Purdue survey found that graduates who regularly encountered students from different backgrounds in college were twice as likely as others to believe their degree was worth the cost and more likely to be engaged employees (Marken 2015). Collaboration in diverse groups in the professional workplace—only possible when colleges and universities produce graduates from a variety of backgrounds—has been proven to increase innovation, research quality, and financial performance (Phillips 2014; Hunt et al. 2018; Lorenzo et al. 2018; Mayer, Warr, and Zhao 2017).

Despite this growing understanding, opportunity for low-income students at top institutions has remained stagnant. For instance, at the approximately 290 institutions that boast six-year graduation rates above 70 percent—the ATI-eligible sector—low-income students still make up just over 20 percent of all students enrolled, according to publicly reported data between 2012 and 2016. That compares with nearly 40 percent at institutions with lower graduation rates.

Several examples of institutional excellence, however, demonstrate that change is possible. For instance, some public ATI-member universities such as those in the University of California System (see the article beginning on page 17) and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and private colleges such as Amherst College and Spelman College, have outperformed their peers in enrolling lower-income students. ATI’s theory of change is that colleges can learn from these examples, and that through collective learning founded on a shared commitment to prioritizing socioeconomic diversity, institutions can achieve more together than they could on their own. As demonstrated below, ATI members have engaged in practices that aim to achieve not just student diversity but also equitable educational outcomes.

### Pursuing Diversity and Equity Alongside Excellence

Over the last two years, Aspen and Ithaka S+R have conducted research and convened leaders and practitioners to better understand promising strategies for enrolling and supporting lower-income students at top colleges. Three early themes have emerged: leadership in finance, broader outreach, and educational innovation.

**Leadership in finance:** The success of institutions’ diversity and equity strategies often rests on the extent to which leaders prioritize investing in need-based financial aid. Ivy League institutions and other colleges with large endowments, as well as institutions with less wealth, have demonstrated that scaled investment is possible.

ATI studied five institutions that allocated substantial resources to need-based financial aid over a sustained period. The report cited five important financial allocation strategies (Kurzweil and Brown 2017):

- reallocating funds to need-based aid, away from merit-only aid
- allocating one-time grants and end-of-year surpluses to need-based aid
- finding savings in noninstructional expenses
- raising funds through means such as enrollment growth and fundraising
- directing endowment spending to need-based aid

Using many of these strategies, Franklin & Marshall College nearly tripled the share of low-income students in its incoming class from 2008 to 2016 (Kurzweil and Brown 2017). Despite its relatively modest endowment, Franklin & Marshall committed to meeting students’ full financial need, gradually shifting nearly all financial aid funding to need-based aid and effectively tripling its need-based aid budget. The college drew from multiple resource streams,
including new tuition and fundraising revenues, merit-only aid, year-end budgetary surpluses, and capital projects. Leadership is essential to achieving high levels of need-based aid. At Franklin & Marshall and many other ATI-member institutions, financial allocation to need-based aid flowed from a long-term vision, set by the board of trustees and the president, to shift not just resources but also campus culture. These investments were not based on socioeconomic diversity as the end goal but rather as a means to achieving excellence—evidenced at Franklin & Marshall by high graduation rates, strong GPAs across income levels, and improved classroom culture.

**Broader outreach:** Investments in affordability alone may not guarantee equitable opportunity for lower-income students. Hoxby and Avery’s 2013 research, which identified a substantial pool of untapped talent, was published eight years after many selective institutions advertised zero-cost policies for students from the lowest-income backgrounds. The fact that low-income students remain underrepresented at these institutions, despite the removal of financial barriers, suggests that current outreach strategies are insufficient.

For instance, although many selective institutions employ initiatives like early outreach and cohort programming, summer institutes, and fly-in experiences, a recent study by Jaquette and Salazar (2018) indicates that the most basic recruitment activity, the high school visit, fails to reach lower-income students. The study analyzed websites of 140 public research and top private colleges and universities and found that, though the institutions expressed a commitment to including students from a diversity of backgrounds, they also demonstrated a bias toward schools that primarily serve affluent white students. During the recruitment process, the colleges and universities sent representatives to visit these schools more often than schools serving lower-income students.

These findings are consistent with the fact that most college-going students from high-poverty high schools attend community colleges. ATI research showed that transfer students made up only 18 percent of new student enrollments at ATI-member institutions, compared with 32 percent at all four-year institutions (LaViolet et al. 2018). (See Figure 1.)

ATI-member institutions are taking concrete actions to enroll more students from lower-income backgrounds. For example, Emory University sets an expectation that at least 20 percent of admissions staff visits are to schools and community-based organizations that serve lower-income communities. Combined with a commitment to need-based financial aid, this policy has resulted in an above-average proportion of lower-income students attending Emory compared with other private colleges with high graduation rates.

At the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), one of the most selective public institutions in the nation, community college transfer students make up more than 33 percent of the undergraduate population. UCLA dedicates significant resources to partnerships with targeted community colleges as well as support for transfer students once they enroll. The result: high enrollment levels of students receiving Pell Grants relative to UCLA’s peers.

Private institutions have also seen success in investing in community college pipelines. Smith College enrolls about thirty new nontraditional transfer students each year through its Ada Comstock Scholars Program. Ada Comstock Scholars include military veterans, parents, students who work full time, and students who are returning to college after gaps in their studies. Smith cultivates an inclusive environment for nontraditional students by pairing supports (such as family housing, a study lounge, and dedicated advisors) with a campus community that is considerate of transfer students’ needs.

**Educational innovation:** Leaders who successfully advance diversity and equity include equitable access to learning opportunities among their priorities. Highly selective colleges have for many decades engaged in practices designed for upper-income students. As a result, the structure of...
educational opportunities both in and out of the classroom may not support lower-income students. For example, conditions for participating in study abroad programs and cocurricular activities may not consider lower-income students’ need to maintain jobs or take care of family. Colleges may assume that students who are interviewing for and participating in internships can afford to travel, purchase professional clothes, and forgo a salary. Many ATI-member schools are bridging such gaps by providing lower-income students additional financial support.

Ongoing research and reflection at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) offer a promising example of how colleges and universities can diversify their student bodies while shaping institutional cultures to ensure more equitable educational outcomes. WPI ranks in the top 7 percent among highly selective private colleges in promoting social mobility (Chetty et al. 2017). This success may stem from WPI’s requirement that all students participate for multiple years in a high-impact educational practice: team-oriented, project-based learning (Kuh 2008). WPI is implementing and assessing an asset-based approach to project-based learning, with the goal of developing “a culture and environment that can identify, appreciate, and utilize the strengths of working-class students, students of color, and other identity groups more equitably and effectively on team-based projects” (Pfeifer et al., forthcoming). Before project-based work begins, students “map” the assets they can contribute. Team members share their individual asset maps and then develop one for the team. Midway through the project, the team assesses whether it is equitably accessing the assets of each member and then develops an action plan to build on successes and overcome challenges. Early results suggest that individual asset mapping has increased the confidence of students from diverse backgrounds and that team-based asset mapping can help overcome stereotypes within teams.

The intentional work among ATI members in these three areas—leadership in finance, broader outreach, and educational innovation—provides concrete examples of how institutions with the highest graduation rates can enroll, educate, and graduate many more talented students from low-income backgrounds. It is efforts like these across member institutions that have contributed to the enrollment of 7,291 more lower-income students during ATI’s first two years. As ATI members continue to innovate and learn from each other, we are confident that we can build on this early progress, reach our “fifty thousand by 2025” goal, and support our commitment to achieving excellence.

