Opening Doors

Support Success

Services That May Help Low-Income Students Succeed in Community College

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Abstract

This paper examines how U.S. community colleges can and do organize the diverse set of guidance, counseling, and other supports — collectively known as student services — that surround their academic programming. To many Americans, community colleges are the most accessible way to earn the postsecondary degrees that can be stepping stones to economic and personal success. In addition to typically charging lower tuitions and using less stringent admissions policies than four-year colleges and universities, community colleges are often better geared to the needs of students who have low incomes and to so-called nontraditional students, such as young single parents, financially independent adults, welfare recipients, students of color and of immigrant backgrounds, first-generation college students, and older and disabled students. However, many of these students never graduate from community colleges. To address the problem of high attrition rates in these institutions, MDRC has launched a demonstration called "Opening Doors," which provides for one of the nation's first large-scale experimental evaluations of innovative strategies to help community college students complete their degree programs. Besides curricular and instructional reforms and supplemental financial aid, the third broad strategy being tested in the demonstration is the enhancement of student services.

Drawing on a literature review, reconnaissance work to develop Opening Doors, and information on early operations of the community college sites in the demonstration, this paper provides an overview of the current state of student services and promising practices for service delivery. It examines five interrelated but distinct elements of a student services program: academic guidance and counseling; academic supports (direct instruction and tutoring on academic subjects and skills); personal guidance and counseling; career counseling; and supplemental supports like child care, transportation help, and book and supply vouchers. In addition, it considers two strategies for providing student services that cut across these categories: (1) programs targeted to low-income and nontraditional students that offer combinations of different kinds of counseling and supports and (2) multiservice centers. For each element of student services, the paper highlights innovative practices found at community colleges around the country. A concluding section offers observations on needs and opportunities associated with the provision of student services in community college settings.

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Introduction

Like regular academic classes and extracurricular activities, the diverse set of guidance, counseling, and related supports and activities collectively known as *student services* are a standard feature of life in U.S. institutions of higher education. Thus far, there have been few systematic efforts to examine the accomplishments and limitations associated with providing these services to students enrolled in community colleges. At the same time, a modest amount of research evidence — although almost all nonexperimental — suggests that these services may have a valuable role to play in promoting successful outcomes for community college students. This paper aims to fill in the picture of the current state of student services in community college settings and to point to possible approaches to improving the provision of these services by:

- Offering some background information on what is known about the content of student services, the roles they can and do play in community college settings, and how they are delivered

- Highlighting promising practices associated with the provision of these services

- Identifying some of the constraints and limitations involved in the delivery of student services

This paper is one of a number of publications, existing and planned, to be issued by MDRC's national Opening Doors demonstration.[1] Through Opening Doors, MDRC and six community colleges are testing the effectiveness of innovative strategies to help community college students whose backgrounds put them at risk of dropping out to persist and complete their educations — and thereby to take a step that can put them on pathways to better jobs, higher earnings, and other outcomes that enable young people to live more fulfilling lives. The interventions being tested include both student service strategies and strategies in two other areas: (1) curricular and instructional reform and (2) financial aid supplements. The main focus is on how the strategies can help community college students complete an associate's degree and/or transfer to a four-year institution. However, to take into account the breadth of educational goals that these students can pursue, Opening Doors also recognizes the value of earning the occupational certificates that are offered by most community colleges.

Opening Doors is targeted to two overlapping groups of students: *low-income students* (typically with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty line) and so-called *nontraditional students* — groups such as young single parents, financially independent adults, welfare recipients, students of color and of immigrant backgrounds, first-generation college students,

[1]See Choitz and Widom, 2003; Kazis and Liebowitz, 2003.

and older and disabled students. While low-income and nontraditional students tend to be outside the mainstream of student bodies in four-year colleges and universities, they make up a significant share of community college enrollees. Because Opening Doors is one of the first large-scale random assignment studies of innovative strategies to promote retention rates for these kinds of students, it is expected to break new ground by producing more reliable evidence than has thus far been available on the effectiveness of such strategies.

This paper — which draws on initial focus groups and surveys conducted for Opening Doors and on a literature review — has been written to stimulate dialogue on how to strengthen the provision of student services in community colleges.

Opening Doors: Rationale, Operations, and Research Agenda

Needs and Problems

Community colleges are a very significant — but sometimes overlooked — part of this country's educational infrastructure. A national profile of community colleges reports that, in 2000-2001, over 1,100 public postsecondary two-year institutions in the United States conferred over half a million associate's degrees, representing 24 percent of the postsecondary degrees awarded during that period.[2] In 1999-2000, 38 percent of approximately 16.5 million undergraduates were enrolled in associate's degree programs,[3] and in many cases these students were older, more likely to be working and parents, and more likely to be attending college part time than their counterparts in four-year institutions.[4] For dependent students — those under 24 years old who were still living with their parents — rates of community college enrollment decreased as family income increased.[5]

According to a review of the educational levels needed for different occupations in the United States, postsecondary education will be important for obtaining higher-paying jobs for 10 of 20 of the nation's fastest-growing occupations; a bachelor's or associate's degree is the main source of education or training;[6] and "the average job growth rates are expected to be very strong for occupations involving at least an associate['s] degree."[7] No doubt reflecting the increased im-

[2]Knapp et al., 2003.
[3]Horn, Peter, and Rooney, 2002.
[4]Horn, Peter, and Rooney, 2002.
[5]Horn, Peter, and Rooney, 2002.
[6]U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003.
[7]Jagoda and Goldstein, 2003, p. 11.

portance of postsecondary education for career advancement, the number of employees with an associate's degree or vocational certificate is expected to grow by almost one-fourth by 2010.[8]

Community colleges — with generally less stringent admissions policies and lower tuition rates than four-year colleges and universities — offer low-income and nontraditional students important entry points to the postsecondary education and training that are more and more becoming a prerequisite for embarking on higher-paying careers. According to one study, almost 9 in 10 community college students enroll in college intending to earn a credential or to transfer to a four-year college or university.[9]

But too often, say many observers, community college students walk through revolving doors.[10] A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) followed students seeking an associate's degree for a three-year period starting in 1995-1996, when they entered an institution of postsecondary education. The study found that 41 percent of the students left college before they graduated, compared with 32 percent who were still enrolled; 7 percent had gone on to a four-year institution; 6 percent had earned a certificate; and only 15 percent had graduated with an associate's degree.[11] Another study shows that, in 1997, almost half of students entering two-year colleges dropped out before the end of their first year and that while slightly more than one-third earned an associate's degree from public two-year colleges within three years, private two-colleges reported that almost 63 percent of their students graduated within the same time frame.[12]

Students of color and students on the lower rungs of the economic ladder seem especially vulnerable to dropping out. Another report drawing on the NCES data found that, three years after initial enrollment in a public two-year college, 40 percent of white students but over one-half of the African-American students and almost one-half of the Hispanic students were no longer enrolled.[13] Interestingly, the same study found less disparity in attrition rates for students of different racial and ethnic groups who had entered a four-year institution: 19 percent of the African-American students, almost 16 percent of the Hispanic students, and nearly 13 percent of the white students were no longer enrolled.[14] Thus, it appears to be the two-year college setting that puts African-American and Latino students at particularly high risk of dropping out. (However, some research suggests that differences in completion rates for black students equal or

[8]Jagoda and Goldstein, 2003.
[9]Hoachlander, Sikora, and Horn, 2003.
[10]See Jenkins, 2002.
[11]U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001.
[12]ACT Newsroom, 1998.
[13]See the discussion of the Beginning Postsecondary Student Study (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999), as presented in Swail (2003).
[14]Swail, 2003.

exceed rates for white students when both groups of students had comparable levels of educational achievement before they entered college.)[15]

The pattern of higher dropout rates for minority students may hold for economically disadvantaged students as well, since many minority students are low-income. One recent study that looked at differentials between low-income and more advantaged students who began their postsecondary education in 1995-1996 found that, three years after enrollment, low-income students were less likely to persist to completion when compared with their not-so-low-income counterparts — 59 percent of the lower-income versus 71 percent of the higher-income students.[16] However, after controlling for demographic and other factors related to lower rates of persistence — factors such as financial independence, working 25 hours or more per week, being African-American or Latino, having delayed entry into postsecondary education, taking classes part time, or starting postsecondary education at a two-year institution — 64 percent of lower-income versus 69 percent of higher-income students were still enrolled or had attained a degree.[17]

Some of the low-income students and students of color who do not graduate in the observed period may simply take still longer to complete their program, often because they need more remedial help or have a harder time paying tuition. Nevertheless, long delays in earning an associate's degree can be problematic, and very likely significant numbers of the community college students who fail to graduate in an observed period never complete college at all.

All the patterns just discussed point to a need to identify strategies that can improve community college retention rates for low-income and nontraditional students — a need that is especially important in the current budget environment, with more constrained funding for programs and services to help these students succeed. Opening Doors is designed to address that need.

The Demonstration and Its Research Agenda

Planning for Opening Doors started in January 2001, with an 18-month reconnaissance effort to conduct background research on the persistence and retention rates of low-income and nontraditional students in postsecondary institutions. During this phase, the MDRC Opening Doors team visited community colleges that had programs geared to this student population; conducted focus groups with current, former, and potential students; and talked with experts on postsecondary education about successful retention strategies.

In the subsequent design phase of the demonstration, MDRC convened meetings of postsecondary education experts to provide guidance on how Opening Doors should be struc-

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[15]Jacobson et al., 2001.
[16]Choy and Bobbitt, 2000.
[17]Choy and Bobbitt, 2000.

tured and on the selection of the four community college sites (comprising six colleges) where innovative strategies would be tested. Together, MDRC and these experts identified the three broad areas, or strands, of work for the community college sites in the demonstration: (1) curricular and instructional reform, particularly for students with low basic skills; (2) financial aid supplements; and (3) the focus of this paper — enhanced student services.

