perspectives

RP Group | June/July 2014

Happy Summer! This joint issue covers the months of June and July, during which time the RP Group engages in a transition of leadership. Andrew LaManque, Associate Vice President of Instruction at Foothill College, who has served as the President of the RP Board completed his two-year term today, June 30. As he shifts into the Past-President position on the Board, Matt Wetstein, Assistant Superintendent/Vice President of Instruction at San Joaquin Delta College (and former Director of Institutional Research), will take over as President of the RP Board. We thank Andrew for his insights and service over the past years and look forward to RP's continued growth and success with Matt!

Here is Andrew's note to the RP community:

I am thankful for the opportunity to learn more about the wonderful people connected with RP and help lead it through a period of transition. A lot has happened with RP in the past two years but as the saying goes, "The more things change, the more things stay the same." Now, I am looking forward to giving others a chance to continue to shape this organization.

The RP Group in 2014 is a nonprofit organization with about two million dollars in revenue, supported by a strong foundation of professional staff and consultants (made up largely of community college institutional researchers), as well as a range of volunteers supported by member colleges. Moreover, RP is a community committed to the use of research to improve the lives of community college students in California. This community includes institutional research, planning and assessment professionals as well as faculty, staff and administrators committed to the use of data to change outcomes for the better. While our staff and board membership has changed in these two years, the organization's commitment remains steady.

Accomplishments in the last two years include:

- *Celebrating our landmark anniversary of 20 years as an organization*
- *Transitioning-for the first time-from one Executive Director to another*
- *Designing an arrangement for support with the Foundation for California Community Colleges*
- *Developing a pre-requisite validation guide for researchers*
- *Offering a new professional development opportunity for leaders in the middle*
- *Convening the largest gathering of IRP professionals in the state through the RP Conference*
- *Continuing to innovate with the Strengthening Student Success Conference*
- *Earning the opportunity to serve as the evaluator and researcher for the Online Education, Educational Planning and Common Assessment grant initiatives*
- *Conducting research through the Student Success (Re)defined study*
- *Evaluating online initiatives like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)*

RP's Board is made up of a very talented group of individuals who are supported in their work by college leaders that value research grounded in practical applications that can

inform improvement efforts. Board members and volunteers represent the research community on statewide committees related to the Scorecard, Telecommunications and Technology Advisory Committee, Matriculation, CCC Apply, Enrollment Priorities, as well as on the Online Education, Educational Planning and Common Assessment grant steering committees. RP maintains several listservs including RP, SLOs, Assessment and Leading from the Middle. We coordinate the Power Awards and the RP Group Awards to give recognition to those doing noteworthy work. And, we publish news and resources through Perspectives and plan to make the website more interactive in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to play a small part in the RP Group community. I look forward to the role that RP will continue to play in supporting California community college students.

--Andrew

Enjoy this issue and "see" you in August!

Sincerely,
The RP Group

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Announcements

Meet Your 2014-15 RP Group Board Members
The RP Group Board of Directors welcomes two newly elected and two re-elected members, each serving a term of two years. First-timers Bri Hays (San Diego Mesa College) and Alketa Wojcik (MiraCosta CCD) will represent the California Community Colleges' southern constituency, and incumbents Carolyn Arnold (Chabot College) and Pamela Mery (City College of San Francisco) will continue to represent their northern colleagues. Board members work internally as a group and externally on committees to improve planning, evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness and success for all students throughout the California Community Colleges. View the full list of RP Board members here.

Thank You, Marc Beam and Lan Hao, For Your Service To RP
We would like to recognize and thank departing RP Board members, Marc Beam (Shasta College) and Lan Hao (Citrus College), for their commitment and contribution to RP. Marc has served as a Board member since 2004 and has held various officer positions including Vice President, South and Treasurer/Secretary. Lan began in 2011 and has served on various committees and, most recently, co-chaired the 2014 RP Conference Committee. Thank you, Marc and Lan, for supporting RP and its mission!

# Statewide Spotlight: Student Equity as an Organizing Principle

Authors: *Gregory M. Stoup*, Senior Dean of Research and Planning, Contra Costa Community College District

With the Chancellor's Office announcement earlier this year that California community colleges update their Student Equity Plans, the issue of student equity has taken center stage at many colleges throughout the state. And, if attendance at USC's Student Equity Plan Institute in May is any indication, colleges are bringing collective attention to equity challenges and a commitment to identify effective strategies for closing existing gaps in student achievement.

