perspectives

July
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Hello, !

I recently gathered a group of students for a fundraising event, and I wanted to thank the participants by giving them something that would remind them of the effort and teamwork they had experienced together. Eureka! I decided to snap a group picture and e-mail the photo to the students.

Well, I had to take several different shots of the 20 or so students because the kids had trouble posing with the same happy smiles and in an arrangement where each person would be visible. With the small window of time I had, I snapped four pictures. Late that night, I viewed these shots to decide which one I would e-mail. Lo and behold, I realized that each picture was different, AND each one had some imperfection. In one, some kids closed their eyes. In another, a student was obscured by the kid in front of her. Another one was too far away so that the faces appeared a bit small for easy recognition. And finally, I realized that several kids did not even make it into the pictures at all because they had important tasks to do at the time I shot the pictures (an example of selection bias?).

In a moment of reflection, I realized how the quick photo shoot actually models our daily routine and career paths in research and analysis. The job often revolves around getting the right picture--the right data and analysis--to tell the right story. Yet, we struggle to get the picture just right, and we often realize belatedly that the pictures are imperfect in different ways.

The July issue of *Perspectives* replicates that picture analogy in that the articles are snapshots of a "big picture" while serving as "big pictures" in their own right--a matter of perspective. In this issue (snapshot), we begin with a message from Gregory Stoup, new President of the RP Group's Board of Directors, followed by an interview with the chief of the Institutional Effectiveness and Partnership Initiative (CCCCO Vice Chancellor Theresa Tena), a brief on the CTE Data Unlocked Project, a review of a thought-provoking book (*Financing Community Colleges*), and an abstract of a study regarding student evaluations of teaching (SET).

Sincerely,
Willard Hom

In This Issue

Session Spotlight | Dream Big: An Innovative, Unorthodox Strategy for Strategic Planning

President's Message | What We've Learned

Author: *Gregory Stoup, President, RP Group and Senior Dean of Research and Planning, Contra Costa Community College District*

May you live in interesting times. This apocryphal expression was purportedly intended as a curse. But hex or not, there is a lot of change out there.

This decade, before the age of seven, has already brought with it much change in community college policy, programing, and practice. Some of that change is fully underway; some is just emerging.

In California, we have seen the creation of the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI) and the launching of multiple scale transformation initiatives. Nationally we have witnessed multiple reform agendas starting to coalesce around a focused guided pathway agenda, also targeting scale-level improvements in student success. At the local level, evaluation of these initiatives and other effective practices, such as the basic skills acceleration programs, are emerging from our colleges at an ever more rapid pace. Traditional approaches that have been in place for decades are being challenged perhaps more aggressively than ever before. Interesting times indeed!

The RP Group has been at the epicenter of these seismic shifts, playing an important role informing the thinking and planning behind these new approaches, helping shape their implementation, and designing the evaluation processes by which these programs can evolve toward ever higher levels of effectiveness.

Nationally the RP Group is routinely asked to inform the design of guided pathway strategies and effective models for student success. At the state level, the RP Group is collaborating with IEPI on several fronts and is the lead evaluation partner in the state's three big transformation initiatives: the Common Assessment, Online Education, and Educational Planning Initiatives. Locally, we are working on over 40 projects with college practitioners to create sustainable models for improving student outcomes and helping their local communities blossom.

The RP Group's Strengthening Student Success Conference has grown to be one of the largest annual conferences in the nation focusing on community college effectiveness and student success. In just three years, our Leading from the Middle Academy hasgrown five-fold. Moreover, our research and evaluation projects, such as our pioneering Student Support (Re)defined study, have seeded change at dozens of California community colleges.

All this success was the direct outcome of the stewardship, vision, and execution of the RP Group leadership and staff. As incoming President of the RP Group Board of Directors, I find myself in the wonderful position of taking the helm of an organization that is poised to accomplish great things. To each of them, I extend a most earnest thank you.

In the coming months, I want to engage our community of partners--and each of you--in conversations about what we've learned through these initiatives and efforts. As a community of practitioners, we've now reached the point where we know a great deal

about what works and what doesn't with regard to how to achieve sustained levels of student success and improve institutional effectiveness. From time to time, it is important for us to pause, put the puzzle pieces together, and discuss the picture.