It was decided that community colleges in the demonstration would randomly assign eligible students to a *program group,* which would be offered a set of enhanced services, or to a *control group,* which would receive the standard academic program and services for that institution. By comparing the two groups over time, MDRC will be able to determine what differences, or *impacts,* the programs make in a wide range of educational and other outcomes.

The sites that were selected to participate in the demonstration offer a variety of different services using a number of different models. Kingsborough Community College (Brooklyn, New York) places students who are in the program group in a learning community — in effect, an opportunity for a small group of students to take courses in common and to share teachers and counselors — as a test of an innovation centered on curricular reform. Lorain County Community College (Elyria, Ohio) is providing enhanced student services combined with a small financial incentive. Owens Community College (Toledo, Ohio) operates a program similar to Lorain County's, and the two campuses are treated as a single site in the demonstration research. Also using a financial incentives strategy are three campuses of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System in the New Orleans area: Delgado Community College (City Park and West Bank) and Louisiana Technical College (West Jefferson); these colleges are offering students a $1,000 stipend over the course of two semesters. Chaffey College (Rancho Cucamonga, California) is providing supplemental instruction in core basic skills along with enhanced academic counseling and student services. Brief overviews of the four sites and their colleges are presented in Appendix A.

The demonstration's research consists of both implementation and impact studies. The *implementation research* will investigate the nature and content of the selected programs, using a variety of qualitative methods to explore what services are provided, how they are delivered, the successes and challenges associated with the innovations, and the best practices used to serve students. Some questions about implementation that may be explored include:

- What marketing and outreach strategies do the colleges use to make postsecondary education more accessible to students?
- What are the factors (program components, staffing, or others) that account for program impacts (both successes and failures)?
- What are the patterns of student engagement?

- What is the intensity of use of the Opening Doors services?
- How do the colleges integrate their programs and services with those offered in four-year institutions?

For its *impact study,* Opening Doors is using an experimental research design, which, as noted, is unusual for research on community college practices: Students will be randomly assigned either to the Opening Doors group, which will receive enhanced services, or to a control group, which will receive existing services. The comparison of a broad set of outcomes for the two groups over time will make it possible to measure the impacts that Opening Doors has over and above what could have happened in the absence of its services. Random assignment evaluations are widely considered the gold standard for measuring the effectiveness of social programs because they have more power than other research methods to eliminate any differences — aside from exposure to the intervention — between a group that does receive program services and a group that does not.

Through the use of 12- and 36-month follow-up surveys to be conducted with both the program and the control group students, the impact study will examine a number of different outcomes associated with earning a postsecondary credential. In the short term, the 12-month survey will look at students' experiences in school and progress toward their goals. Transcript data will be used to monitor students' grade point averages, levels of credit accumulation, term-to-term enrollment, movement from basic skills to transfer-level courses, and progress toward a certificate or a degree. The 36-month survey will investigate more long-term outcomes, such as students' employment histories, occupations, the quality of their jobs, their earnings, and their rates of transfer to four-year colleges. In addition to academic and labor market outcomes, both surveys will include questions about students' levels of civic engagement, their health status and behaviors, their personal development, and their support networks.

Of the three strands of work that sites will undertake — curricular reform, financial aid, and student services — the student services strand is probably the least well understood. While the concepts of curricular reform and financial aid are familiar to most people, the term "student services" may convey only a very general picture of the activities involved. The following section aims to give readers a common understanding of this important facet of community college life.

An Overview of Student Services and Their Role in Community Colleges

What Are Student Services?

Definitions of student services can vary, but the following catalog of their elements — developed for the Opening Doors demonstration — offers one useful description of what such services encompass. According to Opening Doors, student services consist of:

- **Academic guidance and counseling,** including orientation, information on navigating the college, reading and math assessments, educational planning and advising that helps students select courses to meet major requirements that fit their career goals, monitoring students' progress to ensure that they reach educational benchmarks in a timely way, early registration, forums or presentations on topics to help students persist, and transfer counseling to ensure that students complete the requirements needed to enroll in four-year colleges or universities

- **Academic supports,** such as tutoring, remedial assistance, and time management and study skills training

- **Personal guidance and counseling,** which can consist of crisis intervention, information and referral, mental health counseling, life-skills counseling, mentoring or coaching, and peer support

- **Career counseling,** which encompasses aptitude assessments, development of career plans, and sharing of information on careers and their skill requirements

- **Supplemental services,** such as child care subsidies or vouchers, transportation tokens or passes, and book and supply vouchers, that help students pursue an education

Table 1 shows these core elements and presents capsule descriptions of how students might experience them. The descriptions reflect the Opening Doors demonstration's working assumptions about the ideal ways in which these different elements of student services should be provided. The assumptions are based on (1) Opening Doors site visits to colleges around the country that use innovative strategies and promising practices to deliver student services and (2) available research on these services.

Table 1

Core Elements of Student Services

Services and Key Elements	Description
ACADEMIC GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING	
Navigating the Community College: Getting Started	
Orientation	Students receive a "map" of general requirements and some guidance on what is expected of them both socially and academically while they are enrolled. Orientation includes information on which services and resources are provided by which departments and on how these departments interact with each other to support students. Students also receive pointers on how to make the best use of the college's systems to get access to services efficiently.
Educational Planning and Monitoring	
Course planning/choosing a degree or course of study	Students meet with an advisor to create short-term and long-term academic plans that fit their personal, career, and academic goals and that are realistic, given their abilities and the amount of time they have to dedicate to their education. Some attention is paid to which instructors are best for nontraditional students both from an educational perspective and from the perspective of the instructors' abilities to be flexible in working with these students and understanding their needs.
Monitoring and follow-up of academic progress	Students have periodic check-ins with an advisor to review progress made and to revise their short- and long-term academic plans to fit their academic standing and any changes in their personal circumstances. The monitoring may involve the collaboration of faculty and advising staff to detect and act on early signals — such as lack of attendance or poor grades — of academic difficulties.
Transfer assistance	Students receive information on steps needed to complete an associate's degree program or to transfer to a four-year institution. They learn about and discuss transfer requirements for the program of study they wish to pursue.
ACADEMIC SUPPORTS	
Study skills classes	Students receive instruction via short courses, workshops, individual counseling, or printed materials on effective study habits and techniques such as exam preparation and effective note-taking.
Help with basic skills and specific courses	Students receive course-specific tutoring or help with homework assignments in groups or individually. They are also given any remedial help they need in math, reading, or writing.

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Services and Key Elements	Description
PERSONAL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING	
Individual sessions	Students work one-on-one with a counselor to address personal problems such as domestic violence, stress, depression, and other nonacademic concerns that can impede their academic progress. Counseling may include information about and referral to off-campus services.
Group counseling	Counseling focused on solving personal problems is offered in a group setting that allows students with similar concerns, such as eating disorders, or with similar characteristics, such as being single parents, to support each other.
Mentoring	Alumni, faculty, staff, or community members who share career or academic interests are formally or informally paired with students to provide guidance and information and discuss students' concerns and goals.
Peer counseling	Students are matched one-on-one or in groups with trained peers for sharing of information and experiences that help them address personal concerns.
CAREER COUNSELING	
Career planning	Students have access to an advisor who helps them develop an educational plan that aligns their personal interests, goals, and abilities with a career and who outlines educational steps that they need to take to achieve their career goals.
SUPPLEMENTAL SERVICES	
Child Care	
Off-campus child care referrals	Students receive help in locating and applying for high-quality child care on- and off-campus that fits their schedules and financial needs.
Child care vouchers and/or subsidies	Students receive vouchers that can be used at college-approved child care centers or subsidies that can be applied to the cost of child care regardless of provider.
Transportation	
Transportation vouchers and/or subsidies	Students receive vouchers or subsidies that can be used to pay for public transportation or to purchase a car, buy gas, or otherwise meet school-related transportation needs.
Book and Supply Vouchers	
Book and supply vouchers and/or subsidies	Students receive vouchers or subsidies that can be used to purchase books and needed supplies.

Besides the view of student services as *activities* or *elements,* as was just presented, another helpful way to look at student services is to consider their *functions.* Opening Doors field experience and a review of the literature on retention and persistence in postsecondary education suggest that a strong student services component should:

- Provide accurate information on courses, programs, and educational opportunities as well as campus resources for which students are eligible
- Help students enroll in those classes required to complete their major course of study, through continuous guidance and counseling that occur each semester or quarter and as needed
- Facilitate students' personal development by offering them help both from academic advisors and from coaches and mentors who take into account their financial and personal experiences and circumstances
- Ensure that the courses of studies that students pursue fit their goals, strengths, and interests[18]
- Enable students to overcome personal or situational problems that may thwart their persistence in community college

General Conditions for Delivering Student Services in Community Colleges

The nature and levels of funding for student services in community colleges vary by state and institution, and there does not appear to be systematic information regarding which patterns of funding are most prevalent. However, it is worth noting that, in his research on one of the most common student support services — guidance and counseling — offered at community colleges, leading expert W. Norton Grubb found that most states did not earmark monies specifically for these services; rather, the costs were funded mainly from the colleges' general revenues.[19]

Most, if not all, community colleges offer at least some student services, but there is wide variation in how the services are emphasized and arranged. Even more important, these services are often in short supply. Grubb observes that, "like other services that do not directly generate enrollments and therefore revenues, guidance and counseling have often been relatively peripheral to community colleges."[20] Student services may be particularly vulnerable to

[18]Grubb, 2001; Wyckoff, 1999.
[19]Grubb, 2004.
[20]Grubb, 2001, p. 5.

downsizing or elimination during times of budget constraints because of the lack of systematic information about what structures or financing arrangements make them effective. Better and more reliable research highlighting the value of promising student service approaches might do more to protect the services from cutbacks.