There's an opportunity in this moment, not only for colleges to think more deeply about critically important questions related to student equity, but to reorient planning and bring about some much-needed alignment to institutional strategies. It is common practice at many colleges that when a challenge arises or the institution is forced into a prominent position by circumstances, leaders rotate their collective attention away from other important issues on the table to address the current challenge in isolation of the broader strategy landscape.

Once the spotlight shines on equity, leaders mobilize around ethnicity data and begin inventorying programs supporting at-risk or under-represented populations. This Lazy Susan approach to planning often leads to the adoption of strategies that serve the current issue at the expense of progress on others, or worse, lead to the adoption of initiatives that effectively subtract progress in other areas.

All too often our dominant strategies operate in separate orbits. The tendency is to address challenges sequentially with little carry over from one issue to the next.
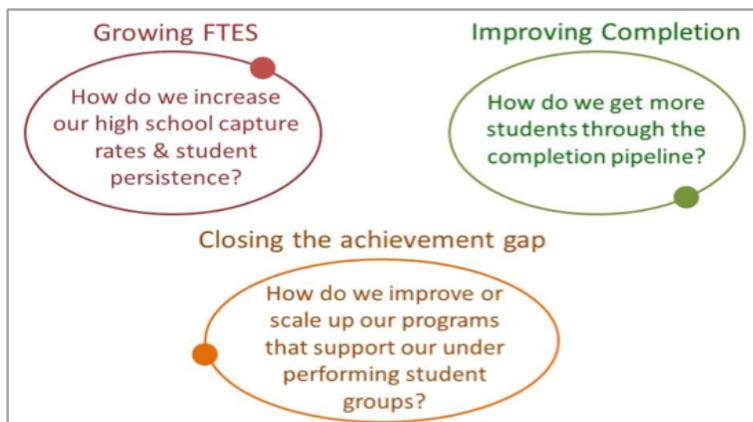
There is some evidence (see source at the end of the article) in the Chancellor's Office data that colleges might be struggling to align and integrate strategies. Examining performance over several time periods, roughly 85% of colleges experiencing increases in overall completion did so at the cost of widening the achievement gap. And of the colleges experiencing some degree of reduction in their achievement gap, approximately 80% of them did so, in part, by decreasing completion rates of the top performing groups.

There are certainly a lot of forces at play in these figures, but if we accept that disconnected college actions might be part of the story, then the current ascendency of the equity issue offers an opportunity to bring some alignment. After all, it's a mathematical requirement that any closure of an achievement gap by improving the outcomes of the lowest performing groups must be accompanied by a rise of the overall average. As such, adopting a strategy framework that places equity at the center provides colleges a schematic for pursuing multiple goals through a more integrated and synchronized approach.
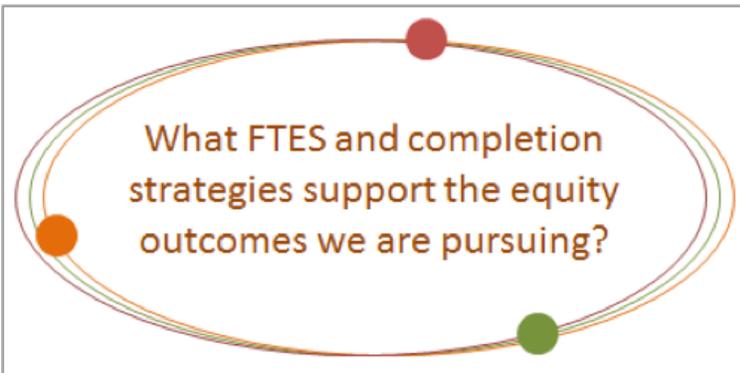
Having challenges framed within the context of an integrated design lessens the likelihood that strategies will work in opposing directions. Moreover, having planning conversations framed in an integrated fashion places colleges in a position to identify strategies having cumulative and mutually-reinforcing properties, providing colleges an opportunity to get a bigger impact out of those precious resource dollars.

Source: California Student Success Scorecard. Completion rate improvement was determined by looking at overlapping three-year performance windows of all California community colleges. The achievement gap was defined as the net change in the gap between the highest and lowest performing ethnicity groups for each college in the Scorecard (removing records containing small sample sizes for any of the ethnicity groups) over the same three-year periods.

