Building Evidence for What Works (and What Doesn’t) to Improve Student Outcomes in Community Colleges

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1) Why college completion matters and key barriers to success

2) Brief overview of MDRC’s portfolio of evaluations with a closer look at two studies

3) Thoughts on evaluation
Why College Attendance and Completion Matters

Unemployment rate in 2010

- Bachelor’s degree or higher: 4.7%
- Some college or associates degree: 8.4%
- High school graduate: 10.3%
- Less than a high school diploma: 14.9%

Median weekly earnings in 2010

- Bachelor’s degree or higher: $1,144
- Some college or associates degree: $734
- High school graduate: $626
- Less than a high school diploma: $444

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics
Fall Enrollment in Two- and Four-Year Colleges and Universities (1963-2005)

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics
Transfer to 4-year
Some Explanations for Low Completion Rates

Student Factors:
- Academically underprepared
- Not sufficiently informed, motivated or directed
- Unable to pay for college
- Competing work or family obligations

Institutional Factors:
- Instruction for students in need of basic skills is weak
- Advising and support services are inadequate
- Financial aid leaves gaps/does not incentivize completion
- College culture is not focused on completion
## Current Portfolio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Education</th>
<th>Financial Aid</th>
<th>Student Supports</th>
<th>Comprehensive Reforms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Learning Communities</td>
<td>• Performance-Based Scholarships – Louisiana and Other Sites</td>
<td>• Intensive Advising</td>
<td>• Achieving the Dream</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Summer Bridge</td>
<td>• Dreamkeepers Emergency Financial Aid</td>
<td>• Student Success Course</td>
<td>• Completion by Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Developmental Education Initiative</td>
<td>• Aid Like A Paycheck</td>
<td>• Classroom Mentoring</td>
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<td>• New Mathways Project</td>
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<td>• Student Support Partnership</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Dev Ed Acceleration Case Study</td>
<td></td>
<td>Integrating Resources and Education (SSPIRE)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP)</td>
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Programs Evaluated Using an Experimental Design

1. Identify students who fit into the defined target group
2. Invite to participate in study
3. Informed consent received
4. Baseline data collected
5. Gift certificate distributed
6. Random assignment
7. Assigned to program
8. Assigned to control group
Learning Communities Demonstration

- Popular strategy for reforming developmental education
  - Two or more “linked” courses, which students take together as a group
  - Intervention lasts one semester

- Underlying theory:
  - Build social support among students
  - Integrated assignments help students master content

- LC Demo: Randomized experiments at 6 community colleges across the country
  - Models ranged from “basic” to “advanced”
Positive Progress through Developmental Sequence

Percent Pass Dev Ed Course in LC Link (Program Semester)

* $p \leq .10$  ** $p \leq .05$  *** $p \leq .01$

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<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KCC(OD) English</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hillsborough Reading</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Houston Math</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>53.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>QCC Math</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merced English</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCBC English</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Control

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Program
Little Evidence of Cumulative Credit Accumulation

Total Credits Earned (Cumulative)

* $p \leq .10$  ** $p \leq .05$  *** $p \leq .01$

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KCC(OD)</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillsborough</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>11.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>QCC</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>16.0</td>
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<td>Merced</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCBC</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KCC(OD): 4 Semesters
Hillsborough: 2 Semesters
Houston: 2 Semesters
QCC: 3 Semesters
Merced: 2 Semesters
CCBC: 2 Semesters
Overarching Lessons About Evaluation

- Most short-term interventions lead to short-term impacts.

- Evaluation can help target limited resources.

- Learning what works is as valuable as learning what doesn’t.

- Evaluations can start useful conversations among (and between) policy makers and practitioners.
FOR MORE INFORMATION...

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