Extraordinarily high student-counselor ratios are the most dramatic sign of the shortage of student services. One study shows that the average student-counselor ratio in U.S. community colleges is almost 1,000:1,[21] while a report examining the diversity of the California college community system found that the median ratio of students to counselor ranged from 1,400:1 in 1994 to approximately 1,700:1 in 2001.[22] The reconnaissance work done for Opening Doors shows that, for a recent semester, Lorain County Community College (Elyria, Ohio) had approximately nine full-time-equivalent academic advisors and six full-time-equivalent counselors. With approximately 9,600 students enrolled, this was about 1,067 students per advisor and 1,600 students per counselor.[23] Exacerbating the shortage of student services, the budgets of colleges and community colleges are often based on formulas that focus on "full-time equivalents," which tend to count part-time enrollments and teaching loads for less than their full worth and thus underrepresent part-time students and their needs.

Research on the Potential of Student Services and on Their Pathways of Influence

Although student services are often poorly funded and although there is a need for more reliable research on their capacity to support students' progress, there is some existing evidence that they can do so. For example, research by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) suggests that special services targeting nontraditional students are linked to better academic outcomes and improved retention rates. Attributes associated with these positive outcomes appear to be that the services be consistent, that they take into account students' strengths, and that they respond to students' needs and to the challenges posed by a college environment.[24]

A 1989 study found that first-year students who felt that they had received good-quality advisement withdrew from public four-year institutions at a rate that was 25 percent lower than students who believed their advising to be of poor quality and 40 percent lower than students who reported that they had received no advisement.[25] In addition, nearly 1,000 college administrators who responded to a survey about student retention practices reported that a key reason why students drop out is "inadequate academic advising." They also reported that the most

[21] Keim, 1989; as cited in Grubb, 2001.
[22] See Woodlief, Thomas, and Orozco, 2003.
[23] Scrivener, Wavelet, and Sagness, 2003.
[24] Mathur, 2004.
[25] Metzner, 1989; as cited in Cuseo, 2003.

common strategy that their institutions used to try to help students stay in school was to improve the quality of advising.[26]

Studies conducted of outcomes for students who received public assistance from California's welfare-to-work program (known as CalWORKs) and who exited California community colleges in 1999-2000 show that there was a positive correlation between students' employment rates and earnings levels and their time spent in community colleges. The studies also show that the earnings gap between CalWORKs community college students and other female students increasingly narrowed after graduation. Interviews with some of these students indicate that such services as on-campus child care and academic advising were often a key factor in the students' academic success.[27]

Other evidence on the importance and potential effectiveness of student services comes from studies of two multiservice programs for nontraditional students: the national TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) program and California's Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS). These are discussed in detail below, under the heading "Multiservice Programs."

Thus far, there have been limited attempts to examine exactly *how* student services can strengthen students' connections to postsecondary education. However, analyses by Tinto that focus on why students do or do not leave institutions of higher education before matriculating give interesting clues about the possible role of student services in promoting educational success. Building on theories that attempt to explain the individual, societal, and environmental factors that contribute to departure in many different contexts, Tinto has developed a framework for understanding student attrition from postsecondary institutions.[28]

He concludes that a very broad array of factors affect students' decisions to stay in postsecondary institutions or to exit institutions before matriculating. Often the examination of these decisions has focused solely on students' individual characteristics — for example, their educational backgrounds, goals, or economic situations. However, Tinto asserts that it is just as important to examine how the larger system of academic and social forces can help or hinder academic progress.[29] This broader perspective shifts some of the attention from what students bring to higher education to what happens to them after they enroll. And although college and community college students continue to be involved in many off-campus experiences and relationships, their interactions with the postsecondary institution — for instance, the level and nature of their involvement with faculty, staff, peer groups, and extracurricular activities — become very important aspects of their lives after enrollment.

[26]Beal and Noel, 1980; as cited in Cuseo, 2003.
[27]Mathur, 2002.
[28]Tinto, 1993.
[29]Tinto, 1993.

This line of reasoning suggests that *activities and supports that promote students' integration into the life of the community college* can influence whether students stay or drop out. Clearly, student services have the capacity to offer those kinds of activities and supports. Thus, Tinto's analysis points to a possible pathway by which student services influence outcomes: These interventions may help students feel part of a community, which, in turn, helps them persist academically.[30] Also, in showing that actions taken by institutions themselves can contribute to retention rates, Tinto's work underscores the value of learning more about how student services are defined, organized, and delivered.

Information Sources for This Paper

- **The literature review.** With some findings that have already been cited in this paper and some that are discussed later, the review focused on persistence and retention rates for low-income and nontraditional students and on strategies to improve their rates of degree completion.

- **Two sets of focus groups.** To help MDRC and its partner sites prepare for the demonstration, two sets of focus groups were convened. The first set consisted of 18 groups of low-income individuals who were current, former, or potential students at six community colleges across the nation.[31] The second set of focus groups, which encompassed fewer participants, was composed of selected recipients of welfare through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) — the nation's public assistance program — who were attending one of three California community colleges. Some participants were getting support services through the special community college program offered through CalWORKs.

- **Opening Doors reconnaissance work.** This work consisted of exploring innovative and promising programs, seeking the advice of experts in the field, identifying the three strands of strategies to be explored, and visiting recommended colleges with services that fit these strategies. (Appendix B presents a list of experts who attended a meeting convened by MDRC to discuss student services.)

This paper now turns to its review of what is known about student services in community colleges.

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[30]Tinto, 1993.

[31]See Matus-Grossman and Gooden (2002) for more detail on the three categories of participants, for details on the methods of conducting the focus groups, and for the findings.

Student Service Strategies

The following discussion examines the five elements of student services that have been defined by Opening Doors and that were outlined earlier (see Table 1): (1) academic guidance and counseling, (2) academic supports, (3) personal guidance and counseling, (4) career counseling, and (5) supplemental services. In addition, the discussion considers (6) crosscutting service strategies that combine some or all of the other elements. Each of the six discussions first presents the rationales for why students need the particular kind of help under discussion and then gives an overview of some of the promising practices that are currently being used to meet those needs.

Although the search for exemplary services and programs cited in the following sections was not exhaustive, it drew on a wide variety of sources, including community college programs across the country. Some of the exemplary programs are operated by institutions that were attended by students in the Opening Doors focus groups, and others are operated by community colleges that were being considered or have been selected for inclusion in the Opening Doors demonstration. Still others are programs that researchers and other experts in the field have identified as notable.

Academic Guidance and Counseling

Needs

Navigating the Institution

Even before community college students start concentrating on their individual classes, they need to know how to find their way around the college environment. College campuses and procedures can be overwhelming and intimidating to new students, who often lose valuable time and money and can become discouraged and drop out if they are not aware of the services and systems that are supposed to support them as they work toward degrees. Assistance in maneuvering through the system can help students — especially students facing multiple demands on their time — to more efficiently get what they need to enroll, register, apply for financial aid, and/or take advantage of support services.

Educational Planning and Monitoring

Students must also be helped to do accurate and consistent educational planning. The following discussion covers three key kinds of educational planning and monitoring that students need: course planning, monitoring and follow-up, and transfer advising.

Course planning

A recurring theme across the focus groups conducted for Opening Doors was the need for upfront assistance in selecting courses and programs of study and in meeting graduation requirements. By guiding students to create long-term educational plans, academic counselors can help them tailor their courses and course loads to fit their available time and skill levels. This advisement can also help students decide whether they should pursue credentials or degrees and then to choose among the types of credentials and degrees that they should try to earn to fit their interests and skill levels. In addition, the advisement can direct students to the developmental courses (such as courses in reading, writing, and math) that many of them need to succeed in college, and it can help ensure that they take prerequisite courses for their major field of study.

Because the way in which courses are scheduled can sometimes delay students from graduating — for example, if a required course is offered only once a year — another facet of course planning is to alert students to any scheduling constraints. This need is particularly strong for part-time students, who have less latitude in arranging their time on-campus than students who attend full time. More generally, it is important for colleges to keep track of whether students are available for day or evening classes and of whether they are full- or part-time students, because those conditions can affect their eligibility for financial aid and their ability to access other support services.

Monitoring and follow-up

In addition to upfront course planning, students benefit from periodic assessments of their grades and credits. Regular monitoring helps students keep abreast of their progress and allows for early interventions if they are not on track to graduate. Progress reports can also motivate students to achieve, by showing them the role that each of their courses plays in furthering their academic goals. Focus group participants said that they valued regular triggers — usually letters or calls that indicate that students are in academic trouble and should seek help. Some focus group members noted that triggers are often activated only after grades have begun to slip, when it is too late to get the academic assistance they need before they fail or are forced to withdraw.

Transfer advising

Yet another important need in the area of educational planning is for transfer advising. Many students who wish to transfer to a four-year institution must start planning early, because not all courses can be transferred toward a four-year degree and because different colleges have different transfer requirements for majors. Transfer counseling can ensure that students make course selections that will improve their chances for acceptance and that facilitate their pursuit of a major once they start attending.

Responses and Promising Practices

Navigating the Institution

Among the many strategies that colleges use to help both new and returning students obtain information about college life are printed materials, online assistance, orientation sessions and courses, and one-stop centers.

Printed Materials

Almost all institutions offer students some form of printed orientation materials. These may suffice to give some students a good grasp of community college practices. Some students, however — including many non-English speakers, first-generation students, and others who tend to need help in orienting themselves — may not understand such information well enough unless it is presented interactively.

