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REMAKING ENTRY FOR POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

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JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

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ABOUT THE SERIES

JFF is leading an effort to explore how competency-based education (CBE) can be adapted to meet the needs of underprepared adult learners, in order to help members of this large and economically vulnerable group earn college credentials and advance in the U.S. workforce. With support from the ECMC Foundation, JFF is reaching out to national experts, policymakers, and practitioners to help identify key issues that can frame a national conversation about expanding and strengthening CBE for students who have been historically underrepresented in higher education. This series of papers, *Next-Generation CBE: Designing Competency-Based Education for Underprepared College Learners*, zeroes in on a practical, but complex, question: what specific design elements and policy changes are needed to realize the potential of CBE for the nation's underprepared college students?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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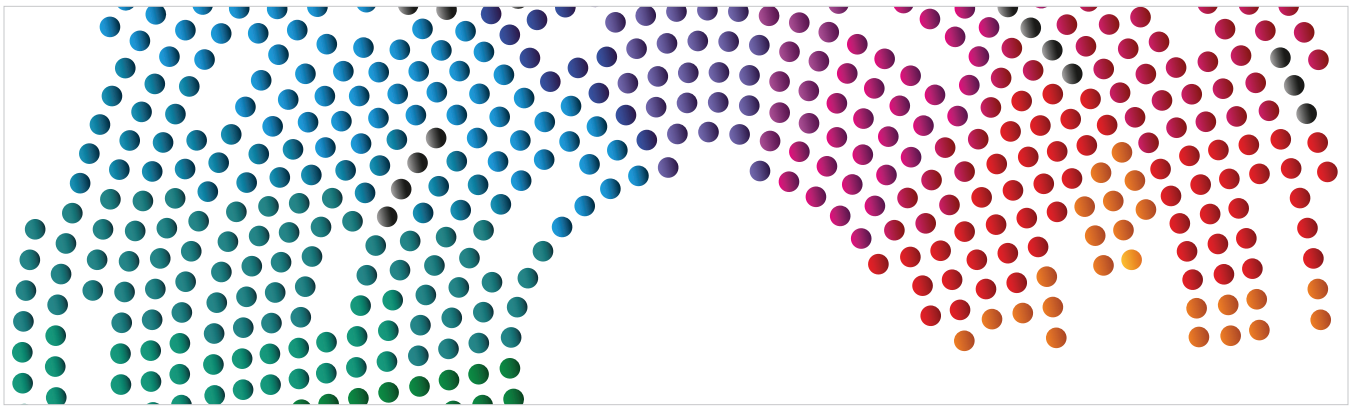

INTRODUCTION

Creating a competency-based education model for underprepared college learners requires a rethinking of each phase of the college experience.

From first contact through credential completion, the model must be designed to meet the unique needs of adults with a wide range of academic experiences and life challenges. Setting students up for success from the moment they enter the program is critical to the ability to support students all the way to the finish line. Essential entry activities typically include intake, placement, and orientation. For postsecondary CBE students, these would include getting to know each individual through a variety of personalized assessments, recommending appropriate courses for the student's interests and goals, and previewing how a CBE-based approach differs from a traditional postsecondary program.

JFF, with support from the ECMC Foundation, is exploring how CBE might help more underprepared learners succeed in college by creating a CBE model for developmental education, the remedial instruction required for students with below-college skills in reading, writing, or math. This paper is part of a series recommending specific features likely to help more underprepared students in CBE settings master college-ready skills, persist in their postsecondary studies, and ultimately earn credentials. The brief focuses on the design elements necessary for effective entry. We examine existing intake, placement, and orientation activities in both CBE and community college programs, and highlight the most promising practices. Fusing the best of both program types, we build up to a set of concrete recommendations for designing entry to a CBE model shaped specifically for underprepared learners. (See "*What is Competency-Based Education?*" and "*Who are Underprepared College Learners?*" on page 2.)

The previous report in this series zeroed in on national efforts to increase the success of underprepared students by redesigning developmental education in community colleges. JFF found that a corequisite model of developmental education, in which students begin college-level courses immediately while receiving supplemental remedial instruction, has the most potential to be paired successfully with CBE. Research shows that the corequisite model is most effective when it's part of a structured approach to promote college completion known as "guided pathways," which have a proven track record.[1] Guided pathways are structured academic and career paths designed to provide students with guidance and clear routes to completion of a degree or credential and entry into the workforce. JFF and our partners are dedicated to leading developmental education and the community college experience in this direction in the interest of improved student success. Our recommendations regarding entry to a CBE model for

underprepared learners—as well as subsequent parts of the college experience addressed in future papers—are based on a corequisite model of developmental education in the context of guided pathways.