Resource:

- [Equity Scorecard Process and Tools](#) by USC Center for Urban Education

Research: New PPIC Report on the Impact of Online Learning on Student Outcomes in California Community Colleges
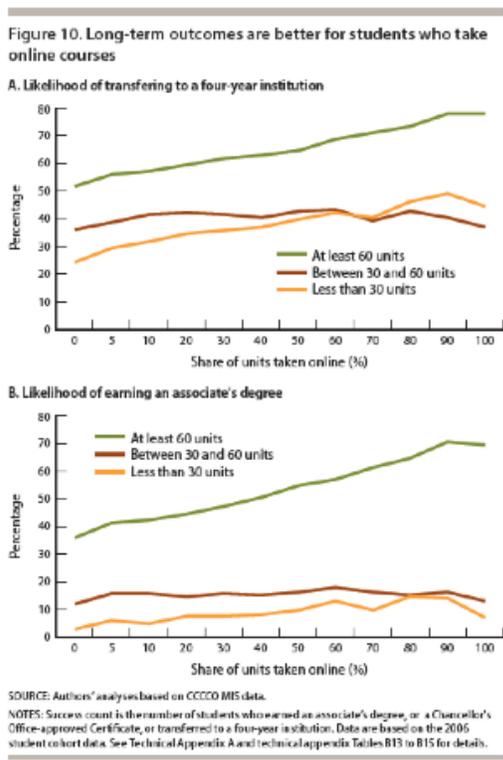
Author: *Andrew LaManque*, Associate Vice President for Instruction, Foothill College

In its recent report, "[Online Learning and Student Outcomes in California Community Colleges](#)," the Public Policy Institute of California examines the effect of online learning on student outcomes. Opening with statistics that reveal the increasingly widespread use of online courses, the report shares that online enrollment made up about 11% (approximately one million students) of the total enrollment in the 2011-12 academic year. Also, enrollment

trends varied by ethnicity with Latino student online enrollments lagging behind other groups.

Using student-level MIS data to examine both short-term and long-term outcomes of students enrolled in online courses, the authors replicated the achievement gap results found by previous authors. They concluded: "Indeed, once we control for a full set of student characteristics (including overall grade point averages [GPAs]) and institutional factors, we find that online course success rates are between 11 and 14 percentage points lower than traditional course success rates."

In addition to course success rates, the report also explored long-term success indicators such as obtaining a degree or transferring. The authors tracked a cohort of students that took at least one online course over a six-year period. For most students, taking an online course improves their chances of obtaining a degree or transferring (see figure below). By fitting into work and life schedules, it appears that online courses may provide students the flexibility to maintain a full-time course load or complete key courses in their program.

Figure 10. Long-term outcomes are better for students who take online courses

A. Likelihood of transfering to a four-year institution

B. Likelihood of earning an associate's degree

SOURCE: Authors' analyses based on CCCCO MIS data.
NOTES: Success count is the number of students who earned an associate's degree, or a Chancellor's Office-approved Certificate, or transferred to a four-year institution. Data are based on the 2006 student cohort data. See Technical Appendix A and technical appendix Tables B13 to B15 for details.

The report also found that on some campuses, the development of online curricula has been based more on faculty interest than on student need. To that end, the report implies that community college institutional researchers can provide data that can help campus decision-makers determine the online courses that would address the enrollment needs of student. In addition, "It would be valuable to track costs involved in developing and maintaining online courses." As the Online Education Initiative (OEI) begins to gather steam, the possibility will exist for improved data analytics that can help colleges "target their limited resources towards interventions that improve course completion and long-term outcomes."

Resource:

- [Online Learning and Student Outcomes in California Community Colleges](#) (includes the Full Report, Short Summary, Press Release, Technical Appendix).

Planning: Recapitalizing the P in RP

Authors: *Julie Slark* and *Linda Umbdenstock*, Senior Researchers, The RP Group

Over the past year, the Research and Planning (RP) Group has engaged Linda Umbdenstock, Julie Slark and Robert Gabriner to conduct the RP Group History Project, consisting of compiling historical documents and interviewing many of those who were instrumental in the initial and developing stages of the organization. Individuals such as Barbara Beno, Bill Scroggins, Raul Rodriguez, Nga Pham, Dick Rasor, Barbara McNeice-Stallard and Rita Mize were among those interviewed and recorded as they recalled the critical growth efforts of the RP Group. Most notable were their recollections about the creation of the RP Group, which not only combined the two state institutional research groups, SCCCIRA in the South and NORCAL in the North, but also recognized that planning is a key component of the institutional effectiveness cycle of evaluate-improvement-plan-implement--just as research is--by adding the function of planning to the organization's scope. One respondent reported that, "The RP Group took planning to the next level." Hence, RP, Research and Planning.