Online Assistance

Using information technology is an increasingly popular technique for orienting students to community colleges. Most colleges have Web sites from which students can get information about available support services. Using a more interactive online strategy, Lorain County Community College in Ohio offers an advisor called "Auntie Carol," an electronic mailbox named after the first academic advisor to retire from the college. Students can email questions to Auntie Carol — in reality, four advisors — directly from the college's Web site and will receive an answer within 24 hours, on weekdays (except for holidays), and they may be referred to links on the college's Web page. But if students raise questions that cannot be answered in that way or if they have concerns about confidentiality, the counselors ask them to call or come in for an appointment.[32] This both protects the students' privacy about personal matters and offers them the direct contact that they may need to solve personal problems.

Group and Individual Orientations

Often colleges invite students to group orientation sessions, which review such basic information as topics covered in the student handbook and course catalog while providing an opportunity for students to ask questions. Some of these orientations give students a chance to seek out and practice using available resources, such as the library's online catalog. Still other colleges encourage students to meet one-on-one with an academic counselor and/or financial aid advisor. While potentially very useful, this individualized counseling — like all case man-

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[32]O'Neill, 2004.

agement strategies — is helpful only when student-to-counselor ratios are low enough to enable counselors to devote adequate time to each person they work with.

ORIENTATION COURSES

Some institutions — including Bronx Community College, California's Chaffey Community College, and Portland (Ohio) Community College — offer semester-long courses that are designed to help students adjust to college life while balancing work, family, and academic responsibilities. These courses assist students with such tasks as developing an educational plan, setting career goals, learning to use time management and study techniques and to think critically, and getting access to the library and other resources, such as tutoring and academic services. Some orientation courses are credit-bearing. For example, Valencia Community College outside Orlando, Florida, offers an elective, three-credit course called "Student Success." When compared with other students seeking degrees and preparing for college, students who completed this course averaged 20 percent higher completion and reenrollment rates.[33]

A comparison-group study gives some evidence that an in-depth orientation course can make a difference: A longitudinal study involving two groups of students — those who had participated in a one-credit, eight-week freshman seminar aimed at helping them adjust to college life and navigate the college and a comparison group of nonparticipating students — completed questionnaires at the beginning and end of each semester. The researchers found that students who completed the course usually equaled or exceeded the comparison-group students in their self-reported confidence in learning skills, knowledge of college procedures and policies, and use and knowledge of available academic and general resources, particularly a campus tutoring center. In some quarters, students who took the course also had higher rates of reenrollment and unit completion than students in the comparison group. Although these differences were not always significant, they were often in the expected direction — with seminar students doing as well as or better than the nonparticipating students.[34,35]

ONE-STOP CENTERS

Some community colleges help students negotiate pathways among various services offered throughout the college. Besides its Web site, Lorain County Community College is trying a one-stop approach to academic guidance and counseling at a satellite site based in a former hospital. Staff from the Student Services Department and trained advisors assist potential, new,

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[33]See Student Success Web site: http://valenciacc.edu/studentsuccess/SS/what_is.htm.

[34]See Keenan and Gabovitch, 1995.

[35]The methodology used to form the nonparticipant group is not clearly outlined, but the study suggests that students were not chosen randomly, so that differences in the participant and comparison groups might account for these results.

and returning students with a variety of services, including admissions applications, academic counseling and advising, registration, and financial aid assistance. The center also offers information on specialized services, such as English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and assistance to veterans and international students. In addition, some basic skills courses and all state-tested Nurses Assistant program coursework is offered at the site.[36]

Educational Planning and Monitoring

COURSE PLANNING

One activity that many colleges have found is key to making an early determination of students' academic needs and skills is comprehensive educational assessments that not only take into account test scores but also explore students' educational and career goals, educational histories, personal experiences, and family situations. Many of the programs that target nontraditional students — such as the CalWORKs Community College Program;[37] the Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS) initiative, which is also in California, and Puente (both programs are described below, under "Multiservice Programs") — offer students this level of academic guidance. EOPS requires students both to develop an educational plan and to meet with a counselor three times a semester to update it.

REGULAR FOLLOW-UP

Providing the kind of early trigger recommended by some students in the focus groups, Hazard Community and Technical College in Hazard, Kentucky, uses an "early-alert system." This joint effort of staff, administrators, and faculty helps to retain students who have academic and/or attendance problems by contacting them and connecting them with needed services at the first sign of trouble. Under the system, faculty can use electronic rosters to provide the Academic Affairs Department with comments on students' progress, which are then forwarded to the Office of Retention Services. Students who are struggling are contacted by mail or phone by staff and/or faculty, who offer them support and appropriate assistance. However, many students could not be contacted, had a disconnected telephone number, or had withdrawn — some for reasons of nonpayment.[38]

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[36]Kneisel, 2004.

[37]In 2003, due to state budget cuts, the funding for the CalWORKs Community College Program was reduced. As a result, some of the California community colleges no longer offer these services or have merged the program with EOPS. Many of the remaining CalWORKs programs cannot offer the intensity of services that they once did. However, the program does illustrate a promising model of comprehensive student services that target low-income, nontraditional students.

[38]Hazard Community and Technical College, Office of Retention Services, 2002.

Valencia Community College makes checkup phone calls, known as "benchmark calling campaigns," to help keep students academically on track. Staff at the college's enrollment services center call to remind students who have completed 15 to 18 hours and 30 to 33 hours of coursework of key dates, including when class schedules are published and upcoming registration periods. Students are also reminded about the resources at the college that are available to help them succeed. Among other purposes, the calls are helpful in monitoring students' full-time or part-time status.[39]

Valencia also provides more intensive academic assistance to students at high risk of failure. If students' grade point averages and completion-of-course rates fall below minimum standards, they are placed on academic probation. During the probation period, they receive special advising and coaching. In addition, Valencia students who are readmitted after they have been suspended or dismissed for academic reasons must have their educational plans approved and are assigned to advisors with whom they must meet throughout the first semester that they return to school.[40]

TRANSFER ASSISTANCE

Some community colleges provide focused and intensive guidance on transferring to four-year colleges. For example, with funding from the federal TRIO initiative (described below, under "Multiservice Programs"), the Transfer Initiative Program (TIP) at Bronx (New York) Community College's Personal and Academic Support Services Center — PASS Center — offers assistance with applications, including how to write personal statements to include in the applications, and prepares students for admissions interviews.[41] Other colleges offer short noncredit courses and workshops that inform students of general transfer requirements. Topics covered by these courses include financial aid planning and the transfer application process. Some of these programs also orient students to what they will need to do to succeed in a four-year college. For example, some community colleges arrange visits to four-year colleges and universities, giving students a chance to witness firsthand what will be expected of them at these institutions.

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[39]See LifeMap Web site: http://valenciacc.edu/lifemap/stages_pd_ps.asp.
[40]See LifeMap Web site: http://valenciacc.edu/lifemap/stages_pd_ps.asp.
[41]See PASS Center Web site: http://www.bcc.cuny.edu/PassCenter/default.cfm?page=ServicesOffered.

Academic Supports

Needs

Besides their needs to learn how to navigate the community college environment and to get guidance in creating and following plans for their education, many students would benefit from more targeted help to master academic skills and content. Needs in this area include help with study skills, remedial and developmental courses on such basic skills as reading and writing, and assistance with specific coursework.[42]

Responses and Promising Practices

STUDY SKILLS CLASSES

Some community colleges offer short courses, workshops, or individual counseling sessions that teach students note-taking, how to prepare for exams, and other study skills. For example, students at Portland Community College can take the Study Skills for College Learning course, while those at Cabrillo College (in Aptos, California) can learn effective study skills and techniques through mini-courses and workshops provided by the college's counseling division. Some community colleges offer credit-bearing courses or workshops (such as the College Survival and Success course offered at Southwestern Oregon Community College in Coos Bay and at Portland Community College),[43] with the expectation that certain four-year colleges and universities will accept the credits for transfer.

HELP WITH BASIC SKILLS AND SPECIFIC COURSES

Tutoring is one of the most widely used academic supports offered at community colleges. Some tutoring programs focus on a particular subject area (for example, English) or skill area (for instance, writing skills), while others are linked to a particular course (such as Intermediate Algebra). These services can be provided either individually or in group sessions, and they can take place under different auspices, such as tutoring centers with regular schedules, drop-in centers, or academic departments. Some programs use a combination of these approaches. For example, Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, New York, offers both individual and small-group tutorials in math at the Mathematic Skills Center.[44] Similarly, the PASS Center at Bronx

[42]See Kazis and Liebowitz, 2003.

[43]For more information, review the course catalogs at Southwestern Oregon Community College's Web site (http://www.socc.edu) and Portland Community College's Web site (http://www.pcc.edu).

[44]Kingsborough Community College's Web site: http://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/StudenServices/Factut.htm.

Community College offers small-group tutoring in most subject areas. The program reports that 80 percent of all students who receive tutoring pass the courses in which they are tutored.[45]

To help staff its PASS Center's tutoring services, Bronx Community College relies on both graduate students and fellow students of the tutees.[46] Like this institution, a number of other community colleges use peer tutors for academic guidance and counseling functions. Typically, the peer tutors are academically successful students who receive training for their roles.

