DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 243 543 JC 840 220

AUTHOR Cohen, Arthur M.
TITLE Hispanic Students and Transfer in the Community College.
PUB DATE 23 May 84
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Hispanic Roundtable Talk of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (Phoenix, AZ, May 23, 1984).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Transfer Students; *Community Colleges; *Dropout Prevention; Educational Responsibility; *Enrollment Trends; *Hispanic Americans; Postsecondary Education; *Student Attrition; Student Characteristics; Student Personnel Services

ABSTRACT

A discussion is presented of Hispanic community college students and the prospects and problems related to their transfer to four-year institutions and progress toward the baccalaureate degree. First, the question of Hispanic student transfer rates is placed in the context of community college enrollment/transfer patterns in general and Hispanic participation rates at all levels of education. Data are provided reflecting the overall deemphasis of the transfer function in community colleges, the differential progress of Anglo and Hispanic students throughout the educational system, the participation rates of Hispanic students in community college education, and community college graduation rates. In addition, flaws and gaps in the data on transfer and student success are highlighted. Then, problems of and barriers to transfer to four-year institutions by Hispanic students are presented, with focus on the characteristics of community college which mitigate successful transfer for all student groups (e.g., lower funding levels, inadequate communication with students regarding transfer, inability to elicit strong student commitment to and involvement with the college, insufficiently demanding academic standards, articulation problems, and underprepared students). Next, improvements in the situation of minority students in the community colleges are discussed, including affirmative action rules, increased interest by philanthropic foundations in minority students, and college-level minority-oriented programs. Finally, ways of improving the transfer process are suggested, including better articulation with universities, stronger remediation and counseling services, and special activities for Hispanic students. (HB)

HISPANIC STUDENTS AND TRANSFER IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Arthur M. Cohen
University of California, Los Angeles

Paper prepared for the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges Hispanic Roundtable, Phoenix, Arizona.

May 23, 1984

Prepared for the AACJC
Hispanic Roundtable
Phoenix, AZ May 23, 1984

HISPANIC STUDENTS AND TRANSFER IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Arthur M. Cohen

UCLA

Community colleges are the point of first entry for over half the students of Hispanic origin who begin higher education in the United States. The reasons for this are obvious: half the Hispanics in the United States live in California and Texas where the community colleges are the point of entry for most students. In fact, 85% of all undergraduates in California are in community colleges; 58% in Texas. Therefore all questions of Hispanic students' progress from college entry to the baccalaureate must be viewed in a community college context. This paper considers the data regarding Hispanic students in community colleges, the flaws in the data, the problems of student progress toward the baccalaureate, what is being done to ameliorate the problems, and what could be done.

The data for Hispanics in two-year colleges must be understood in relationship to all students in community colleges and in the context of Hispanics in the American system of graded education that reaches from kindergarten to professional and graduate school. Community colleges offer grades 13 and 14 within that system but they tend to pass few of their students through to institutions providing education at grades 15 and beyond. When the two-year colleges were organized, earlier in the century, they acted as feeders to the senior institutions. But subsequent to the 1950s they expanded their functions of occupational education and non-credit community service activities for an adult population. Accordingly, the percentage of students transferring to senior institutions steadily declined. At present around five percent of all students entering community colleges complete two years at those institutions and transfer to the upper division of a four-year college or university. Add to that group the number of community college matriculants who transfer short of completing two years and perhaps another five percent at most moves on. Accordingly, for 90% of the people entering community colleges,

the baccalaureate degree is not the culmination of their education. Why? Many receive preparation for careers that do not require the baccalaureate; many already have higher degrees and are attending community colleges only for their personal interest or for upgrading in a career; many who may have intended transferring merely drop out, perhaps to reappear as students at a later time, perhaps to have completed their tenure in the formal education system.