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Giving Back: Community-Based Learning and Men from Low-Income, First-Generation Backgrounds

Theresa Ling Yeh, Director of Research and Programs, Brotherhood Initiative, and Research Scientist, Community College Research Initiatives, at the University of Washington

For years, research and practice have shown the powerful educational value of community engagement. Service learning and other forms of community-based education can positively affect a wide range of psychosocial and learning outcomes (Celio, Durlak, and Dymnicki 2011; Warren 2012). In fact, community-based pedagogies are well known as a high-impact educational practice that can improve student learning, success, and persistence (Kuh 2008).

Yet much of what we know from the research about the impact of community-based education is centered on the outcomes of those who are most likely to participate in these experiences: white, female students from middle- to higher-income backgrounds (Foster-Bey 2008; Salgado 2003; Sax 2008). For a variety of reasons, first-generation, low-income, and male students are less likely to participate in community engagement activities. These student groups are also the least likely to persist in college (Buchmann, DiPrete, and McDaniel 2008). Because community-based learning can have a positive impact on persistence, it should be further examined as a possible strategy for engagement and retention.

This article draws upon data from a mixed-methods study of first-generation male college students, the majority of whom came from low-income backgrounds. I examined participation in community engagement activities, the effects of community-based learning experiences on study participants’ learning and engagement, and how their knowledge and assets shaped their experiences in community-based education.

In the initial quantitative phase, I used data from the 2004/09 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Survey (BPS:04/09) to investigate national participation rates of first-generation male college students in community service experiences. In the subsequent qualitative phase, I interviewed fifteen men (fourteen of whom came from low-income backgrounds) from two universities in the Pacific Northwest. The group included eight current students, two recent graduates, and five staff who worked with community-based education programs. All had been active participants in community-based learning experiences in college.

Participation Rates
Surprisingly little information is available on community engagement participation rates of different demographic groups in college. Thus, I began by examining community engagement participation by income level. I used the federal TRIO program eligibility criteria to define “low income” as an annual income of $25,000 or less for a family of four. Analysis of the BPS data showed that nationally, low-income college students (both male and female) were significantly less likely to volunteer than higher-income college students, which is consistent with research on low-income youth and adults (Hyman and Levine 2008; Spring, Dietz, and Grimm 2007).

In my interviews, I explored some of the reasons for these lower participation rates. Interview participants who grew up in low-income households reported a constant struggle with finances, and most had to maintain paid employment in college. Many students also commuted from home rather than living on campus, which limited their ability to do things outside of class, particularly when total commute time could take over two hours per day. In addition, several participants indicated that community engagement activities might seem foreign or impractical to people from low-income backgrounds, particularly when juxtaposed with the need to generate income.

However, the same themes that surfaced as barriers to participation also seemed to motivate the students to continue their community involvement. Several students cited growing up in poverty as a critical motivator, and the most common theme that arose was a strong sense of obligation to “give back” to low-income, minority, and/or immigrant communities that were similar to their own.

Outcomes of Participation
The men I interviewed described a wide range of outcomes from community-based learning:

1. Academic and career outcomes. Participants indicated that their community-based learning helped them better understand their coursework on related topics. In addition, their participation prompted them to reflect on their academic experiences more broadly, making their academic pursuits feel more relevant to “real life.”

2. Psychosocial outcomes. Students described expanding their leadership and communication skills, which contributed to increased self-confidence and empowerment, both
of which lead to greater self-efficacy. Moreover, community engagement enabled them to cope with college stress by helping them maintain perspective and by providing an opportunity to get off campus. Several participants shared that while college sometimes felt like an elite, alienating environment, the local community felt more familiar and welcoming.

3. Personal and spiritual growth outcomes. Community-based learning allowed the study participants to explore questions of calling and purpose. They were challenged to think beyond themselves and their own interests. As men from first-generation and low-income backgrounds, their involvement motivated them to persevere academically because they were reminded about why they were in college. Those who worked with youth felt a responsibility to graduate because they served as role models to kids from similar backgrounds to their own.

4. Sociopolitical outcomes. Because of their community engagement, study participants became more aware of societal issues at local, national, and international levels. They began to critically examine the socioeconomic inequities they saw through their direct experiences and apply their insights to their own economic contexts, as well as to larger societal problems.

Recommendations for Practice
Community-based learning is a high-impact educational practice, yet institutional and structural barriers prevent low-income students from participating. There are several ways that colleges and universities can increase access and participation:

- **Broaden the types of community engagement opportunities available.**
- **Compensate students for community engagement.**
- **Offer scholarships for community engagement participation.**

By drawing upon these recommendations, institutional leaders and practitioners can modify their community engagement strategies to be more inclusive and supportive of low-income men.

References


Using Transcript Data and Online Courses to Prepare More Students for College

Yvette Gullatt, Vice Provost for Diversity and Engagement and Chief Outreach Officer at the University of California

Founded in 1868 as a public land-grant institution, the University of California (UC) seeks to ensure that as many students as possible can pursue an education at one of our ten campuses, including students from low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented backgrounds. Currently, 42 percent of UC students receive Pell Grants, and the same percentage are first-generation college students. Five UC campuses have now been designated as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), with more than 25 percent Latinx enrollment, making UC a predominantly HSI university system.

Serving low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented students means expanding educational opportunities for these students much earlier than college and guiding them on their journey to a UC education. These efforts demonstrate UC’s commitment to students’ success while they are still enrolled in secondary schools. In addition to a variety of successful college preparation outreach programs, UC has implemented large-scale strategies to ensure that as many students as possible prepare for a UC education. Two interventions have proved to be essential: transcript evaluation and online courses.

The Challenge

Prospective undergraduate students must take many steps to get to UC. They must take the appropriate courses and exams, earn the required grade point average (GPA), and often exceed the minimum admission requirements. They must apply to the university and, if admitted, accept the offer. To engage in these actions, they must perceive the university as accessible and affordable. All students—particularly first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students—benefit from adult guides who can help them navigate the college preparation journey.

California public schools face student-to-counselor ratios of nearly 760 to 1, which makes equitable access to consistent, high-quality college advising a challenge. Many students therefore do not complete key college preparatory courses. UC and the California State University (CSU) systems require applicants to complete A–G subject requirements in the areas of history/social science (A); English (B); mathematics (C); laboratory science (D); languages other than English (E); visual and performing arts (F); and college-preparatory electives (G). Courses used to satisfy the A–G subject requirements must be approved by UC and must appear on the A–G course list for the student’s school, district, or online program.

To give students the information and support they need to apply to college, UC provides precollege academic preparation outreach—including college advising, entrance exam preparation, academic enrichment in STEM and other academic disciplines, and informational services—to more than one hundred thousand K–12 and community college students and their families, particularly those from underrepresented communities or from schools in low-income neighborhoods. By and large, these services pay off: participants in the outreach programs offered across all UC campuses apply to and enroll at UC at higher rates than other California high school graduates.

As successful as these programs are, they are limited by personnel capacity and funding. Many more students than those reached by these programs lack access to the high school courses they need to achieve eligibility for the UC and CSU systems. Too many students from low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented backgrounds fall off the college preparation pathway too early in their high school careers. In addition, these students are frequently unaware that they possess the academic skills to attend a selective college or university. As a result, they may not take the necessary steps to apply to a college that matches their interests and abilities.