As I begin my term as President, I look forward to working with all of you in helping us bring ever greater focus and awareness to the programs and practices that consistently demonstrate their effectiveness in improving the success of *all* our students.

Statewide Spotlight | Thoughts on the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI): An Interview with Vice Chancellor Theresa D. Tena

Author: *Willard Hom, Consulting Editor, RP Group*

In June, I met with Vice Chancellor Tena to solicit her thoughts about the IEPI after the first year of its implementation. A visit to the IEPI website will reveal a suite of activities undertaken thus far. As the Vice Chancellor of the Institutional Effectiveness Division in the California Community College Chancellor's Office, Tena directs the IEPI, a product of the 2014-2015 California Budget Act. The IEPI aims to elevate institutional effectiveness and to improve the system's performance in terms of accreditation sanctions and audit findings.

Vice Chancellor Tena has worked on budget and policy matters for nearly 20 years, including positions with the California Department of Finance (as a Budget Analyst), the Chancellor's Office (in the Fiscal Services Unit), Solano Community College District (as Director of Fiscal Services), and the Community College League of California (as a vice president responsible for budget and fiscal policy). She also has degrees from University of California Davis and University of Southern California.

1. Editor: What do you see as the high points of the IEPI program thus far?

Tena: Tremendous receptivity among the colleges and districts. A high point that IEPI has experienced is with our work to provide technical assistance to our colleges through our Partnership Resource Teams (PRTs). Team members are experts from the field who bring their experience and understanding to the institutions they visit: this is a "colleagues helping colleagues" model. A college requests a PRT visit, and the experts who serve on teams are seen as thought partners to address the area of focus highlighted by the college. There's recognition that technical assistance can come to the campus without being judgmental. It's looked at as "appreciative inquiry." This is a unique time in the system-tremendous support by both the administration and the legislature for the technical assistance and professional development resources.

2. Editor: What do you see as "bumps in the road" in the program thus far?

Tena: I would say that change, and identifying how IEPI might offer specific support and tools for community colleges, takes a lot of time. There's relationship-building with partners. We're a big system, and there are many aspects to it. There are really broad areas in our colleges that need attention, and we want to be a partner that helps them confront their challenges with innovative solutions.

3. Editor: How will the program change in the next couple of years?

Tena: There are a couple of things being built out. One has been the Micro-PRT, which leads to activity that is more targeted than the initial three visits of the full PRT model. These will be more focused on a business practice or help implementing a best practice in areas such as processes in admissions and records, financial aid, and instruction. A couple other things involve experimenting with communities of practice and leadership

development in the context of the California community college environment. Of course, there has been progress in program reach. We have 55 of the 113 colleges in the queue for PRT visits, and that number will grow. We've had about 4,000 participants at our professional development activities.

4.   Editor: Do you see much connection between IEPI and accreditation?

Tena: Yes, particularly in the work with the RP Group. The recent best practices outlined in the accreditation task force report add to this connection. IEPI tries to identify effective practices, and these are directly connected to accreditation. This year IEPI hosted professional development workshops focused on integrated planning to support institutions that have upcoming accreditation evaluations. In addition a resource center is being developed for the online professional learning network which will contain materials focused on integrated planning and data disaggregation to start. The hope is that these will become best practices. The IEPI works to describe the high-performing institution-the exemplary institution.

5.   Editor: Do you see much connection between IEPI and budgeting at the state and local levels?

Tena: The IEPI is a resource for effective practices in budgets at the local level. We partner with ACBO [Association of Chief Business Officials] on this. There's been no overt path for the IEPI to include performance funding.

Editor: Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us.

Resources:

- IEPI website: http://www3.canyons.edu/Offices/IEPI/index.html

- CCCCO Institutional Effectiveness Division website:
  http://extranet.cccco.edu/Divisions/InstitutionalEffectiveness.aspx

Research | A Summary of the Career Technical Education (CTE) Data Unlocked Project

Authors: *Kathy Booth, Senior Research Associate, WestEd; and Alyssa Nguyen, Associate Director of Research and Evaluation, RP Group*

CTE Data Unlocked: Find it. Understand it. Use it.
Colleges need better information on student outcomes and labor market conditions to inform their CTE programs. CTE Data Unlocked will help colleges find, understand, and use CTE data. By providing tools, training, technical assistance, and funding, CTE Data Unlocked will support the development of regional workforce plans and strengthen local processes like program review, accreditation, and integrated planning.