Questions of the progress of Hispanic students in community colleges must be placed in the context of those students in the other levels of the system. The figures are as follows: of 100 Anglo students entering the educational system, 83 graduate high school, 38 enter college, 23 receive a bachelor's degree, 14 enter graduate or professional school, and 8 receive a graduate or professional degree. Of 100 Hispanic students entering the system, 55 graduate high school, 23 enter college, 7 receive a bachelor's degree, 4 enter graduate or professional school, and 2 receive a graduate or professional degree. These data reveal that Anglo and Hispanic students progress differentially through the system at all levels. Fewer Hispanics graduate from high school, fewer enter college, fewer complete college, and so on. This raises an important point: those who charge the community colleges with failing to facilitate transfer for Hispanics rarely consider all the data. Fewer community college students of any ethnicity receive baccalaureate degrees when compared with students who enter universities at the freshman year. And fewer Hispanic students progress through the school system regardless of the level or environment in which members of that group are examined.

What have the community colleges done? They have provided access, not only to students of Hispanic origin but to all people desiring higher education. They enroll 4.5 million students, more than one-third of the people attending any type of college in the nation. They have made it possible for the ratio of Hispanic college students to the percentage of Hispanics in the total population to come closer to parity in states with high Hispanic populations. The following

percentages held in 1976: in Arizona, 15% of the population is Hispanic; 11% of the college students are in community colleges; in California, 16% and 10%; in Colorado, 11% and 9%; in New Mexico, 34% and 16%; in Texas, 20% and 17%; in Florida, 7% and 7%. For the United States as a whole, 5.3% of the 18-to 24 year-olds are Hispanic and 8.2% of that group are in community colleges (Cohen and Brawer, 1982, pp. 42-43).

These figures vary from state to state depending on the level of community college development and on the relative accessibility of the universities. In some areas the community colleges are in balance with the local population: El Paso, Texas, has 63% Hispanic population; in El Paso Community College 63% of the students are Hispanic (Farrell, 1984). On the other hand, based on the percentage of Hispanics in a university relative to the total number of Hispanics in higher education in the state, the universities in many states are severely under-enrolled. These include Texas A&M and the University of Texas at Austin, the University of California's campuses at Berkeley, Davis, Los Angeles, and San Diego, and flagship universities in Arizona, New York, Colorado, Florida (Astin, 1982).

These data cannot of themselves be interpreted accurately. How many students intended obtaining bachelor's degrees when they entered community colleges? According to the annual freshman survey conducted by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program at UCLA, among fulltime freshmen entering community colleges, 80% aspired to at least a bachelor's degree (Astin, 1982). But when all entering students are considered, as in studies done in Virginia, Maryland, California, and Washington, the proportion of bachelor's degree aspirants drops to between 15 and 33% of the community college population (Cohen and Brawer, 1982, p. 46).

The progress of all students through two-year colleges is less direct than through senior institutions. Community colleges have been quite liberal in allowing students to enter regardless of their prior academic achievement, encouraging commuter and part-time attendees, and developing programs that do

not lead students in the direction of traditional bachelor's degrees. According to data provided by Astin (1982), for students who entered college in 1971 saying they intended obtaining at least a bachelor's degree, the following percentages completed a degree program by 1980: in all institutions 51% of the Blacks completed the degree; 24% for those who entered two-year colleges. For Chicanos, 40% of those entering all institutions, 20% of those entering two-year colleges; Puerto Ricans, 42% in all institutions, 27% in two-year colleges; Anglos, 56% in all institutions, 29% in two-year colleges.

The data obscure as much as they reveal. Aggregating data by an entire college system in a state or for the nation obscures what individual institutions are doing. Aggregating data for an entire population obscures what uses individual students are making of the institutions. However, these problems apply to any general data set. The more serious flaw in the data about community college transfers is that they have error; and some data are missing.

The California State University System has a standard reporting form that asks for the number of students transferring into each of its 18 campuses. On some campuses the form is completed by the registrar, in others by a research officer, and in others by a transcript evaluator. Which students are called transfers from community colleges? Those who appear with at least 15 units earned? Those whose college of last attendance was a community college? Some reporters use one definition, some use another. Which students are Hispanic? The California Post-Secondary Education Commission reports, "Since some of the five campuses with high percentages of unknown ethnicity might be expected to have relatively large enrollments of Blacks and Chicanos among their transfers, statewide enrollments of these ethnic groups in the state university may be underestimated in recent reports (CPEC, 1982, p. 9)." In other words, of all transfers to the University of California in any one year, 10% are "ethnicity unknown" and of all transfers to California State University, in recent years,

between 16% and 37% have been "ethnicity unknown."