Given these circumstances—inadequate access to high-quality counseling, limitations on the ability to scale outreach programs, and disproportionate numbers of low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented students not completing a full sequence of A–G courses—we set out to implement large-scale strategies that directly addressed A–G course access, progress, and completion. What could UC do to improve students’ awareness of their course-taking patterns, address A–G course availability in schools, and guide students to additional resources to help them prepare for college? We have found that transcript evaluation and online courses are crucial in scaling our college preparation outreach efforts.

Transcript Evaluation Service

The UC Office of the President developed the Transcript Evaluation Service (TES) in 2004 to inform individual students of their progress in achieving eligibility for UC and CSU, raise their awareness of college opportunities, and guide them toward resources available
The University of California uses transcript data and online courses to offer college preparation support to more students. (Photo by Elena Zhukova)

to help them achieve their college goals. Schools that partner with UC for transcript evaluation receive student-, school-, and district-level reports that are based on individual transcript evaluations for all enrolled students in ninth to twelfth grades.

In 2017–18, TES generated customized progress reports for more than three hundred thousand California students in over one hundred schools. Each student report details courses completed, courses in progress, and courses that should be taken to successfully complete the full sequence of college preparatory courses. Combined with a GPA calculation, a TES report provides a complete summary of where a student stands and what a student needs to do to become fully eligible for UC or CSU. School administrators, guidance counselors, and teachers can receive these transcript evaluations, enabling them to identify students who are close to meeting the UC or CSU admission requirements but who, without intervention, may fall short of eligibility. Administrators and staff can then encourage these students to enroll in online programs to complete A–G courses that may not otherwise be available at their schools. They can also point students toward UC college access programs to receive assistance with academic advising, study skills, test preparation, financial aid, and college applications.

The school-level report details a school’s overall progress in A–G access and completion and identifies courses that enroll large numbers of students and that, with some curricular revisions, could become college preparatory courses recognized by UC and CSU. UC professional staff engage with schools to help them develop these courses and/or pursue online course options.

The TES system provides students with better information about their progress and helps schools better understand how they are helping students achieve college preparation goals. A formative analysis found that schools that implemented TES for two years improved CSU- and UC-eligibility rates by up to 30 percent. By Year 5, TES schools, on average, experienced a 41 percent increase in graduates applying to UC compared with their base year.

Online Courses
In 2013, to further support student access to A–G courses, UC created UC Scout. This full-service online learning platform offers interactive online courses for middle and high school students, including low-income and first-generation students and English language learners. The university develops UC Scout courses—including Advanced Placement (AP), honors, and credit recovery courses—in close consultation with UC faculty. UC also certifies that the courses meet A–G requirements.

Schools can use the UC Scout platform and materials to offer UC-accredited and approved classes they might not otherwise have the resources to provide. Basic and Plus courses—in which individual schools provide the teacher and UC Scout provides materials—are offered for free to California public school teachers and students. In Premium and On Demand courses, UC Scout provides the teacher for a low cost. In 2016–17, 259 California schools used UC Scout courses to supplement their A–G course offerings. UC Scout also supported students from charter schools, independent study programs, juvenile justice facilities, adult education centers, and community colleges.

Expanding Our Reach
University-led college preparation efforts like those at UC provide credibility and authority that K–12 information systems and vendors cannot. In other words, when UC tells students what they can do to achieve their college goals, they do it. Raising awareness in this manner, as well as providing opportunities for students to complete needed courses online if the courses are not available in their schools, has allowed UC to support thousands of students that we could not reach through college preparation programs alone. As a result, many more low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented California students are achieving their college goals and becoming UC students.
Berea College was established in 1855 as the first interracial, coeducational institution in the American South. Founded by abolitionist Rev. John G. Fee in a slaveholding state (Kentucky), Berea provides access to higher education for historically underserved populations—primarily from southern Appalachia—who otherwise could not afford tuition at a high-quality, private liberal arts institution. The motto of Berea College, “God has made of one blood all peoples of the earth,” has long reflected its purpose, mission, and vision.

At Berea, people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds seek to learn from and about each other while living together. Berea is among the most racially diverse private liberal arts colleges in the United States, boasting a population that includes 44 percent students of color. The college admits only low-income students and awards each one a Tuition-Promise Scholarship, meaning no student pays tuition. Also, Berea is one of seven federally recognized work colleges, providing students with a robust academic experience and an opportunity to learn work and life skills. All Berea students are required to work at least ten hours per week in jobs that support the operation of the college.

In spring 2013, in response to concerns from faculty and staff about the lagging retention and graduation rates of African American men and Appalachian men from economically distressed counties, Berea undertook an in-depth research study. As part of this study, we averaged six-year graduation rates from eight prior years at Berea and found that, as of 2012, graduation rates for all men lagged behind those for all women (58 percent compared with 67 percent), and that African American men, as well as white men from distressed Appalachian counties, graduated at even lower rates (52 percent and 47 percent, respectively).

The college piloted the Black Male Initiative (now the Black Male Leadership Initiative, or BMLI) in fall 2014 and launched the Appalachian Male Initiative (AMI) and the Latino Male Initiative (AMI) in fall 2016. Students in each cohort take one first-year, first-semester course that supports their transition to college and their identity development. The BMLI and AMI cohorts also meet outside of class with staff or faculty members who mentor them and guide them through addressing issues of identity. (We are hiring a full-time, tenure-track faculty member for the LMI who will implement similar meetings.) In keeping with Berea’s mission, we bring all three cohorts together to learn about their similarities and differences.

Students are enrolled in a cohort based on their self-identification as male and African American, Appalachian, or Latino. They may choose to opt out, but very few do. (Appalachian students of color are initially enrolled as part of their racial and ethnic cohorts, as we believe they might find more support in those groups, but they can choose to be part of the AMI instead.) We work in these identity-based cohorts because, although educational attainment for all these students is limited by similar national capitalist politics and ideologies, those same forces have taught them to see one another and themselves in a negative light. When working in these cohorts, students can more easily explore race, region, class, language, and power in spaces that let them be vulnerable as they build strength, develop community, and learn to value their own assets and the inherent beauty of their cultures. This structure sets them up to appreciate men in the other cohorts as they work together as Bereans, both through explorations shared among the three cohorts and during the rest of their college careers.

**Black Male Leadership Initiative**

The BMLI’s first-year, first-semester course, Mentors and Models, focuses on personal identity development while introducing students to support networks both on campus and in the city of Berea, Kentucky. Because two faculty historians teach the course’s two sections, the syllabus also focuses on the historical context that frames conditions and perceptions of African American males. As of fall 2018, 23 percent of Berea College students self-identified as African American, and 7 percent of Berea students self-identified as African American and male.

Outside the classroom, students meet as a group twice weekly with a full-time BMLI director and a student staff member, who also attends the classes. The director helps students negotiate what it means to be a black
One-fourth of Berea’s students come from central and southern Appalachia, which stretches across eight states. Two-thirds of those students are from eastern Kentucky, one of the most economically distressed areas in the nation. Ten percent of Berea students self-identify as male and Appalachian.

We conducted the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory on our campus, which indicated that white Appalachian men are the only group of male students with severe financial worries who also seem to inherently mistrust the administration and who often feel underprepared for college. They long for educational guidance but are the least likely group to ask for help. Other studies that we have conducted confirm those findings and show that these students feel disconnected from the mountains of home where they are deeply involved in the care of their families. They also struggle to find ways to belong on campus. They are, in general, more politically and religiously conservative than their fellow students at a college dedicated to racial and gender equality and concerned with social justice. However, they want to stay at Berea because of the future economic opportunity it offers them and their families, the quality of their classes, and the caring faculty and labor supervisors.