The history project interviewees often asked, "What happened to Planning in RP?" While the research function continues to thrive and hone to a new state of sophistication since the RP Group's inception, the planning function of the organization seems to have experienced starts and fits and has struggled in the shadows of research advancement. Why? Since planning is, after all, an activity that is conducted throughout an institution and is typically led by the CEO and top leadership, perhaps advocacy for fostering and promoting good, systematic planning itself needs to be more collaborative. At the same time, researchers are most often hired for their advanced research ability and experience and less often for their leadership and organizational development skills, skills that are required for successful institutional planning and which are not simply learned in on-the-job training. Additionally, colleges sometimes find it most expeditious to employ outside consulting assistance when in need of a specific expertise, such as planning facilitation, or engage in planning as a "spurt" activity, even occasionally when planning officers exist at a college.

One key finding from the history project is that interviewees think the RP Group should be doing more work related to integrated planning. Related to this, some key questions arose: Is there a common understanding of what planning is? How can we integrate various aspects (e.g., program review, master plans, student success initiatives, resources)? How can we involve stakeholders (e.g., faculty, staff, administrators, students, community) more effectively? How can we promote the significance of planning in light of the current challenges of funding, outcomes, leadership and governance, and expectations?

RP's new dedicated chair of planning and policy can help RP resuscitate Planning and breathe more life into the range of college effectiveness efforts. With new emphasis on

planning, the the RP Group moves from a "lower-case p" effort to an "upper-case P," which re-emphasizes the need for advocacy, leadership guidance and professional skill development. Enhancing collaboration with those stronger in their planning roles and practices has the potential to increase access to activities that develop planning skills and promote planning capabilities to address common issues, as well as reinvigorate colleges' efforts in planning for effectiveness--and capitalize on a founding premise of the RP Group itself.

Resource:

Academic Strategy by George Keller

Assessment: "Value"ing Learning - Exploring Massachusetts' Vision Project

Author: *Robert Pacheco*, Dean of Institutional Effectiveness, MiraCosta College

Statewide leaders focus their attention almost exclusively on student achievement measures when assessing institutional quality. Higher education accountability systems use educational milestone completion and academic threshold clearance to assess college performance, with completion outcomes taking the lead.

An emerging trend, though, includes intermediate milestones that reliably predict later success on exit outcomes. The states have not looked much at student learning, as distinct from achievement--not for lack of interest, but rather because converting outcomes findings into fungible learning widgets that the state can count is awfully tricky. Faculty and program leads uniquely define learning outcomes and individually tailor assessment methods to measure the learning. Uploading these findings at a state level for cross discipline or inter-institutional comparison is a methodological nightmare. Let's not forget the palpable concern over governmental encroachment into an academic exercise traditionally (and perhaps best) left to those instructors and department heads who know their stuff. Still, the public call for improved college level learning isn't going away and employer lamentations for better skilled graduates at workforce entry continues.

Massachusetts has developed a model to look at higher institutional-level learning, referred to as the Vision Project, under a statewide initiative called AMCOA (Advancing a Massachusetts Culture of Evidence). The goals of The Vision Project are to:

- Share outcomes findings in ways understood by the public
- Use authentic student work to assess learning
- Permit the comparison of student learning among Massachusetts colleges

The Bay State uses the Liberal Education and America's Promise Outcomes (LEAP) and applies the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics to faculty assessments of course-embedded assignments, providing formative findings for

colleges to benchmark improvement and to meet the public and workforce demands for improved learning.

Massachusetts has taken its project across state lines, reaching out to nine states including Minnesota, Oregon and Indiana to pilot the initiative across the country. The multi-state effort is no easy chore, and the methodological challenges are daunting. Yet, the plans are in place and a model has been established for the states to look at learning. Just how close attention the accrediting bodies and the lawmakers in Washington are paying to these efforts remains to be seen.

Resources:

- [A Massachusetts and Multi-State Approach to Statewide Assessment of Student Learning](#) - Change Magazine (May/June 2014 issue)
- [Vision Project](#)
- [AAC&U's VALUE Rubrics](#)

The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges | www.rpgroup.org