Missing data also include what is being learned by students in community colleges, how well they are being prepared to enter senior institutions. These data are necessary to determine the community colleges' actual effect. Failing such data the effect of the two-year colleges can only be inferred by the percentage of students who transfer. As a way of considering the learning attained by community college students, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges developed a test of student knowledge in the humanities, sciences, social sciences, mathematics, and English usage. The Center administered this test to a sample of approximately 8,000 students enrolled in transfer credit courses in the community colleges of Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, and St. Louis in 1983-84. Among the results was the finding that Hispanics scored higher than Blacks but lower than Anglos. The Hispanic students in Los Angeles, most of whom are of Mexican descent and those in Miami, most of whom are of Cuban descent, had nearly identical scores. In Miami Hispanics scored higher than Blacks even when controlling for English as a native language; that is, the non-native English speaking Hispanics scored higher than the native English-speaking Black students. In Los Angeles scores for native English-speaking Blacks and non-native English-speaking Hispanics were approximately equivalent (Riley, 1984a, Riley, 1984b).

Issues of transfer relate to characteristics of the community colleges and of the receiving institutions, the universities and four-year colleges to which students would transfer. There is no question that fewer students obtain a bachelor's degree if they begin their college career in a community college than if they begin at a baccalaurate degree-granting institution. Astin points out that among students entering public higher education, 76% of the Anglos but only 49% of the Chicanos were still in school two years later. He attributes the extremely high attrition rate of Chicanos to their tendency to begin postsecondary

education in the community colleges. Although he admits "It is probably true that, were it not for community colleges, many minority students would not attend college at all," he questions the policies that allocate resources differentially to two-year and four-year colleges (Astin, 1982, p. 152). In another part of his analysis of minorities in higher education, he points out that "Public policy generally has focused on the issue of access to any post-secondary institution, assuming approximately equivalent effects and benefits of college attendance." (p. 121) In other words, he is intent on communicating the message of differences between colleges, saying that access is not a unitary concept.

The question of whether community colleges are beneficial to minority students is, thus, unresolved. If sizeable percentages of minority students would not attend any college unless there were a communtiy college available, then community colleges have certainly helped minorities, along with all kinds of students. But if the presence of a convenient community college discourages minorities from attending senior institutions, thus reducing the probability of their completing the baccalaureate, then for those students who wanted degrees the college has been detrimental.

What happens to people who enter community colleges? The first issue is that those colleges have fewer resources to expend. The universities spend 60% more on their education and general expenditure category. They spend 20% more in instruction, 50% more for their libraries, 100% more for financial aides, and 1000% more on research (Astin, 1982, p. 143). Therefore, people beginning community college enter an environment in which the institution simply does not have equivalent funds.

Other problems exist within the institution. Avila notes such internal issues as, "Inadequate communication regarding existing admissions for transfers; inadequate orientation for transfers; unsatisfactory communication of regulations, procedural

changes and other information needed by counselors/advisors of transfer students; and complex admissions and registration procedures which frustrate many potential transfer students (1983, p. 12). Astin says "Apparently community colleges are not set up to elicit strong student involvement in and commitment to the collegiate experience, at least not to the extent that other academic institutions are. Lacking such involvement and commitment, students are more apt to withdraw from post-secondary education (Astin, p. 8)." This suggests that because community college students tend to be attending part-time, commuting rather than residing on campus, and enjoying less opportunity for on-campus jobs, their enrollment continuance is jeopardized because they never do become sufficiently involved with college life.