One professor and one full-time staff member (the Appalachian Male Advocate and Mentor) engage these students through the AMI, with support from the director of the Appalachian Center. The initiative has three interconnected parts: (1) fostering social connections; (2) encouraging students’ academic journeys and personal explorations; and (3) investigating Appalachian values, history, heritage, and cultures through the Appalachian Cultures course. Within this course, students practice critical reflection and dialogue and undertake four hands-on learning experiences outside the classroom, led by a Berea staff member, which show the sophistication of the people who settled the region. These experiences include harvesting and milling timber from the Berea College Forest, as well as designing and building structures like those in use in the 1800s.

After completing the class, students have reported developing positive self-recognition and cultural ownership. One student explained, “Appalachia is not all I thought it was. There is a life that has been lived and a story that needs to be told.” Such self-awareness allows these students to empathize with domestic and international students of color. By studying the region’s history, AMI students come to understand the integrity of their lives and cultures and how those ideas often differ from structures of national capitalist ideology. Another student shared, “I am learning how to really appreciate opposing viewpoints, [which] helps me sharpen and redefine my way of thinking.” Most importantly, these students find their social and emotional community. One student described the class as “a family.”

**Latino Male Initiative**

The LMI reflects Berea College’s responsiveness to the changing demographics of Appalachia and the college’s commitment to equity. The first formally recruited group of Latino students enrolled at Berea in fall 2014. Twelve percent of Berea’s students self-identify as Latino/a/x, and 5 percent of the college’s students self-identify as Latino and male.

One faculty member is dedicated to teaching the LMI course, Latinos in Higher Education. Students spend...
a semester exploring racial and ethnic identity, belonging, language, and US immigration. Course objectives center on developing strategies and skills for success in college, as well as fostering mental and emotional wellness. Participants also engage in theoretical work concerning Latino identity and the historical importance of Latino educational attainment.

LMI students range from first-generation immigrants from a variety of Latin American countries to men whose families have been in the United States for more than four generations. Because of the diverse, intersecting identities that mark the US Latino experience, these men often struggle to find a sense of belonging, both within the LMI group and the Latino community on campus. Because Latino people in many Appalachian counties are a new, but quickly growing, group, there is a sense of urgency to ensure their long-term success and well-being. Programs that pay attention to the retention rates of Latinos in college are crucial.

LMI class discussions are rich and provocative, centering on topics including struggle, pride in language, and home. One student adapted verses from the song “Latinoamérica” by Calle 13 to express the strength of his people:

*Si se derrumba yo lo reconstruyo,* if my people fall—what is left of us will rebuild it.

We are the smoke from the factories, we are the working force, and we are hard labor.

Another participant expressed that he felt he needed to hide an important part of who he is by avoiding speaking Spanish in high school: “Once [my classmates] saw that [racism] was okay, they attacked my language, so I hid it for a very long time.” Yet another student delineated the negotiation of identity as a man of color: “Being Latino to me means pain, grind, and sacrifice. No one ever gave my people anything, so we got it how we could.”

### Joining These Initiatives as One

Consistent with Berea’s mission of interracial education, we unite the three cohorts to participate in shared experiences. For example, this past year, all cohorts traveled to Cincinnati to engage in experiences together highlighting each group’s cultural heritage. They attended a Cincinnati Reds game focused on celebrating Latinx heritage. The Reds lost, but the words “Berea, where friendships are made fast and true” flashed on the scoreboard. The next day, they toured the Underground Railroad Freedom Center, and students learned about Berea College’s roots in the 1834 Lane Rebellion, where black and white seminary students became engaged in the abolitionist movement. Later they met with black, white, and Latino elders connected to Cincinnati’s Appalachian migrant community, who shared their stories and encouraged students to share theirs.

We are in our third year running all three initiatives. While retention rates have not dramatically increased, 85 to 100 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed in their course evaluations that the classes made them feel more at home at Berea, made them more confident to ask questions in other classes, and gave them a deeper understanding of different perspectives. In addition, 75 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the classes made them feel more confident of their success at Berea and more confident in themselves and their academic abilities.

Perhaps the impacts are best understood from the words of the young men themselves. As one LMI student put it, “I have learned a lot about my own identity as a Latino male. It has been quite inspirational, and I will never forget it.”

A BMLI participant agreed:

The skills that I learned in the class are skills that I have the ability to use for the rest of my life. Also, the class gave me a chance to obtain knowledge about my culture. . . . The class guides you to it, but you must show initiative.

Through affirming the cultural capital that students bring and helping them realize the work still to be done, the initiatives help our students learn to thrive. As one AMI student explained, this class really is one that has prepared me for being better in college and helping me to feel more welcome and comfortable here. The class taught me a lot about myself and where I come from. . . . I definitely know I came to the right college.

*Representatives of Berea College’s Latino Male Initiative, Appalachian Male Initiative, and Black Male Leadership Initiative meet to discuss their experiences on campus.*

(Video by Jay Buckner)
Global Students Having Global Experiences

KATIE B. WILSON, Founding Coordinator of the Global Guttman Program at Stella and Charles Guttman Community College (City University of New York)

Students do not need to travel vast distances to engage with diverse cultures and ideas. Nonetheless, when they do have the opportunity to study abroad, transformative learning occurs. Study abroad programs allow students to refine their global lens and see themselves in a new light as they confront deep questions about the world and themselves.

Study abroad is a powerful global learning pedagogy, yet it is not equally accessible to all US college students. From community college to graduate school, study abroad should be a norm, not an exception. As twenty-first-century educators, we must prepare our students to live and work in an interconnected global landscape. The Global Guttman program at Stella and Charles Guttman Community College, part of the City University of New York (CUNY), provides an exciting example of a short-term, faculty-led study abroad program that effectively serves community college students.

Community College Students and Study Abroad

Study abroad is not a common experience for most community college students. In 2016–17, 10 percent of US students traveled abroad, and 86 percent of these participants were seeking bachelor’s degrees, 12 percent were graduate students, and less than 2 percent were seeking associate’s degrees (Institute of International Education 2017). Given that approximately 34 percent of US undergraduate students attend community colleges (Community College Research Center n.d.), this is a serious equity issue, especially if students need global competencies to succeed in a global workforce.

Community college students often face obstacles to participation in study abroad due to financial, employment, and familial responsibilities. Yet other barriers also present challenges, including administrative obstacles, fear of failure, or difficulty with perceiving themselves as the “type” of student who studies abroad.

Meanwhile, the impact of study abroad for community college students can be even greater than for their counterparts at four-year colleges. Guttman Community College’s assessment data suggest that community college students’ study abroad experiences may increase their retention and graduation rates, encourage them to seek bachelor’s degrees, and influence the course of their professional pathways. An often-overlooked benefit is the effect on the family members of first-generation community college students. Families often have immense pride in their student, and this support can augment learning, both for the student and the family. The student often inspires younger family members to pursue college so they, too, can study abroad. One student told me, “My goal to travel the world is my family’s goal to travel the world.”