The CTE Data Unlocked initiative is part of the Chancellor's Office actions on the Strong Workforce Task Force recommendations, and a collaboration of stakeholders is carrying out this effort; partners include the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, California Community Colleges Chief Instructional Officers, the Centers of Excellence, CTE Outcomes Survey/ Santa Rosa Junior College, Delta College/Educational Results Partnership/Butte CCD, the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative, Regional Consortia Chairs, the RP Group, Sector Navigators, and WestEd/Butte CCD.

The project included a range of activities including building awareness of resources, supporting college data usage, deepening practitioner expertise, and expanding data usage in regional CTE planning.

Building Awareness
To ensure that college leaders know about the full suite of resources available to them regarding CTE outcomes and labor market data, the project has been providing trainings around the state during spring 2016. College teams will learn about the expanded CTE metrics on the Student Success Scorecard and get hands-on experience with the LaunchBoard.

Supporting College Data Usage
Colleges that participated in training in the spring will be eligible to receive $50,000 in funding and 10 hours of technical assistance to support CTE data usage in fall 2016. Each college will also be given a free year of participation in the CTE Outcomes Survey and three years of participation in the Career and Technology Education Management Application (CATEMA) System to access more nuanced information about students' educational and workplace outcomes.

Deepening Expertise
Starting in fall 2016, a suite of resources will be posted to support colleges in integrating statewide data sources like the LaunchBoard, Student Success Scorecard, and Datamart into college processes such as program review, accreditation, and integrated planning. In addition, "super-user" trainings will be offered across the state to build a cadre of college-based practitioners with deeper knowledge of CTE data tools and labor market information.

Expanding Regional Data Usage
During fall 2016, colleges will receive support for regional workforce planning. Each region will receive a report that brings together information on local labor market conditions, educational offerings, and students' employment outcomes for discussion in meetings that bring together colleges, employers, and educational partners.

Resources:

- CTE Data Unlocked Project website:
  http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/LaunchBoard/CTEDataUnlocked.aspx

Planning | Financial Community Colleges; Where We Are, Where We Are Going

Reviewer: *Willard Hom, Consulting Editor, RP Group*

Almost all of us proclaim the concept of the "big picture" as critical to high performance and survival for organizations in our dynamic and uncertain environments. However, we also acknowledge the difficulty for each of us to tap a resource that will help us to grasp our big picture in a 3-D fashion. By "3-D," I mean specifically, the dimensions of past, present, and future. Fortunately for us, a book by two experts in the community college environment, Romano and Palmer (2016), does just that.

Through *Financing Community Colleges* (FCC), we will get an eye-opening and thought-provoking view of a fundamental concern of every community college administration--how to pay for the college's operation. In just seven chapters that span 180 pages, Romano and Palmer cover the recent past of community college funding, the current state of affairs, and prospects for the future. The writing style is concise and readable because it largely avoids the terminology that usually characterizes academic articles by economists. Their

conclusions use extensive references (about 20 pages worth of sources) to establish credibility, but the level of referencing will not swamp the lay reader.

Romano and Palmer further help the reader by classifying cited studies according to their level of rigor (Type 1, Type 2, or Type 3). Romano and Palmer tackle tough questions with an appreciation for the widely varying contexts of community colleges across the nation. For example, they address the funding system in California with its unique features. Their analysis updates the detailed examination that Murphy (2004) undertook (see Resources below).

"...In California the number of students that can be served is heavily dependent on state funding. During periods of recession when enrollment expands, state support is cut, and community colleges are forced to cut class sections and limit the number of students they admit.... The failure to fund rising enrollments has reportedly left 500,000 students without a place to go and has pushed up enrollments in the expensive for-profit college sector.... In this case, the low-tuition policy, combined with the lack of control over tuition revenue, has resulted in reduced access.... We find that the California Community system is inefficient because with its low tuition levels it fails to recognize the private benefits derived from going to college..." (pp. 13-14).

On the topic of performance-based funding (PBF), Romano and Palmer offer these conclusions that they qualify extensively in FCC.