The charge that the academic programs within community colleges are not sufficiently demanding has also been leveled. Richardson and his associates analyzed the literacy demands being placed on students in one community college district and concluded that the very process of reading and writing had been reduced to a set of minuscule bits; expectations of reading for pleasure, style, or overall content had been all but eliminated (Richardson and Others, 1982). Avila concluded his indictment with the statement, "At present, it appears that the caliber of some community colleges is such that it does not prepare students for rigorous academic work." (p. 19)

There are problems in the nature of relationships between community colleges and receiving institutions. The well-developed community college systems in Arizona, California, and Texas account for the high proportion of Hispanic students in those three states, but articulation policies there make transfer less likely than it is in Florida. In Florida about 15% of the entering community college students complete two years and transfer; in California, 3%. The California State University receives more than 30,000 transfers per year compared with 5,000 students transferring to the University of California.

Reasons include proximity (18 campuses compared with 9), occupationally-oriented baccalaureate programs such as business and accounting, lower costs, fewer costs, fewer course-credit challenges, and a grade point average requirement that sees the CSU allowing students with a 2.0 to transfer whereas the University of California requires a minimum of 2.4 (CPEC, 1982). The staff at El Paso Community College report that the University of Texas at El Paso limits the number of credits that can be transferred (Farrell, 1984).

The types of students entering community colleges present yet another force in mitigating transfer. On average, students who begin community colleges have lower high school grades, lower entrance test scores, and a less well-developed commitment to receiving the baccalaureate. The very fact that they must change colleges, change environments and social relationships, and learn new sets of rules makes successive transfer difficult. However, it is important to add that these characteristics of both institutions and individuals do not work differentially for members of ethnic minority groups. As Hunter and Sheldon put it at the conclusion of their longitudinal study of community college students in California, "Among ethnic minorities, it was found that very few students had problems arising from their minority status (p. 8-7)."

It is easy to document problems for transfers, less easy to trace what is being done. Large-scale date sets obscure individual institutions. However, there are a few reports of efforts especially designed to encourage transfer. In general, financial aid has become more readily available over the past 20 years. This is an enhancement to all students, especially those from low-income families because it ameliorates the negative effect of forgone earnings while attending college, even for students in the relatively low cost community college. Affirmative action rules and compliance offices on the national level have also raised the consciousness of people who are dealing with minority students on campus. Within the states, standards for high school graduation have been tightened

in the past few years. Eventually this should have a salutary effect since students entering community colleges will be better prepared.

Philanthropic foundations too have turned their attention to minority students in community colleges. The Ford Foundation has begun a community college initiative that will assist community colleges in increasing the transfer rate for their minority students. The Foundation initially selected 24 colleges to receive grants in 1983. Among the colleges with high Hispanic enrollments, Hostos Community College (N.Y.) is developing a special orientation course for potential transfer students. The college is also revising its course information so that an updated list of transfer value becomes available for each course. Los Angeles Mission College is developing a program that has potential transfer students meeting weekly with faculty mentors and with upper division alumni for academic, career, and transfer advisement. Miami-Dade Community College is doing a follow-up study of its former students who have transferred to assess the problems they encountered at the university. South Mountain Community College (AZ.) has assigned faculty mentors to work on a one-to-one basis with a selected group of potential transfer students.

Other college-level efforts are being made, sometimes with support from external agencies, more often using the general resources available to the colleges. Glendale College (AZ) operates a Minority Engineering Science Achievement program. The Los Angeles District maintains Project Access, an integrated effort to retain potential transfer students. Other colleges have developed special orientation and advising sections for minority students and are constantly changing remedial courses and student support systems. Many of the colleges have once again begun restricting admissions to the transfer courses for underprepared students, feeling that the 1960s philosophy giving the students "the right to fail" was misguided. Some colleges are attempting to create transfer programs from their disparate transfer courses, programs that have support services and readily identifiable

procedures built in. Six community colleges at the border with Mexico in California, Arizona, and Texas developed various block programs in which the staff works with students having difficulty in English grammar and writing, reading, psychology, history, and mathematics. Much of the activity involves staff members in designing and implementing practices reaching across the various disciplines in a manner such that students studying in one area are supported by their studies in other areas. (Rendon, 1982).