A Global Community in a Global Metropolis

Guttman Community College—the newest of seven community colleges in the CUNY system—opened in 2012. The Guttman model was designed to meet the needs of urban community college students in a small, tight-knit environment. As of fall 2017, Guttman had 1,066 matriculated students. Our student population is diverse and young. Guttman students speak more than fourteen languages and come from more than sixty countries outside the United States—with the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Jamaica, Ecuador, Guyana, Bangladesh, China, Colombia, Haiti, and Guinea making up the top ten—and 98 percent of our students are under age 22. Most are from low-income communities in the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Manhattan, and 71 percent receive Pell Grants. Our faculty, staff, and administration are also polylingual and ethnically diverse.

Not only are many of our students first-generation Americans or immigrants—skilled in global learning competencies like perspective taking, cultural awareness, and the dynamics of acculturation—but they also live and study in the cultural mosaic of New York City. Global learning experiences can occur on the short walk from the train to the college’s front door. Teaching global competencies at Guttman goes with the territory.

Global Guttman

Guttman strives to do things differently, and the Global Guttman program is no exception. As its founding coordinator, I had the privilege of building the program from the ground up with colleagues and students. In 2014, I led a ten-day pilot travel program in Berlin with ten students. One student described it as “the single best learning experience of my life and the reason I pursued a [four-year] college [degree].”

Global Guttman became an integral part of the college’s identity and culture. We became a community college that does study abroad and does it well. Approximately 8 percent of our graduates have participated in a Global Guttman program. We remove
some logistical barriers to student participation by covering students’ fees in full (thanks to funding from the Guttman Foundation) and planning short-term trips ranging from eight to eighteen days. The program has now offered thirteen faculty-led travel programs in eight countries across four continents. Guttman students, faculty, and staff have traveled to Berlin twice and Ecuador four times, as well as to Alaska, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Belize, Chile, New Orleans, and China. We also offer local global learning experiences on campus, such as a Campus Consortium partnership with the Pulitzer Center and a student-led global awareness club.

The program’s rapid growth is a testament to the hard work of faculty and staff, commitment of senior administrators, generous funding from the Guttman Foundation, and most importantly, curiosity and courage of the students. The students make the program succeed through their willingness to take risks, believe in themselves, and challenge the statistics that suggest community college students “don’t do study abroad.” A China program participant told me that she wouldn’t have believed this opportunity was possible for her because of “where I grew up” and “how society had made us believe that we wouldn’t go too far in life.” She explained, “It only made me grow stronger and work harder in school to prove these stereotypes wrong.”

Global Learning Pedagogy

The Global Guttman curriculum begins with the assumption that the students’ preexisting global knowledge and experiences are vast and deep. We craft pretravel orientations, trainings, and assignments; critically reflective journal assignments for when students are “in the field”; and post-travel reintegration workshops, assignments, and presentations.

Throughout each phase of the program, we use a revised version of AAC&U’s Global Learning VALUE Rubric (n.d.) to assess learning about global self-awareness, perspective taking, cultural awareness, and knowledge of global issues. Students share their reflections in ePortfolios and comment on each other’s work. ePortfolios make students’ learning visible to the college community and are useful as we analyze student work for indicators of global learning outcomes.

What Do Global Guttman Students Learn?

Assessment data reveal that as a result of Global Guttman, students experience a significantly increased sense of self, improved perspective taking, and deeper knowledge of the travel country. Students’ written and video reflections before and after travel convey the intricacies of their new ideas.

In addition, we have found that Global Guttman students have transformative experiences from which they extrapolate deep learning years after they return. Students think of themselves as global scholars with an expanded global perspective. One Ecuador program student said, “This experience gave me a sense of gratitude, and I developed as a human being.”

Global Guttman students often become leaders—on campus, in the workplace, in their families, and perhaps someday on a global stage. Last year’s student government association president, who traveled to Chile in summer 2017, said the program “inspired me to think about what the possibilities are for me; there’s so much more I can do than I previously thought!”

Conclusion

Most educators would agree that the twenty-first-century college experience must prepare students for the global workforce and an interdependent world. Global Guttman students develop global critical-thinking and problem-solving skills that can help them analyze the world’s complexities. But Global Guttman is the exception, not the rule. Many community colleges struggle to provide study abroad options for their students.

Community colleges need to do more to address the disparity in access to study abroad. Community college students will become a significant portion of the workforce, and they need to experience immersive global education to remain competitive in a global marketplace. As one business major who traveled to Chile explained it, “Businesses are globally connected, and I want to be a player in that game.”

REFERENCES


The Power of Mentoring within High-Impact Practices: A Focus on Low-Income Students

BECKY WAI-LING PACKARD, Professor of Psychology and Education at Mount Holyoke College

“As a first-generation student from a low-income family, conducting research in the field of psychology has opened doors of opportunity for me. When I first started at my community college, I never would have thought I would have the experience of coauthoring a paper with my advisor, in addition to completing a summer research internship at an Ivy League university, serving as a writing mentor, or tutoring in the community. I have become a more confident, inquisitive, sociable, open-minded individual, and I have deepened my critical thinking skills.”

Katie, my advisee, shared this sentiment following her recent graduation when I asked her to reflect on her time in college. Beyond two undergraduate research experiences, Katie participated in at least two additional high-impact practices: a writing-intensive course and community service. Each experience built her resume and revealed her strengths and interests. She made meaningful connections with people who invested in her long-term success.

I met Katie in my office a few years ago when she transferred to Mount Holyoke College from a community college four hours away. Katie was full of enthusiasm; she had an ambitious academic schedule in mind and was eager to get the most out of her truncated time at our four-year college. She also faced intense financial barriers and needed to find a work-study job soon. Although she had emotional encouragement from her mother and a cousin, she had no financial safety net. As her advisor, I needed to acknowledge the constraints she faced yet encourage her to pursue a wide range of possibilities.

Katie told me she was interested in a career in psychology, liked writing and problem-solving, and wanted to gain practical experience to explore various subfields. I encouraged her to pursue a research experience with me. As her advisor, I would likely be writing a letter of recommendation for her in the future, and this would help me get to know her better. I also walked her down the hall to meet our community engagement team so she could express her interest in paid work-study community engagement opportunities.

Later, I asked Katie to coauthor a paper with me. I also encouraged her to apply for a summer internship at an Ivy League school, though she initially thought such coveted internships were reserved for other students. Katie completed the internship, where she had support from a research mentor and fellow students. She fully applied herself to every opportunity.

**A Pivotal Moment**

Like Katie, I was a first-generation student who needed to work while going to college. My dad was struggling for stable employment after being laid off, and my mom was working in a fast-food restaurant. Semester to semester, I grappled with whether my investment in college was worthwhile while I could be working full time to help my family.

Instead of learning about options from an advisor, I stumbled upon my high-impact practice experience. One day, I overheard a fellow student asking my professor about undergraduate research. After class, I asked my professor what undergraduate research was, and I was stunned to learn I could get paid for it. He encouraged me to pursue a summer undergraduate research project under his supervision. My entire career trajectory—my life course, really—was shaped by that moment. I was so transformed by my undergraduate research experience that I have spent more than twenty years studying the mentoring experiences of low-income and first-generation college students.

In my advising sessions with students, I explain that through high-impact practices such as undergraduate research, community engagement, internships, and study abroad (Kuh 2008), faculty and staff get to know students in a multidimensional manner, and students learn about themselves and gain skills that will help them with whatever they do next. I hope that when I share my story, students will recognize that despite facing constraints, they have choices.

One goal of my research is to identify what makes mentoring possible within high-impact practices and how we can increase access to these programs for low-income, first-generation college students. Our institutions miss out when these students opt out of transformational educational opportunities. We need their insights, contributions, and talents.