An example of a particularly intensive approach to academic guidance and counseling comes from Chaffey College in Rancho Cucamonga, California, which created instructional and academic support hubs — a Math Success Center, a Reading/ESL Success Center, a Writing Success Center, and on- and off-campus multidisciplinary Success Centers — as a unified effort to provide academic support services to all students. Each of these instructional and academic support centers helps students needing assistance in its particular skill area, while the multidisciplinary centers offer assistance in several subjects, including chemistry, physics, and accounting.[47] The centers are open up to 12 hours a day, and each contains a computer lab where students can do coursework and use software to help them with course assignments. Some centers offer directed learning programs, where students' attendance and progress are monitored weekly, as outlined in a learning contract; video equipment, which allows students to watch video courses; printed resource materials; and small-group study rooms. The center staff also facilitate learning and study groups and offer students workshops to improve their skills and, on occasion, provide in-class support or tutoring services to all students in a particular class. Some instructors even require that students log a specific number of lab hours at the most appropriate center, as part of their course requirements.[48]

Personal Guidance and Counseling

Needs

Reconnaissance work for Opening Doors suggests that the two kinds of academically oriented services that were just discussed — academic guidance and counseling and academic supports — are the most prominent strands of student services at most community colleges. But regardless of how well students are prepared for academic work, even their best-laid educational plans can be diverted by both unexpected life events and ongoing personal problems. Whereas Tinto stresses the role that college life can play in promoting students' success, two other experts

[45]PASS Center's Web site: http://www.bcc.cuny.edu/PassCenter/default.cfm?page=ServicesOffered.
[46]PASS Center's Web site: http://www.bcc.cuny.edu/PassCenter/default.cfm?page=ServicesOffered.
[47]Walker, 2004; Arner, 2004; Creel, 2004.
[48]See Chaffey College's Web site: www.chaffey.edu.

on the community college system emphasize the importance of concerns outside of college, noting that attendance behaviors for community college students are "more dependent on their personal lives, their job lives, the outside world, than on anything happening within in the college."[49]

Feedback from the Opening Doors focus group studies confirms that personal problems were a major impediment to students' persistence and retention in community colleges. Whether they were current, former, or potential students, and whether or not they were public assistance recipients, focus group participants indicated that they faced difficult challenges in their personal lives that could make it harder to complete an education. The many challenges that they cited included the need to balance the demands of work, family, and school; discrimination; domestic violence; financial concerns; child care arrangements; and mental health difficulties, including depression, stress, and anxiety. Participants also said that when they confronted difficult life situations or crises, they often lacked the financial and personal resources that they needed for support.

Responses and Promising Practices

Clearly, personal guidance and counseling has the potential to help community college students confront nonacademic challenges, and most community colleges do offer this service. In some cases, staff, faculty, or academic advisors refer students to personal guidance and counseling, but most often students must take the initiative to seek it out on their own. How personal guidance and counseling services are offered and by whom varies across colleges. Strategies include individual and group sessions with professional counselors, mentoring, and peer counseling.

INDIVIDUAL SESSIONS WITH PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS

The most common form of personal counseling involves individualized sessions, often with trained professionals. For example, Southwestern Oregon Community College, LaGuardia Community College, and the Community College of Denver employ licensed professional counselors, psychologists, graduate students in the counseling profession, and clinical social workers to help students develop self-esteem, deal with the transition to and pressures of college, manage crises, and cope with mental health issues and with concerns related to their families or peer relationships.

Typically, this kind of personal counseling takes place on campus, but not always. For example, besides referring students to counselors at the community college, the Fast-Track-to-Work program at Cabrillo College (described below) suggests professionals elsewhere in the community. This kind of guided outreach to services that are outside the walls of the commu-

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[49]Griffith and Connor, 1994, p. 20; as quoted by White, 2001, p. 3.

nity college and that students might not have found on their own adds to the personal guidance and counseling options that the institutions can offer.

GROUP SESSIONS WITH PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS

Another way to extend personal guidance and counseling resources is to offer this service to students in groups. The value of the group approach is that it gives students the opportunity to interact with others who are experiencing similar difficulties. Northampton Community College (Bethlehem, Pennsylvania) forms counseling groups to match particular interests and problems — for example, a group for students with eating disorders.

MENTORING

Professional counselors are not the only source of personal guidance to students. For example, many colleges have recognized that, on an informal basis, faculty members can be important mentors and counselors to help students address personal concerns. Interestingly, a group of community college faculty members who were asked to describe their roles as part of a study of their career paths and roles used such terms as *mentor, role model, student facilitator,* and *guide.*[50] Consistent with this view, participants in the Opening Doors focus groups noted that faculty support and understanding were critical when they faced personal difficulties that might have affected their ability to get good grades or to complete courses.

Besides faculty members, the community college can also connect students with other adults who can offer them personal counseling. The Puente Project at Cabrillo College — which, like all Puente projects in California, provides career and academic counseling to low-income, first-generation Latino students[51] — matches students with mentors from the business or professional community. By sharing their personal, academic, and career experiences with the students, these mentors give them insights into real-life work environments and what it means to function as an adult. In the course of these mentoring relationships, students often receive personal advice and guidance.

PEER COUNSELING

Just as many colleges rely on peer tutors for academic guidance and support, many of them have found that students can counsel their peers to help solve personal problems. Again, as in the realm of academic guidance and counseling, students typically must have strong academic records to be chosen to become peer counselors on personal matters. Also like student

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[50]Fugate and Amey, 2000, p. 6.
[51]See the Puente Project's Web site: http://www.puente.net.

tutors for academic subjects, students who become personal counselors are almost always offered training.

Students who are counseled by fellow students often find that the camaraderie of the peer relationship can be an important form of encouragement and support that helps them cope with difficult life situations. The ability of peer counselors to draw on their own experiences at the college may be particularly attractive to the counselees, who may prefer advice from someone who has recently and successfully covered the same ground that they are trying to travel. And the use of trained peers is yet another strategy that allows community colleges to offer personal guidance and counseling to a greater number of students.

One example of the peer approach comes from the women's center at Oakland Community College (Bloomfield Hills, Michigan), where trained peer counselors "help women work towards their own solutions."[52] Similarly, Sinclair Community College (Dayton, Ohio) invites students who have been enrolled for at least two semesters and who have a grade point average of 2.5 or better as well as strong communication and study skills to apply to join the counseling service staff as peer counseling assistants.[53]

Career Counseling

Needs

Compared with both the academic and the personal counseling activities that are discussed above, community colleges have traditionally placed less emphasis on helping students to identify career goals and to align them with an education plan. Keim's 1989 study of community college counselors found that they spend only about half as much time on career counseling as they do on academic counseling.[54] However, many, if not most, community college students need some help with both thinking through career choices and strategizing how to move into the careers that they have selected. According to Grubb,[55] two types of students have especially strong needs for this kind of counseling. One group is the so-called *experimenters:* typically, students who enroll in college knowing that they need higher education to get better jobs but who are unsure of what occupation or career they want to pursue. The second group is *students who do have clear career aspirations but whose educational plans are not well matched to their goals,* often because they lack the academic skills needed for the careers they have chosen. Especially for this second group of students, an important function of career coun-

[52]See Oakland Community College's Web site: http://www.oaklandcc.edu/womencenter/services.htm
[53]See Sinclair Community College's Web site: http://www.sinclair.edu/stservices/sss/list/index.cfm.
[54]Keim (1989) and Coll and House (1992); as cited in Grubb, 2001.
[55]Grubb, 2001.

seling is to advise them on whether — given their career interests and assessment scores — they should pursue an occupational certificate or an associate's degree.

Responses and Promising Practices

Although work-related counseling may be in short supply, most community colleges do provide some guidance and career planning services that can help students — including experimenters and students whose goals are mismatched with their skills — explore career options. These programs give students information on career opportunities and help them to articulate their career goals and to create plans that identify the main academic and personal skills needed to reach these goals. The programs also provide job preparation services (for example, help with résumé writing) and teach students job search and interviewing skills.

Shoreline Community College in the state of Washington offers vocational, educational, and personal counseling in one Student Development Center. Students who use the center can take part in career and life-planning classes and receive one-on-one career counseling and help with educational planning. At the Career Employment One-Stop Center, students can research various careers, search job banks, draft résumés, and practice their interviewing skills.[56] A few schools also offer programs like Cabrillo College's Fast-Track-to-Work, which provides short-term intensive instruction leading directly to employment. In addition to vocational instruction, students in this program receive academic and career counseling, and they participate in workshops that help them define their ideal job, prepare a résumé, practice interviewing techniques, learn job search strategies, and develop a five-year career plan. Degrees and certificates earned through the program are designed to prepare students for jobs available in the surrounding county.[57] As noted earlier, the Puente Project matches low-income Latino students with academically and professionally successful mentors from the community, who advise them on career, as well as academic and personal, matters.

Other programs provide career and academic counseling for students who are interested in specific subjects. In California, the MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement) Program targets educationally disadvantaged students, with an emphasis on "students from groups with low eligibility rates for four-year institutions," to help them complete degrees in math and science-related fields.[58]

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[56]For further information, see Shoreline Community College's Advising and Counseling Web page: http://success.shoreline.edu/advising/about.htm; and its Career Employment Services One-Stop Center Web page: http://success.shoreline.edu/career/ces.htm.

[57]See Cabrillo College's Web site: http://www.cabrillo.edu/services/fttw/index.html.

[58]See MESA's Web site: http://mesa.ucop.edu/about/index.html.

Supplemental Services

All the student services discussed above involve some kind of counseling, guidance, or mentoring. But many community college students also need more tangible help to be able to continue in school and graduate. The literature review and the Opening Doors focus groups indicate that these students need assistance in three important areas: securing safe child care, traveling to and from school, and buying books and supplies.

Child Care

Needs

For many students who are parents — particularly, single parents — the stress of balancing work, college, and caregiving responsibilities and the need for multiple child care arrangements can be overwhelming. The participants in the Opening Doors focus groups who were working parents identified child care as one of the primary factors that influenced their decisions to attend or complete college. Parents who had a stable, affordable child care arrangement viewed it as essential either for enrolling in college or — in the case of those focus group participants who had not yet enrolled — for allowing them to consider attending in the future. More generally, colleges that help parenting students find, evaluate, and secure child care can remove a major source of stress that can distract them from their studies.