Miami-Dade Community College has taken the lead in invoking several system changes. It has revised its general education requirements; reinstated a mandatory placement examination; developed several levels of courses in remedial reading, writing, and computation; initiated a Standards Of Academic Progress system that monitors students as they progress through the transfer programs; established an Academic Alert and Advisement System designed to flag students with academic difficulties; and installed an Advisement and Graduation Information System that alerts potential transfers as to the requirements of various programs and departments in the different publicly supported senior institutions in Florida. The college also does admissions testing for purposes of placing students in courses where they have a chance of succeeding.

Since beginning these systemic modifications in 1975, the retention and graduation rate of students in Miami-Dade Community College has steadily increased. In 1981-1982, the college awarded 7, 401 degrees to a student body totaling 36,850, by far the highest number and ratio of graduation among community colleges. And similar graduation rates were shown for white non-Hispanics and for Hispanic students who were equated on entering test scores (Losak and Morris, 1982). Furthermore, the withdrawal rates for Hispanics had become approximately equivalent to the average withdrawal rate for all students.

Much of the literature suggests additional efforts that could be made to enhance transfer rates. Olivas (1979) studied the issue of all minorities in

community colleges and concluded that the institutions must promote enhanced academic and academic-support programs in the mainstream collegiate and occupational areas, not in community service and peripheral programs. Avila recommended that all incoming community college freshmen engage in mandatory sessions with counselors, that potential students have their transcripts and credentials evaluated prior to transfer, and that remedial programs targeted for transfer students be established. Chancellor Koltai has spoken out repeatedly on behalf of transfer in the Los Angeles Community College District and has recently exhorted the colleges to make an effort to rebuild the advanced or second year classes so that potential transfer students stay at the community colleges long enough to receive full benefit (1984). Rendon urged the colleges to emphasize the transfer function, provide satellite centers, permit flexible scheduling, and support activities designed to stimulate Chicano student pride in their institution (1981).

The Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities concluded that for the community colleges to enhance transfer they would have to have better articulation with the universities, stronger remediation and counseling services, and that they should build a transfer college within the community college to more closely approximate the traditional collegiate experience. The Commission recommended also that senior institutions set aside special funds to support community college transfers. In their most controversial recommendation, the Commission suggested that students aspiring to a baccalaurate degree be encouraged to bypass the community colleges and enter the four-year colleges directly (Astin, 1982, p. 191).

Some of these recommendations could be feasibly implemented. The community colleges can build better academic support services, support special activities for Hispanic students, schedule courses so that Hispanic students take them together, thus enhancing peer group support systems, and provide especially designed transfer counseling. Of itself, none of these practices will solve all problems related to transfer but, as Miami-Dade Community College has

shown, a set of practices put together for distinct purpose can have dramatic effect within a span of a few years.

More difficult to effect are the changed practices that involve relationships with senior institutions. Few four-year colleges and universities have made the kind of effort to promote transfer from community colleges that must be made if better transfer rates are to result. Where they have, the results have been positive. Arizona State University and its neighbor, the Maricopa Community College District have developed numerous links to enhance transfer. By limiting the size of its freshman class and by articulating its upper-division curriculum in several areas, including business, the university has become a prime receiver of students from the local community colleges; around 40% of its junior class is comprised of transfer students.

However, where changes in state policy are needed, the modifications are likely to be more difficult to effect. Some states, including Texas, have succeeded in their efforts to require all colleges and universities to use a common course numbering system, a necessary step toward enhancing course articulation and the transfer process. On the other hand, some of the major efforts in state-wide coordination have been less successful. Attempts to have the universities accept associate-degree transfers as having met general education requirements have floundered because of the recalcitrance of individual departments within the universities whose faculty refuse to accept the general education courses as sufficient preparation to enter their upper-division programs.

One change that could be effected within community colleges is to provide more on-campus jobs for the students. A second change is that greater academic support services be built to assist students in completing their courses satisfactorily. Those two could be married with programs that would employ students as tutors and paraprofessional aides to the instructors. The community colleges cannot feasibly recreate the residential experience that students enjoy in institutions where

they live on campus, but they can modify their practices in a way that students become more involved.