**Conceptualizing Mentoring as a Collection of Key Interactions**

In my research, I have found that many people think of mentoring as a relationship with one “official” mentor (Packard 2003, 2016). In reality, most mentoring is informal, obtained through interactions with individuals across daily life, from home to school to work (Packard et al.)
We can conceptualize mentoring as a collection of key interactions with others where we emerge with new skills, confidence, and knowledge. Students who opt into high-impact practices may increase the likelihood they will encounter mentoring interactions. To be clear, not every high-impact practice is a mentoring program; however, high-impact practices offer intentional, sustained interactions with thoughtful peers and invested adults.

**Low-Income Students and High-Impact Practices**

While all students may benefit from high-impact practices, the outcomes may be even more powerful for low-income students. Importantly, engaging in high-impact practices can facilitate a sense of belonging in higher education for low-income students (Means and Pyne 2017). These students especially benefit from gaining a peer cohort (Cox 2017).

Low-income and first-generation college students may perceive that high-impact practices are reserved for other students. Although flyers advertising these opportunities do not include obvious restrictions, low-income students (who need to work) and transfer students (who are under a time crunch to fulfill graduation requirements) may feel that they do not have time to participate.

I offer two perspectives on why low-income students may not opt to pursue high-impact practices despite their benefits, as well as ways to help change this.

**Why Feasibility Matters**

Feasibility is an important construct to consider when analyzing who participates in high-impact practices. Interest is often operationalized as who signs up or applies for an opportunity. Students’ perceptions of an activity’s feasibility shape their interest, and for this reason, I think of feasibility as a dimension of interest (Packard and Babineau 2009; Packard 2016). It is difficult for low-income students to generate interest in an activity that is too costly to be a realistic choice.

We need to actively resist seeing early applicants as “go-getters” while viewing students who express trepidation as disinterested. Students may exhibit ambivalence when they have questions about how to finance an opportunity (Means and Pyne 2017). Students may say they are not interested if they see an “either/or” choice between paid work and a high-impact practice.

What can you do to improve feasibility?

- **Be flexible.** Is it possible for students to work at a part-time job or contribute to family responsibilities while participating in a high-impact practice? For example, a study abroad program in May (a “May-mester”) that includes financial aid may be more feasible for low-income students than a longer program (Sanchez 2012). As an undergraduate, I gained permission from my professor to leave my research experience an hour early twice a week to keep my part-time job. A colleague of mine permitted a half-day research schedule in his lab to allow students from a nearby community college to participate. Faculty and staff need to be proactive about offering flexibility as low-income students may otherwise opt out instead of asking for modifications.

- **Address logistics.** Logistics support, such as transportation, may be a deciding factor. When I told my professor I did not have transportation to the field site, he asked a team member if I could catch a ride with her. This mentoring moment left me less embarrassed in what was already an intimidating new experience and made the difference in my decision to “opt in.” While some colleagues may feel this type of advocacy deprives students of the chance to be self-sufficient, I would argue that students who already have transportation may not have obtained it by being self-sufficient, either.

- **Embed high-impact practices in the curriculum.** Many colleges and universities provide key experiences for most or all students, such as writing-intensive courses or first-year seminars. Campuses including Portland State University and California State University–Monterey
Bay require community engagement work (Calderón and Pollack 2015). Doing so takes the option out of the equation.

**Why Recognition Matters**

While participating in high-impact practices may help students cultivate mentoring relationships, students may rely on mentoring to gain access to high-impact practices in the first place. Indeed, students need a letter of recommendation to apply for some opportunities. Others may be open enrollment, yet some students will not consider enrolling without a credible person encouraging them to do so. This messenger might be a faculty member, a staff member in a cultural student union, an employer, or a peer (Means and Pyne 2017).

Recognition is when someone sees you and your future potential; a professor or advisor literally recognizes the student as a developing member of the community (Carlone and Johnson 2007). Numerous students, particularly first-generation, low-income, and racially minoritized students, recount painful moments of being overlooked or dismissed; they also describe powerful moments of being seen or recognized. In these mentoring moments, students begin to see themselves as belonging. A student may reflect, “If my professor thinks I am good enough for that opportunity, then I should take a second look.”

How do you facilitate moments of recognition?

- **Issue a direct invite.** First-generation college students are less likely to go to office hours (Kim and Sax 2009). Faculty might stop a student on the way out of class or send an email to pass along an opportunity. In my research, I found that faculty who embedded encouraging, informative messages in their courses reached many students beyond just those who followed the faculty member back to his or her office (Packard, Tuladhar, and Lee 2013).

- **Help students understand why high-impact practices matter.** One strategy is to annotate major maps (major requirement documents that all students receive) with information about the importance of high-impact practices. Low-income and first-generation college students may not realize that faculty and staff write letters of recommendation based on their in-depth knowledge of students’ growth, and that high-impact practices allow these adults to get to know students well.

- **Spread messages from alumni to demystify the process.** Students are particularly motivated by alumni who they perceive have walked in similar shoes (Packard and Hudgings 2002; Packard 2016) so it is important for students to hear from alumni from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds about their experiences with high-impact practices. Invite alumni to speak to first-year courses or leverage their online testimonials within these classes. This approach is much more accessible than optional events.

**Conclusion**

The power of high-impact practices has been documented widely. Colleges and universities are expanding their programs, but when low-income and first-generation students self-select, they may opt out, and we may misinterpret their lack of participation as a lack of interest. By improving the feasibility of our programs, and by recognizing students so they can feel truly invited to participate, we can make high-impact practices more accessible and inclusive for all students.

**REFERENCES**


CIVIC LEARNING FOR SHARED FUTURES

The American dream is that anyone can have a good life if they work hard and that there are ample opportunities for success. But if you are raised in a home with chaos and stress, with or without parents, how do you understand when an opportunity presents itself? If you are consumed by hunger and don’t have a place to live, do you dream? Do you have hope? Do you learn the joy of reading? What if you are part of a marginalized group that is blamed for its own circumstances?

Many academics study poverty and victimization and write brilliant articles and books on these issues. Their core question is: how does one help facilitate change for individuals and communities? The simplest response is that education, in a variety of forms, matters. Unfortunately, education historically was used to punish the Dakota (Sioux) people and other Native people and force them to assimilate into white (Western) culture. In addition to the lingering suspicion of education, the Dakota people and other Native people today face endemic poverty, historical trauma, displacement, stereotypical clichés rooted in ignorance, and a lack of preparedness for college. These factors, compounded with the raging drug epidemic that has hit rural America and Indian reservations, are seemingly insurmountable obstacles to the work of tribal community colleges. Yet these colleges are beacons of hope and possibilities.

The Strengths of Tribal Colleges and Universities
Tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) were established more than fifty years ago to address the glaring failure of mainstream higher education institutions to serve and graduate Native students. Today there are thirty-eight TCUs with more than seventy-five campus sites in seventeen states. Most TCUs started via charters from tribal governments. TCUs are accredited, public institutions, located primarily on reservations. With an average annual tuition of $2,937, TCUs are the most affordable colleges and universities in the United States, and 85 percent of TCU students receive federal financial aid (American Indian Higher Education Consortium 2017, 2018).

The core mission for all TCUs is to teach, learn about, and perpetuate our respective cultures and languages to cultivate students’ identity and rebuild our communities. TCUs are very family oriented, as family is core to indigenous culture. TCUs are small institutions, with less bureaucracy, more flexibility, and more freedom to respond to student needs and emergencies, such as a suicide in a student’s family. Classes at TCUs are small so that faculty can get to know students on a very personal level; that aids the advising process for building students’ confidence and helping them take incremental steps toward success.