Although four of the six colleges in the national focus group study offered some form of child care on campus, many focus group participants reported that the care did not meet their needs. The on-site services differed widely in terms of the number of slots available, the ages of children served (infants and older children were often not eligible), costs, eligibility requirements, the size of waiting lists, and the hours of care. Parents reported that often no care was available for their children's age groups or for the time the family needed it (usually in the evening). And even if the appropriate care was offered on campus, sometimes there were no open slots.

In part because of the limited supply of formal child care on campus, some participants relied on informal care provided by relatives or friends. Even though a number of parents preferred this form of care, users often encountered problems with its cost, quality, and reliability. According to focus group participants, the best child care services would include on- and off-campus care options with quality providers that offer affordable services to a broad age range of children and reliable care outside of regular hours.

Responses and Promising Practices

PROVISION OF SERVICES AND SUBSIDIES

As noted, some community colleges (like the four represented in the national focus group study) do provide on-site child care. Typically, the care meets part — but by no means all — of parents' needs. There are, however, examples of colleges that offer child care services at nonstandard hours. LaGuardia Community College provides on-site care with Saturday hours, and the Rock Creek campus of Portland Community College has an evening child care program and allows drop-ins.

Another form of child care help available to community college students — including some of the focus group participants — is *child care subsidies.* For example, until August 2004, Louisiana used resources from its TANF grant to provide funds to students that could cover child care costs (as well as the costs of tuition, books, and transportation). Generally, child care subsides can be used to pay for a range of care, including formal center-based and informal care.

REFERRAL SERVICES

While it is not known how often community colleges offer students child care referral services, some colleges where on-site child care is not an option do refer parenting students to local child care providers. For example, low-income students who attend Lane Community College (Eugene, Oregon) can receive customized referrals to child care from a parent consultant, available through Lane Family Connections — a program that links parents of children from infancy through age 13 with child care providers in Lane County.[59] Portland Community College's child care resource and referral office helps parents get access to a variety of local services, including off-campus child care centers, Head Start programs, family child care providers, and preschools.

Transportation

Needs

About a third of the participants in the Opening Doors focus groups described transportation difficulties as complicating their efforts to pursue an education or limiting their educational choices, and their experiences are echoed elsewhere. Many Sinclair Community College students, for example, commented that they chose the college because it is located downtown and is easily accessible via public transportation.[60] This reaction suggests that the length of time

[59]See Lane Community College's Web site: www.lanecc.edu/lfc/index.htm.
[60]Wavelet, 2001.

required to travel to and from the campus played a more prominent role in the educational decisions of these students than they would for more affluent students, who would not be restricted by the proximity of a campus to public transportation because they can afford to own cars and pay for parking. Some students in the focus groups said that lack of transportation was the major barrier to their enrollment in community college.

Responses and Promising Practices

There are a few sources of transportation help for community college students. Students who are attending college as part of a welfare-to-work program can receive transportation help — just as they can get child care assistance — through that program. For example, CalWORKs has offered welfare recipients assistance in the form of vouchers, bus passes, or stipends. The Seattle Community Colleges District's Web link to "commuter info" alerts bus riders to special transit passes that allow unlimited rides any time and to a subsidy program for carpoolers, who are offered a reduced parking rate and are eligible for $35 in vouchers per quarter. Sometimes colleges with multiple campuses, such as Portland Community College, have free intercampus shuttles.

The example of the Sinclair students also suggests that, in examining the kinds of supports that low-income community college students need, it is useful to take into account not only transportation services that are offered by community colleges or welfare-to-work programs but simply how well public transportation serves a campus. In some instances, there may be changes in routes or in frequency of service that could provide as much assistance to these students as transportation vouchers or shuttle buses.

Book and Supply Vouchers and Stipends

Needs

The high costs of books and academic supplies — often requiring expenditures of several hundred dollars a semester — can be a financial burden for low-income students. Often students resort to using textbooks that are available in the library or copying pages from classmates until they can purchase their own books.

Responses and Promising Practices

Some programs do offer low-income students book vouchers, stipends, or reimbursements to defer part of the cost of books. CalWORKs focus group participants reported that the program's book reimbursement system was extremely helpful. Kingsborough Community College and Lorain County Community College provide stipends to cover the semester's costs of books, supplies, and other school-related expenses to low-income students who are receiving extra support in conjunction with the Opening Doors demonstration at those schools. A number

of focus group participants identified book assistance as a major source of help that allowed them to afford college. However, in order for these stipends to be most useful, focus group students recommended that they be made available before the start of classes; sometimes students received their book vouchers well after the semester had begun.[61]

Crosscutting Strategies

Needs

This paper has thus far examined discrete elements of student services, such as academic guidance and support or personal counseling. However, sometimes the value of these different kinds of services may be undercut because students experience them as scattered and fragmented and must expend too much time and energy to locate and use them. The paper's investigations pointed to two strategies designed to reduce fragmentation: (1) multiservice programs targeted to low-income and nontraditional students and (2) one-stop shopping centers. Both strategies combine many or all of the different elements of student services. While the previous sections have touched on these crosscutting strategies, the following discussion underscores the contributions that they can make to a strong student services component.

Responses and Promising Practices

Multiservice Programs for Low-Income and Nontraditional Students

Several programs that came to light in the research for this paper illustrate the approach of providing a range of different kinds of help to special groups of students.

THE PUENTE PROJECT

Since 1981, this project — a statewide initiative now offered at 56 of California's 108 community colleges (as well as at the University of California) — has aimed to increase the number of Latino students in the state's four-year colleges and universities. *Puente* means "bridge" in Spanish, and the main connection that the program tries to make is between high schools and four-year postsecondary institutions. However, Puente also works with community college students by helping them transfer to appropriate four-year colleges and universities. Key services include regular academic and career counseling, visits to four-year colleges, and a two-semester ethnically

[61]See Nelson and Purnell, 2003; Nelson, 2002.

focused English course that emphasizes the Latino experience. Students are also matched with community mentors who have been successful both academically and professionally.[62]

THE TRIO STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES (SSS) PROGRAM

The federal TRIO SSS program, which is similar to the Puente Project, offers a variety of academic services to help low-income and disabled students and students who are the first in their families to attend college earn postsecondary degrees.[63] According to the program's Web site, there are over 900 colleges — including community colleges — offering the TRIO SSS program.[64] Funded through Title IV of the federal Higher Education Act of 1965, this initiative provides remedial instruction along with ongoing academic counseling and monitoring of students' progress, extracurricular activities, workshops, study groups, and referrals to academic support services and personal counseling.

EOPS AND CARE

The educational planning and academic counseling services of California's Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS) (discussed above) are part of a broader array of supports. In 2001-2002, over 106,000 students received services from EOPS, which is available at all 108 of California's community college campuses.[65] To be eligible for EOPS, students must have low incomes, attend college full time, and be at the start of their college careers — with no more than 70 credits toward graduation. Besides academic guidance and counseling, other forms of help that are available to participants include priority registration policies, which allow students to register first and ensure that they do not get closed out of required classes; financial aid; peer networking opportunities; and cash grants. These students can also turn to EOPS for child care vouchers and transportation assistance. To qualify for program services, they must be making satisfactory academic progress and attend the three mandated counseling sessions to update their educational plans.

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[62]See the Puente Project's Web site: www.puente.net.

[63]TRIO is a federally funded set of outreach and support programs geared to motivate and support the academic success of low-income and nontraditional students of all ages in all stages of education from middle school to the early phases of postsecondary education. In addition to TRIO SSS, other TRIO programs include Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math Science, both of which help low-income youth prepare to enter college by offering them after-school instruction in a variety of academic subjects on college campuses; Veterans Upward Bound, which provides basic skills training and instruction to help military veterans get access to postsecondary education; Talent Search, which supplies information on college requirements, financial aid, and scholarship programs to low-income sixth- through twelfth-grade students whose parents have not attended college; and the Educational Opportunity Centers, which offer similar informational services to low-income, displaced, or underemployed workers. For more information, see the National TRIO Clearinghouse Web site: http://www.trioclearinghouse.org/trio.html.

[64]See the TRIO programs' Web site: www.trioprograms.org/abouttrio.html.

[65]California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2003b.

The Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) program supplements these services for EOPS students who are on public assistance and have children under 14 years old. Depending on the college, extra services may include such supports as enhanced assistance with transportation and child care and workshops for single parents.

THE ACCESS TO BETTER JOBS PROGRAM

Based in Ohio's Sinclair Community College, this program helps low-income unemployed and working adults complete short-term occupational training programs that are connected to high-demand jobs. Participants receive book and tuition assistance, academic advising, and help in finding jobs. Once students are employed, they are offered additional help with applying to a degree program, receiving financial aid to return to school, and general support to help them keep their jobs.

THE CALWORKS COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM

This program (discussed above in connection with academic guidance and counseling) has, as noted, most recently seen its services significantly cut back. However, it continues to operate in fewer locations and sometimes with less intensity of services with the support of state funding and with supervision by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. The program has provided a variety of supports to welfare recipients who attend community college as their allowable TANF work activity. Together with the county welfare offices, the CalWORKs community college staff have helped students get access to both on- and off-campus services, including subsidized child care; financial aid; placements in jobs and/or work study positions; academic planning, support, and guidance services; career counseling; and personal counseling. The county welfare department reimbursed CalWORKs students for up to 24 months for books and supplies, for the lowest-cost transportation available to them, and for child care payments.