"...Do PBF programs have the effect that policymakers intend? Despite a growing body of research on these programs, this remains an open question. The first phase of PBF did not seem to improve measures of student success, due in part to the fact that many PBF schemes initiated early on were short-lived and never had a chance to take root in state funding mechanisms.... As a more workable compromise, we recommend that a flat 25% of state appropriations, phased in incrementally over time, be tied to performance, and that this level of funding be reconsidered over time after we gain greater insight into the validity and impacts of the metrics used in PBF formulas..." (pp. 108-112).

In summary, Romano and Palmer have succeeded in presenting a series of highly relevant analyses with supporting data that readers can easily digest to facilitate policy-making. FCC succinctly advises the reader about different policy options while acknowledging that some of its conclusions and recommendations will be disagreeable to some readers. In terms of limitations, FCC may try to cover too much territory in too few pages, and that may disappoint those who seek detailed "how-to" instructions (the cookbook approach) for performance-based funding and other topics. On the other hand, folks with strong theoretical leanings may view the content in FCC as a bit simplistic, and this particular group may also wish for the inclusion of more original data analyses to explore issues or support conclusions in depth. In any case, the large audience of policy-oriented readers (community college administrators, policy analysts, legislators, and institutional researchers) will likely benefit from a careful reading of FCC.

Resources:

- Romano, R., & Palmer, J.C. (2015). *Financing community colleges: Where we are, where we are going.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

- *Financing California's Community Colleges:* This report describes funding trends for the CCC system and assesses its ability to meet its future challenges. http://www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=324

Assessment | A Test of Selection Bias in Student Evaluations of Teaching (SET)

Article Author: *Willard Hom, Consulting Editor, RP Group*

A dimension of institutional performance is arguably the performance of instructors at an institution. But the assessment of instructor performance is a thorny measurement issue that challenges researchers and administrators alike. One historic approach in this area has been student evaluations of teaching (SET), which involve surveying students to obtain their ratings of their course instructors.

A recently published study by Wolbring (University of Mannheim) and Treischl (Institute of Sociology, University of Munich) explores the validity of the SET approach through the analysis of selection bias in SET gathered at a German university. Wolbring and Treischl describe their findings and drew the following conclusions:

1.   "…we find that approximately one third of the original audience do not participate in the regular SET during the last quarter of the term…" (p. 66).

[Note: Although each institution may experience a different level of non-participation, the point is that a sizable segment of students escape measurement.]

2.   "…our regression analyses show that course quality, students' motivation, course topic, climate among course participants, course-and workload, and timing of the course substantially influence absenteeism. Hence, data are certainly missing not at random…" (p. 66).

[Note: When data are not missing at random, the analyst faces a plausible issue with selection bias.]

3.   "…strong variations occur when we adjust for selection bias, the average changes of student ratings are small. In contrast to that, we find substantial changes in rankings based on SET…since extent and direction of selection bias varies with course format which induces substantial changes in course rankings, SET are, at least for the current sample, ill-suited for the comparison of different courses. Consequently, the finding of biases induced by the self-selection of participants raises doubts whether evaluation results are appropriate to depict a precise order of courses or instructors in regards to their teaching quality" (p.66).

4.   "…Thus, in contrast to the current practice, we recommend to mainly use SET results as a feedback instrument which can be put in context by the instructors" (p. 66).

Wolbring and Treischl elaborate on some of their methodology in the following excerpt:

"…We empirically examine the causes and consequences of self-selection for SET data at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Munich. Using a design with two measurement points in time, the attendance behavior of students at the regular time of evaluation as well as its determinants can be investigated. For this purpose we asked 29 lecturers to conduct an additional evaluation at the beginning of the semester.... The subsequent calculations are based on this matched data set which includes 2,263 observations for 1,569 students" (p. 60).

Wolbring and Treischl share their findings and methodology through their article in a 2016 issue of *Research in Higher Education* (see Resources below). This article may inform a discussion about SET in other contexts such as community colleges in the United States, and it may also have implications for off-campus versions of SET, such as RateMyProfessor.

Resources:

- Wolbring, T. & Treischl, E. (2016). Selection bias in students' evaluation of teaching. *Research in Higher Education*, *57*(1), 51-71.

- Student Consensus on RateMyProfessors.com

- RateMyProfessors.com: Testing Assumptions about Student Use and Misuse

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