Support Systems
Cankdeska Cikana Community College (CCCC) in Fort Totten, North Dakota, educates an average of 190 students per semester. The majority of CCCC students are Spirit Lake tribal members, but each semester we average between eight and ten non-Native students. Sixty-four percent of our students receive Pell Grants, and 88 percent are first-generation college students.

Our students bring challenges as well as strengths. Their enthusiasm and hope are tempered by a lack of knowledge about the college experience, which fuels a lack of confidence. Most of our students are reluctant to ask for help or are unsure of how to find their way in a college setting.

To support the needs of our current and future students, CCCC has a variety of systems in place. We begin our work with the four local high schools by providing college credit and dual-credit courses, as well as weekend and summer academies to strengthen students’ academic readiness in STEM and literacy and to support the transition to college. The summer academies serve both middle and high school students. We offer all these programs free of charge, and students receive a stipend for participating in the weekend and summer academies. CCCC also operates a Talent Search program through the US

“The tribal college ensures my dreams for a better future, to make it a reality that I can achieve a degree with my culture intact.”

—Starla Littlewind, Cankdeska Cikana Community College student

The Unique Role of Tribal Colleges and Universities

CYNTHIA LINDQUIST (TA’SUNKA WICAHPI WIN, STAR HORSE WOMAN), President of Cankdeska Cikana Community College, Enrolled Member of the Spirit Lake Dakota Nation

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Department of Education to provide academic, career, and financial counseling to encourage students to complete high school and pursue higher education.

After students enroll at CCCC, we support the whole student, as well as students’ families, by providing low-cost services like transportation, child care, and food services to help them become successful college students and responsible adults. The Spirit Lake reservation is classified as a food desert, with little access to healthy whole foods. Our College Café works with our land grant program to provide fresh produce from the college’s gardens and greenhouses to students. We serve refreshments or meals with a cultural theme at all CCCC events to promote healthy eating. CCCC also operates an angel fund where students can bring in a bill for a car repair, utility payment, or family emergency and make a request for help, up to $400 per semester.

With the help of grants, CCCC provides tutors and training. Sessions on time management, note taking, computer skills, literacy, and life and financial planning are all relevant to student success. CCCC also offers General Equivalency Diploma (GED) courses. Like many community colleges, CCCC provides a first-year experience or student success seminar that is part of the regular academic calendar and that broadens students’ understanding of the college pathway. In addition, we design research and travel opportunities to be relevant to Native students, their families, and the community. For example, through our research program—offered in cooperation with the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences, where our faculty have faculty status—we train students in research protocols and careers, focusing on issues that affect the Dakota people, such as diabetes or addiction.

Finally, we create a welcoming and supportive campus climate. We train non-Native faculty not to judge students’ clothing, language, posture, or expectations, as students come from a very different background and context, and the college is located on the students’ homeland.

Reinforcing Identity

All CCCC students are required to take a Dakota Studies course, which strengthens tribal identity. It explains the history of the Dakota people, how and why we live on reservations, and where, as tribal people, we need to focus efforts toward change and improvement.

CCCD students enrich the teaching and learning process by sharing their knowledge of culture or family stories. Faculty learn more about the students and the tribe, and students place their own stories in the context of the subject matter. In some ways, this process “validates” cultural knowledge, though my Dakota grandparents would disagree, as we know what we know because it is rooted in being and needs no validation. Our resolve and our resiliency are testaments to Dakota knowledge.

Education is an individual journey, and for Native college students, it is also for the people, the community, and the betterment of the family. The more CCCC graduates we produce, the more we help to diminish the lingering suspicion among our people that education is not a good thing.

Education for All

College students who come from a background of poverty or other human trauma or from diverse cultural heritage bring important voices to the college experience—for the institution, faculty, staff, and classmates. Higher education is no longer an elite and limited (white male) experience but one that is open to all who choose that pathway. Education is about the learning process and having an open mind to discover “truths” and to more fully understand the world in which we all live. Sharing that process in a safe and open environment with others who are different from oneself is a rich, rewarding experience.

Any college student deserves the opportunity to succeed. Their success may be contingent on a variety of factors that they may or may not understand. Institutions that are truly community based (or, as TCUs call it, place based) understand the dynamics of their students and build support systems that foster student success. This is the work of TCUs. As vested community members, TCUs do amazing work with limited resources.

REFERENCES


Supporting Success by Addressing Students’ Academic, Engagement, and Financial Needs

ELLEN NEUFELDT, Vice President of Student Engagement and Enrollment Services at Old Dominion University

For many of the students I serve, a college degree means more than starting a career. A degree can mean upward social mobility for students and their families and communities. At Old Dominion University (ODU), we have made it our mission to serve many low-income, first-generation students, and we are proud of our work. Our student body includes almost eight thousand students who receive Pell Grants, the most of any Virginia institution (State Council of Higher Education for Virginia 2018). ODU Pell students personify determination and have an intense desire to succeed.

As one of the most diverse campuses in the United States, ODU is committed to educating students of all backgrounds and empowering them to complete their degrees. As our president, John R. Broderick, reflected, “We promise a diverse and welcoming community for learning, where we all benefit from the collegial exchanges of thoughts and perspectives” (2018).

Student affairs, student success, and enrollment professionals must be leaders in helping all students succeed at every point in the student life cycle. The student life cycle begins at the student’s first point of contact (well before the first day of classes) and continues through and beyond graduation, as shown in ODU’s student success continuum in Figure 1. Using this continuum, we work across campus offices and divisions to create an intersection of services that seamlessly support student success.

To help provide these services, ODU pairs student affairs and enrollment management in its Student Engagement and Enrollment Services (SEES) division, where I serve as vice president. This pairing reduces silos and ensures strong partnerships to support students. An important phrase in our division is “assessment for relevance.” Using data, we learn about the student experience, the impact of our services, and areas where we can remove obstacles that impede student retention and progress. In SEES, we work with our colleagues across ODU divisions to support three student success factors: academics, student engagement, and financial needs.

Academics

Academics and student engagement overlap, as Edward, an engineering student of color from a low-income background, illustrates:

[There] weren’t many people of color pursuing engineering... It was hard to develop relationships with professors and other students in the classrooms, which hurt my learning process. The thing that helped was... an [engineering] living-learning community [LLC] as well as the National Society of Black Engineers.

Academic and student affairs professionals can work together to support students like Edward and advance the institution’s academic mission. At ODU, our efforts to integrate social and academic aspects of education begin prior to the first day of classes. For example, the LLC student experience starts with an orientation and dinner hosted by the academic and student affairs teams. This collaboration continues as faculty and staff provide tutoring, networking, and support to students in the residence halls. In addition, career-focused experiential learning opportunities outside the classroom are often a highlight of students’ college experience. Recently our Engineering and Cybersecurity LLC students toured the USS Lincoln aircraft carrier, and our Engineering LLC students visited a local architectural and engineering firm for an alumni-hosted presentation.

Student Engagement

It is not only classroom performance that predicts success. Kevin Kruger, president of NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, emphasizes that when faculty and staff make individual connections with first-generation, low-income students, they become much more likely to stay in school (2018). From student
organizations to mentorship programs, there are countless ways we can support students’ connection to the institution and its faculty, staff, and students.