The colleges could also provide better transfer information to the students. Miami-Dade's Advisement and Graduate Information System allows each student to see at a glance the requirements of the departments in all senior institutions in Florida. The college took the initiative in putting the system together and computerizing it so that students need not depend on counselors to find answers to routine questions regarding the particular courses that a department has agreed to accept. Coupled with computer-generated letters advising each student of their academic progress each semester, the system has had a major impact at a relatively modest cost.

In summary, it is easy to disagree with those who say that community college is a dead end for Hispanics. The colleges have made it possible for Hispanic students to matriculate in large numbers. It is quixotic to expect that states would have built high-cost senior institutions within easy reach of the majority of the populace. For Hispanics, dropout is greater all through the educational system, from the lower schools through the graduate schools. To single out the community colleges as doing a disservice to them is decidedly unfair; the same untoward charge was leveled against the elementary schools at the turn of the century when attrition was high for the children of immigrants from Europe to the United States.

Since the mid 1960s 46% of the high school graduates have been entering higher education. In states with well-developed community college systems, rates of college going are high. Where there are few community colleges, fewer people participate in higher education, regardless of the ethnic composition of the state's population. The community college systems in California, Texas, Florida, Arizona, and New York have enhanced the rate of college going for all people, especially for the Hispanics. Would equity be better served if there were no community colleges and consequently if fewer young people from any group entered higher education?

References

Astin, A.W. Chicanos and Postsecondary Education: Some Dilemmas for Educators and Policy Makers. UCLA (n.d.).

Astin, A.W. Minorities in American Higher Education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1982.

Avila, J.G., and Others. Petition to Increase Minority Transfer from Community Colleges to State Four-Year Schools, Prepared by the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Public Advocates, Inc., and Sacramento Urban League. September 13, 1983. (JC 830 509).

Brown, G.H., and Others. The Condition of Education for Hispanic Americans. Washington, D.C.: National Council for Education Statistics, 1980. (ED 188 853).

Cohen, A.M. and Brawer, F.B. The American Community College. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1982.

de los Santos, A.G., Jr. and Others. "Chicano Students in Institutions of Higher Education: Access, Attrition, and Achievement," Aztlan Journal of Chicano Studies Research, 14, 1 (Spr. 1983), pp 79-110.

Farrell, C.S. "Two-Year Colleges Offer Haven For Many Hispanic Students," The Chronicle of Higher Education, 28 (4) March 21, 1984, page 1 and page 11.

Hunter, R. and Sheldon, M.S. Statewide Longitudinal Study: Report on Academic Year 1979-80. Los Angeles: Los Angeles Pierce College, 1980 (ED 203 953).

Koltai, L. Shaping Change: New Goals and New Roles. Paper presented at LACC Commission on Research, Asilomar, California, April 11, 1984.

Losak, John and Others. Implementation and Evaluation of The Standards of Academic Progress at Miami-Dade Community College, April 1981. (ED 206 335)

Losak, J. and Morris, C. Retention, Graduation, and Academic Progress as Related to Basic Skills. Miami-Dade Community College Research Report No. 82-36, 1982. (ED 226 784).

Olivas, M.A. The Dilemma of Access: Minorities in Two-Year Colleges. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1979.

Rendon, L. Basic Skills: Responding to the Task With Effective Innovative Programs. Presentation at Urban Community Colleges in Transition National Policy Conference, Detroit, Mi., March 7-9, 1982. (ED 213 460).

Rendon, L.I. "The Three R's for Hispanics in Higher Education: Rentention, Recruitment, and Research," Paper presented to the College Recruitment Association for Hispanics, Lansing, Michigan June 30, 1981. 19 pp., 1981. (ED 210 075).

Riley, M. The Community College General Academic Assessment: Miami-Dade Community College District, 1983. Los Angeles: Center for the Study of Community Colleges, March 22, 1984 a.

Riley, M. The Community College General Academic Assessment: Los Angeles District, 1983. Los Angeles: Center for the Study of Community Colleges, Feb. 15, 1984 b.

A Focus on the Community College Transfer Student. Report of the Intersegmental Conference, University of California, Irvine, Oct. 27, 1983.

Update of Community College Transfer Student Statistics. Sacramento: California Postsecondary Education Commission, Report 82-24, June 1982.