OPENING DOORS PROGRAMS

In addition to the programs that are not in the Opening Doors demonstration and that were examined through the reconnaissance work for it and the programs found through the literature review, the demonstration's own community college sites provide or plan to provide a wide range of interrelated services to nontraditional students. For example, the Louisiana site — which encompasses three campuses at two different community colleges — deploys four counselors, who provide program participants with personalized, accessible, and consistent career, academic, and financial advising. Students are referred to personal counseling and other social services as needed. In addition, program staff help students develop and carry out educational plans and secure employment that complements their educational and career goals.

As noted in Appendix A, first-semester Opening Doors students at Kingsborough Community College are assigned to groups known as learning communities. They consist of blocks of up to 25 students, with each block taking three courses together: two academic courses, one of which is usually a remedial English class, along with a college orientation class. The three teachers in the block consult with one another regularly about the students' progress.

At Lorain County Community College, a team of staff members offers Opening Doors students academic advising, career counseling, personal counseling, financial aid advice, and referrals to other staff who have expertise in particular areas. Ratios of students to team members are kept low so that students have easy access to counselors. In fall 2004, Owens Community College — the other part of this single demonstration site — began to offer similar services to students.

The Chaffey College site, which has not yet begun program operations, will offer students a semester-long experience that integrates a guidance and orientation course with a practicum that is focused on building basic skills (math, reading and writing, and English) and that has links to the college's specialized tutoring centers.

Appendix A more fully describes current and planned program activities at all the Opening Doors sites.

In connection with the subject of services that cut across categories, it is interesting to note that student service strategies that begin as more circumscribed than the ones discussed in this section can stimulate broader campuswide efforts to promote student persistence and retention. For example, the researchers who conducted the study of the one-semester orientation class cited above note that especially because the class involved dozens of faculty members and college administrators in team-teaching the sessions, it "served as a catalyst for consideration of factors that contribute to student success and involved a significant portion of the campus community in thinking and talking about strategies to improve the quality of students' early experience at the college."[66]

RESEARCH EVIDENCE ON THE VALUE OF SOME OF THESE MULTISERVICE PROGRAMS[67]

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office regularly reports on academic outcomes for EOPS and CARE students. The CCCCO's 2001-2002 report to the legislature and the governor shows that when compared with other students who were enrolled full time,

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[66]Keenan and Gabovitch, 1995, p. 12.

[67]Evidence for the programs discussed in this section comes from descriptive and correlational studies. The random assignment design for the selected sites in the Opening Doors demonstrations will permit researchers to make more definitive statements about whether promising models of student services actually lead to better retention and persistence rates for low-income and nontraditional students.

EOPS/CARE students had better academic outcomes — persistence, retention,[68] and degree completion — than their non-EOPS/CARE counterparts. Over a five-year period (from 1996 to 2002), EOPS/CARE students were more likely overall to have higher retention rates and to persist more than non-EOPS students. In addition, preliminary data suggest that EOPS students were more likely than other basic skills students to make the transition to transfer-level English classes. In fact, 44 percent of students enrolled in basic skills English at four levels below transfer level had advanced to transfer-level courses by the end of the study period. CARE students were even more successful in earning degrees and certificates than EOPS students, but, possibly due to the stresses of being single parents, they had lower transfer rates than other EOPS students.[69]

As noted above, interviews with a group of CalWORKs participants who attended community colleges indicate that they attributed much of their academic success to such student services as child care and academic advising. Presumably, many of these students received the services under the auspices of the CalWORKs Community College Program. More direct evidence on the results of this program comes from a report issued by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. It shows that, after the first quarter after program participants in 1999-2000 left school, their earnings were 50 percent higher than the earnings of the current welfare population and that, by the fourth quarter, the earnings gap between the two groups had risen to 80 percent.[70]

The National Study of Student Support Services — a longitudinal study of 30 of the national TRIO Student Support Services at both two- and four-year colleges — found that the program had positive outcomes: Both students' grade point averages and their year-to-year retention rates increased as they were exposed to the services.[71] Along with academic courses designed specifically for students in the program, four kinds of services among those that were offered (cultural events, academic advisement and counseling, peer tutoring, and workshops) seemed to have the most pronounced effects on these outcomes, and, of these, peer tutoring appeared to be particularly important.[72] In several instances, there was an association between the amount of services that students received and their outcomes. For example, there was a linear relationship between the number of hours of peer counseling that students were exposed to and their grade point averages.[73] The researchers concluded that, overall, these services were beneficial because they addressed a myriad of students' academic and personal needs, built a sense of

[68]The study defined "persistence" as completing one term and enrolling in subsequent semesters and defined "retention" as the ratio of the number of completed to the number of attempted units.

[69]California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2003a.

[70]California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2003b.

[71]Muraskin, 1997; Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, and Rak, 1997.

[72]Muraskin, 1997; Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, and Rak, 1997.

[73]Muraskin, 1997.

belonging to the college community, and provided academic and personal support through the use of peers.

One-Stop Services

Among the most important recent innovations in the way social services are delivered is the growth of one-stop service centers, where people can find a wide variety of services in a single location. Discussions in the Opening Doors focus groups — which highlighted how referrals from one office to another could obstruct students' efforts to get access to services — indicate that one-stop centers may be a very useful way to ensure that students take advantage of the full range of supports needed to help them complete their educations. As noted elsewhere in this paper, Lorain County and Shoreline Community Colleges offer variants on one-stop centers.

Another example of the one-stop approach comes from De Anza College in Cupertino, California, where the Student Success and Retention Services Center focuses on serving students who have historically low retention and transfer rates, first-generation college students, and reentry students. Using peer mentors, tutors, faculty, and other staff, the center offers these students educational planning and academic advising services, personal counseling, academic mentoring and coaching, study groups, leadership development activities, access to computers, four-year college and university campus tours, academic enrichment workshops, and scholarship and financial aid information.[74]

[74]For more information, see the De Anza College Student Success and Retention Services Center Web site: http://www.deanza.fhda.edu/ssrsc/.

Financial Resources for Student Services

The examples of best practices presented in this paper suggest that community colleges can and do try to use a wide variety of promising ideas to deepen and focus their student services and, ultimately, to give these services more power to help improve retention and graduation rates. Clearly, however, strengthening student services often requires not only new planning but also new resources, especially to ensure that the counselor-to-student ratios — which are pivotal to many of these interventions — are reasonably low.

Currently, outside the community colleges themselves, dollars to support improvements in student services are extremely limited, and most funding sources are targeted only to certain subsets of the student population — for example, to welfare recipients or to students who can document low incomes. Nevertheless, community colleges that are interested in improving student services and that have not already done so should consider actively pursuing these avenues of support, which include funds available through TANF, TRIO, and the federal Workforce Investment Act. Energetic and creative development departments at community colleges may also want to make a case for funding some aspect of student service improvements to local philanthropies and business organizations that are interested in workforce development issues. At a minimum, since student services are often one of the first areas of community college life to be cut when budgets are tight, institutions may wish to consider whether they can do more to preserve funding for these activities during periods of fiscal austerity.

One development that possibly could strengthen financial support for student services would be the growth of funding arrangements for community colleges that tie funding levels to completion rates. If these systems spread, both community college officials and their funders may have a greater incentive to invest resources in student services, which have the promise of improving students' retention rates.

Conclusion

The community college system is often the first, and sometimes the only, point of access to postsecondary education for nontraditional and low-income students. But despite the economic and personal benefits associated with earning a postsecondary credential, many of these students struggle to realize their educational goals while juggling work, family, and school responsibilities. Research to date suggests that student services can be an important part of the arsenal of strategies that community colleges can use to help low-income and nontraditional students graduate. The information in this paper suggests that while there is no one recipe for student services, which are structured and delivered in many different ways, a number of promising practices and approaches for providing these supports deserve further consideration.

To start, existing research, including the observations made in the Opening Doors focus groups, points to the value of making student services as comprehensive as possible, so that they can address the full breadth of academic, personal, and financial problems that nontraditional students face. As the paper indicates, each of the ingredients that make up a comprehensive set of student services — academic guidance and counseling, academic support, personal guidance and counseling, career counseling, and supplemental supports — makes its own important contribution to students.

For the academic guidance and counseling strand of student services, one promising practice is regular contact with a consistent counselor in order to develop and monitor an education plan. Some community colleges do have low student-counselor ratios that permit this high-touch advising. But the extremely high student-to-counselor ratios found at many institutions suggest that large numbers of community college students receive counseling that falls far short of this standard.

While no area of student services seems to be well funded, there appears to be a particular need to devote more resources to career services. Assistance in this area should go hand in hand with academic guidance and counseling, helping students to develop clear aspirations for future work and to adjust any unrealistic expectations about what they need to do to achieve certain career goals.

Besides examining promising practices associated with individual elements of student services, this paper also suggests that there is value in bringing several of these elements together into a single intervention. For example, because one-stop shopping makes services more convenient, students — especially hard-pressed single parents and other nontraditional students — are more likely to get many or all of the different kinds of help that they need when it is available under one roof. Another promising crosscutting approach is the provision of a wide range of different kinds of supports under the auspices of one program to groups of nontraditional students. Typically, these programs connect academic guidance and counseling with edu-

cational assessments and career counseling, enabling students to develop educational plans that highlight their areas of strength and long-term career interests. In addition, the tangible supports such as book vouchers and transportation assistance that these programs offer can alleviate some of the financial hardship that many nontraditional students face.

In an era of fickle public support for postsecondary institutions, shrinking budgets, and expanding student bodies — a time when student services are often vulnerable to cutbacks — it is difficult for community colleges to offer sufficiently intensive and comprehensive services to nontraditional students, either in special programs or as part of the standard student services component. Still, colleges can try to maximize their resources for these services. An important first step is for an institution simply to be clear that its menu of student services should encompass all the different elements discussed in this paper and then to inventory existing services in order to identify gaps and weaknesses. Such an examination might, for example, point to a need to bolster career counseling so that its resources more nearly match the resources available for academic counseling.