Brother 2 Brother (B2B) is a national organization that supports African American and Hispanic male college students by providing fellowship, economic empowerment, accountability, and support for student success. At ODU, B2B collaborates with several campus divisions. B2B cosponsors a Minority Male Symposium with ODU Athletics, and an Academic Achievement Recognition Awards ceremony for African American and Hispanic men with Academic Affairs. Within SEES, B2B supports and has collaborated with the Women’s Center, the Office of Leadership and Student Involvement, the Office of Intercultural Relations, and student organizations. Many members of B2B are from low-income backgrounds and/or are first-generation students.

Anthony, an African American junior, shared the impact of ODU’s B2B chapter on his college experience:

I used to be shy [and] didn’t know how to network—but just talking with the group of guys in the general body meetings [and] seeing people becoming successful, [I thought], “If you surround yourself with people like that, then of course, the success will come.”

In addition, SEES staff members collaborate with ODU’s first lady, Kate Broderick, who leads the university’s Women’s Initiative Network (WIN), a group of female business and community leaders throughout the region. WIN connects these leaders and community leaders throughout the region. WIN leads outreach efforts, including Big Blue’s Closet, a collaboration with the College of Business and an ODU student organization. The closet houses gently used professional attire and accessories for men and women, which ODU staff and community members have donated. Students may select clothing for interviews and professional development events.

Financial Needs
For many ODU students, the ability to finance higher education is as important as academic ability in college persistence. Our Learn and Earn Advantage Program (LEAP)—an on-campus work program housed in Career Development Services in the SEES division—shows how financial aid and career services can work together to offer not only funding but also real-world skills. LEAP students are employed in offices and departments across campus in their early years, preparing them for paid internships, often in their field of study, in their junior and senior years. They also take a class where they learn employment skills and interact with alumni and other professionals through informational interviews. As Crystal, a LEAP student, shared,

Working on my resume in my LEAP program has made it possible for me to get a paid summer internship. LEAP has also helped enhance my communication skills.

ODU serves academically talented students who sometimes encounter unexpected financial hurdles. Bridge the Gap, founded by WIN, raises money to assist students in closing financial gaps that can prevent them from progressing with their education. In many cases, low-income students are one financial emergency away from dropping out. Also, students may need support beyond their financial aid packages to meet basic living needs or to participate in student conferences, study abroad, or internships in other cities.

Addressing financial challenges is a critical component of student success. On my campus, our institutional research shows that if we can meet 64 percent of a student’s financial need, they are more likely to persist. Colleges and universities might consider how to revisit the design of their aid programs to leverage aid for retention (Godow 2015).

The Path to Student Success
Supporting students’ academic, engagement, and financial needs leads to productive alumni and a better-prepared, more innovative workforce. Student affairs, student success, and enrollment staff must partner with their academic colleagues to lead the way, helping students realize success to its fullest.

Paving the path to student success starts by reaching across divisional lines and connecting with colleagues to provide seamless service throughout the student life cycle. Promoting student success and college completion should be everyone’s job.

REFERENCES


[Broderick] has inspired and motivated me to achieve in and outside of school. She helps me get through complicated situations I have encountered as a college student.

WIN leads outreach efforts, including Big Blue’s Closet, a collaboration with the College of Business and an ODU student organization. The closet houses gently used professional attire and accessories for men and women, which ODU staff and community members have donated. Students may select clothing for interviews and professional development events.
Resources and Opportunities

Becoming a Student-Ready College: A New Culture of Leadership for Student Success
By Tia Brown McNair, Susan Albertine, Michelle Asha Cooper, Nicole McDonald, and Thomas Major Jr.

Instead of focusing on student preparedness for college (or lack thereof), Becoming a Student-Ready College asks what colleges and universities are doing to prepare for the students who are entering their institutions. Published by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and Jossey-Bass in 2016, this book examines how educators can acknowledge their own biases and assumptions about underserved students, develop and value student assets and social capital, advance student success, and create a new student-focused culture of leadership at every level. To order print copies or the eBook, visit https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/publications/becoming-student-ready-college.

The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice
Founded in 2013 as the Wisconsin HOPE Lab and now based in Philadelphia, the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice is a nonprofit action research center that focuses on systemic change to support students’ basic needs, including addressing food and housing insecurity and reinventing financial aid. Recent publications include Still Hungry and Homeless in College and Campus Food Pantries: Insights from a National Survey. To learn more, visit https://hope4college.com.

The Center for Working-Class Studies
Among its many projects, the Center for Working-Class Studies at Youngstown State University focuses on teaching working-class students and teaching about social class. Materials, ideas, and syllabi for teaching about social class issues—as well as a list of publications focusing on teaching students from working-class backgrounds—are available at http://cwcs.ysu.edu/teaching/.

AAC&U and the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) Action Network
As part of its commitment to preparing all students for civic, ethical, and social responsibility in US and global contexts, AAC&U has formed the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) Action Network. The CLDE Action Network builds on the momentum generated by the 2012 White House release of the report A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future. Coordinated by Caryn McTighe Musil, AAC&U senior scholar and director of civic learning and democracy initiatives, the network includes twelve leading civic learning organizations that are committed to making civic inquiry and engagement expected rather than elective for all college students. Diversity & Democracy regularly features research and exemplary practices developed and advanced by these partner organizations and their members:

- American Association of State Colleges and Universities
- Anchor Institutions Task Force
- Association of American Colleges and Universities
- The Bonner Foundation
- Bringing Theory to Practice
- Campus Compact

- Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement
- Imagining America
- Institute for Democracy and Higher Education
- Interfaith Youth Core
- The Kettering Foundation
- NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

New AAC&U Publication—Available at No Cost

TRADITION SHAPING CHANGE: General Education in the Middle East and North Africa
Edited by Maha Al-Hendawi, Abdelhamid Ahmed, and Susan Albertine

This eBook surveys the landscape of general education and core curricula in the Middle East and North Africa. A first effort of its kind, the eBook offers chapters on specific programs in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. Contributors discuss indigenous features of programs and address boundary-crossing or global goals and outcomes. To download the eBook, visit https://www.aacu.org/publications/lena.
## Upcoming AAC&U Meetings

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### About Diversity & Democracy

*Diversity & Democracy* supports higher education faculty and leaders as they design and implement programs that advance civic learning and democratic engagement, global learning, and engagement with diversity to prepare students for socially responsible action in today’s interdependent but unequal world. According to AAC&U’s Statement on Liberal Learning, “By its nature ... liberal learning is global and pluralistic. It embraces the diversity of ideas and experiences that characterize the social, natural, and intellectual world. To acknowledge such diversity in all its forms is both an intellectual commitment and a social responsibility, for nothing less will equip us to understand our world and to pursue fruitful lives.” *Diversity & Democracy* features evidence, research, and exemplary practices to assist practitioners in creating learning opportunities that realize this vision. To access *Diversity & Democracy* online, visit [www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy](http://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy).

### About AAC&U

AAC&U is the leading national association dedicated to advancing the vitality and public standing of liberal education by making quality and equity the foundations for excellence in undergraduate education in service to democracy. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises 1,400 member institutions—including accredited public and private colleges, community colleges, research universities, and comprehensive universities of every type and size. AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, faculty, and staff engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Through a broad range of activities, AAC&U reinforces the collective commitment to liberal education at the national, local, and global levels. Its high-quality programs, publications, research, meetings, institutes, public outreach efforts, and campus-based projects help individual institutions ensure that the quality of student learning is central to their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges. Information about AAC&U can be found at [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org).