Once it is clear which elements most need attention, institutions may be able to develop creative ways to find new funding to fill gaps for at least some groups of students or to provide more or better supports by stretching existing resources. For example, rather than relying primarily or exclusively on professional counselors, colleges may want to add or expand on other approaches, such as counseling offered by trained peers, faculty mentoring, group counseling, and sometimes even online help. Off-campus referrals — which have the benefit of giving students a wider range of options for counseling and supports like child care — are another way of maximizing resources to help students get access to services.

Given the number of factors that can influence academic success, a wide segment of the college community, including faculty members, should be involved in thinking through student service strategies; indeed, many other community colleges may see the value of undertaking broad-based planning in this area. But if community colleges are to invest new energies in planning and analysis to improve student services, they must have more reliable knowledge to guide their decision-making. The information contained in this paper offers insights into best practices for bolstering student services, but, at this stage, hard evidence on what makes a difference is limited. The six community colleges that have agreed to test promising practices experimentally by participating in the Opening Doors demonstration will help officials, policymakers, college administrators, and other educators who are concerned about community college retention rates to take an important step and move from speculation toward proof.

Low-income and nontraditional community college students often must travel a hard road to earn postsecondary degrees, and this paper suggests that student services may be able to help them stay the course. The paper also suggests that the promise of student services is most likely to be realized if more is understood about how these services function, how they should be structured, and what they can accomplish.

Appendix A

The Opening Doors Sites

Chaffey College — Rancho Cucamonga, California
Kingsborough Community College — Brooklyn, New York
Lorain County and Owens Community Colleges — Elyria, Ohio, and Toledo, Ohio
Louisiana Community and Technical College System: Selected Campuses

Chaffey College

Chaffey College, located in Rancho Cucamonga, California, serves approximately 20,000 students from the surrounding communities of Chino, Fontana, Ontario, and Rancho Cucamonga. Currently, an estimated 3,200 Chaffey students are on probation — meaning that they have cumulative grade point averages of less than 2.0 and/or have completed fewer than six units in the preceding semester. To help these students move off probation and persist to the completion of their programs, Chaffey has proposed a one-semester Opening Doors intervention — slated to begin in January 2005 — to provide instructional and academic support supplemented by academic counseling.

Students in the Opening Doors program will take a two-unit, semester-long orientation/guidance course, which is designed to teach them effective time management techniques and critical thinking and study skills; link them to available services and resources; and help them develop educational plans. The revamped course will also work more closely with the college's Success Centers — subject-specific and multidisciplinary academic support centers — to ensure that students attend workshops and receive tutoring and instructional support in math, reading or English as a Second Language (ESL), writing, and other subjects, such as chemistry and accounting.

The orientation course will be integrated with a one-unit practicum through which students will complete a semester-long academic project requiring visits to and contact with Success Center staff. The particular projects that students pursue will be designed to help them improve specific skill deficits in math, reading, and writing that are identified through assessments of their basic skills levels. Using a strengths-based approach, the Success Center staff and counseling faculty will develop assignments and workshops that will help students move from developmental to transfer-level courses.

Kingsborough Community College

Founded in 1963, Kingsborough Community College is one of six community colleges in the City University of New York (CUNY), and it is the only public two-year college in Brooklyn. Kingsborough serves over 30,000 students per year, with nearly 17,000 in credit programs. The college is testing a program designed to help low-income, educationally and economically disadvantaged freshmen who lack clear career goals make a smooth transition to college during the critical first semester. Known as "Opening Doors Learning Communities" (ODLCs), the program combines all three strands of Opening Doors activities: curricular reform, student services, and enhanced financial aid.

Students are divided into blocks of up to 25 students who take three courses together: an English class (in most cases, a remedial course that is required because the student failed CUNY's proficiency exam), a core required academic class, and a college orientation class. The three courses are scheduled conveniently to minimize the time that students must spend on campus. Faculty members for the students in a particular block collaborate to assess their needs, track and encourage their progress, and integrate instruction across the three courses.

The college orientation course meets once a week for an hour to help students improve their study skills. It is open to all freshman, although a few students who are not participating in the Opening Doors program enroll. Each orientation course is taught by an Opening Doors counselor who is responsible for following up students who are showing signs of difficulty. Compared with counselors for the control group students, the Opening Doors counselors are much more proactive in following up students, in part because they carry smaller caseloads than the other counselors.

Opening Doors participants also receive tutoring and up to $225 in vouchers during their first semester to help pay for textbooks.

Lorain County and Owens Community Colleges

In Ohio, Lorain County Community College, situated in Elyria, in an industrial county just west of Cleveland, and Owens Community College, in Toledo, are each enrolling 1,000 students in the Opening Doors study. The two colleges — considered as one site for demonstration research purposes — are providing similar Opening Doors programs that center on enhanced student services but that also include a financial aid component. Lorain County began operating its program in fall 2003, while the program at Owens began in fall 2004. (For simplicity, this summary uses the present tense to describe activities that are planned for Owens but that are already operating at Lorain County.)

The programs at both schools provide student services that differ significantly from the regular student services available at each college. Students in both programs enjoy easy access to and personal attention from a dedicated program coordinator and a team of advisors, who deliver academic advising, career counseling, personal counseling, and financial aid advice and who refer students, as needed, to other staff with particular expertise. A low student-to-staff ratio gives participants increased access to student services. Students are encouraged to use the team on a regular basis, and they are required to check in with their advisors throughout the semester.

The financial aid component at both schools provides fill-the-gap financial aid assistance by offering a stipend of $150 per semester for two semesters to program students. The stipend may be used to defray any costs not already covered by federal, state, or college assistance, including books, fees, meals, transportation, and child care. At both campuses, the stipend is paid in two installments each semester, following mandatory meetings with an advisor.

Both programs provide other services to Opening Doors students. For example, at Lorain County, students are invited to interact at social gatherings, where they may find the informal peer support that often contributes to persistence. Lastly, Opening Doors students at both schools take a college orientation course to help them navigate the college experience; at Lorain County, an enhanced orientation course that emphasizes technology and career development is restricted to students in the program.

Louisiana Community and Technical College System: Selected Campuses

In the New Orleans area, low-income parents are being targeted for Opening Doors services by three campuses of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System: Delgado Community College (City Park and West Bank) and Louisiana Technical College (West Jefferson). Their program incorporates two of the three Opening Doors strands of activities — enhanced student services and increased financial aid. These supports are intended to enable the students to reduce their work hours so that they can take more units per semester and, therefore, can graduate more quickly.

As part of the enhanced services component, four counselors provide program participants with personalized, accessible, and consistent career, academic, and financial advising. Students are referred to personal counseling and other social services as needed. In addition, program staff help students to develop and carry out their educational plans and to secure employment that complements their educational and career goals.

Along with comprehensive student services, program participants receive a $1,000 scholarship for two consecutive semesters if they make adequate academic progress (at least a C average) and meet with a program counselor throughout the semester. The scholarship is disbursed in three increments: $250 after the student has started classes, $250 after midsemester, and $500 at the semester's end. If a student is not academically eligible for the $250 midsemester scholarship but satisfactorily completes the rest of the semester, she or he will receive both the midsemester and the end-of-semester payments as a reward for continued progress. The scholarship can be used to pay for child care, transportation, fees, books, and other costs incurred by college enrollment. To help students use their stipends well, counselors refer them to financial organizations and conduct budgeting exercises when the scholarships are disbursed.

Appendix B

Participants in the 2002 Seminar on Student Services

On December 18, 2002, MDRC hosted a meeting of experts in the area of enhanced student support services to help develop a model of these services to be used in the Opening Doors demonstration. Seminar participants are listed below.

Dr. Thomas R. Bailey, Director
Community College Research Center
Teachers College, Columbia University

Dara Barlin, Program Associate
Ford Foundation

John Colborn, Deputy Director
Ford Foundation

Judith Crocker, Director
Corporate & Community Outreach Services
Executive Director for Workforce Development
Lorain County Community College

Sherri Goldberg, Supervisor
CalWORKs Community College Program
Sacramento City College

Lisa Grossman, Policy Analyst
National Governors Association

Cynthia Heelan
Consultant

Julie Kerksick
The New Hope Project

Shauna King-Simms, Director
Adult Education Partnerships and Transitions
Kentucky Community & Technical College System

Mary Murphy, Outreach Performance Coordinator
Lorain County Community College

Derek V. Price, Director of Higher Education Research
Lumina Foundation for Education

Judy Reichle, CalWORKs Unit
California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office

Jean E. Rhodes, Professor
Department of Psychology
University of Massachusetts

William Rivers, Director
College Discovery Program
Kingsborough Community College

Brett A. Visger, Program Officer
KnowledgeWorks Foundation

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MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization. We are dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through our research and the active communication of our findings, we seek to enhance the effectiveness of social policies and programs. MDRC was founded in 1974 and is located in New York City and Oakland, California.

MDRC's current projects focus on welfare and economic security, education, and employment and community initiatives. Complementing our evaluations of a wide range of welfare reforms are new studies of supports for the working poor and emerging analyses of how programs affect children's development and their families' well-being. In the field of education, we are testing reforms aimed at improving the performance of public schools, especially in urban areas. Finally, our community projects are using innovative approaches to increase employment in low-income neighborhoods.

Our projects are a mix of demonstrations — field tests of promising program models — and evaluations of government and community initiatives, and we employ a wide range of methods to determine a program's effects, including large-scale studies, surveys, case studies, and ethnographies of individuals and families. We share the findings and lessons from our work — including best practices for program operators — with a broad audience within the policy and practitioner community, as well as the general public and the media.

Over the past quarter century, MDRC has worked in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada. We conduct our projects in partnership with state and local governments, the federal government, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.