CBE models are customized to individual abilities and pace of learning. They measure progress toward a degree by what students demonstrate they know and are able to do, as spelled out in specific competencies, rather than by earning a passing grade at the end of a traditional time-bound course.

Most CBE programs screen out students who aren't prepared for college coursework, or at least who lack a threshold level of academic and digital literacy. A redesigned intake, placement, and orientation process for underprepared learners would include use of a variety of tools to identify academic and non-academic needs and establish plans to meet them, rather than block these students from entry. Determining academic and professional goals is an essential part of this process. Research shows that underprepared students who enter postsecondary education with goals in mind are far more likely to succeed.[2]

This paper focuses on the types of effective intake, placement, and orientation activities that are especially critical for success in CBE programs, both because of the unique delivery model and because students often begin lessons at an individualized starting point. An essential function is to determine what the starting point should be. The more personalized the process, the more effective it is likely to be, because each learner's skills, interests, habits, and expectations can be considered and used to help them adjust to the program. In developing postsecondary CBE approaches for underprepared learners, our goal is to design intake, placement, and orientation activities that are inclusive and personalized, responsibly measure student skills and needs, and provide crucial guidance and support.

What is Competency-Based Education?

CBE models are flexibly paced programs of learning in which progress toward a degree is determined by what students demonstrate they know and are able to do, regardless of time spent in a classroom.[3]

Who are Underprepared College Learners?

Underprepared college learners are individuals who enter postsecondary education without college-level skills in at least one foundational area: reading, writing, or math. Roughly 2.4 million community college students each year—about 60 percent of the incoming population—are required to take at least one remedial course in English or math before starting college-level coursework. Only 28 percent of these students earn a credential within eight years.[4] Many juggle school with work and family responsibilities.

The Three Phases of College Entry

INTAKE
The policies and processes that receive new students, present them with an array of course options, assess their interests and abilities, and onboard them to college.

PLACEMENT
The policies and procedures that place students into a particular course or set of courses upon entry based on baseline academic skills. Can include both instruments (tests) and practices (interviews and other methods).

ORIENTATION
Activities that are designed to position students and help them acclimate to college academics and expectations.

BARRIERS TO SMOOTH ENTRY

In this section, we explore typical entry processes at community colleges and CBE programs, and highlight some of the common barriers facing underprepared learners in each setting. We begin with intake, then examine placement practices and orientation.

Intake at Community Colleges: Too Much Choice?

Community colleges face many challenges in building intake processes that meet their students' needs.[5] In this era of declining public funding, many institutions feel pressure to increase enrollment and reach even greater numbers of students.[6] As a result, intake processes often are implemented with an emphasis on expanding access rather than increasing success.[7] This environment can make it difficult to allocate sufficient resources to support longer-term goals like student persistence and completion.

In order to attract more students, most community colleges have expanded their range of course options, and online offerings have skyrocketed.[8] The rationale is clear: get more people of all ages and backgrounds through the door and accommodate their diverse needs by providing an array of choices in course topics, delivery methods, and scheduling. In practice, however, this often results in students enrolling without a clear plan for what they want to study. They also receive too little guidance to create a path toward completing a credential—a situation that community college researcher Judith Scott-Clayton has dubbed "the shapeless river."[9] Indeed, many students face an overabundance of choice, experiencing college as a self-service cafeteria: it serves a bevy of a la carte options that each entice but provides no guidance about how to put them together to create a complete meal.

The lack of structure causes many problems, including too many students who:

- Delay the selection of a major or focused program of study. Research shows that the longer a student takes to declare and stick with a program of study, the less likely they are to complete a credential;[10]
- Select a series of courses that are disconnected and do not add up to a degree; and
- Use up financial aid on courses that do not efficiently, or sometimes ever, lead to degree attainment.

Intake in CBE Programs: Screening Out the Underprepared

Much like in traditional college courses, CBE practitioners have found that students with certain characteristics tend to fare better in their programs, and accordingly have built intake processes to sort for these types of students. For example, a Mathematica evaluation of three community colleges

jointly implementing an online CBE model (an adaptation of the Western Governors University online model) found that intake was intended to weed out students who were less likely to thrive in the self-directed environment that online learning requires. In fact, marketing efforts emphasized a particular student profile—namely, an older student with documented work history or prior college experience.[11] This example echoes the intake policies of other notable CBE programs established outside of community colleges, particularly Southern New Hampshire University's College for America, which partners with employers to gain student referrals and recommendations. WGU, for its part, has a decades-long practice of using interview protocols and readiness assessments designed to predict student success in the online environment.[12] Practitioners from other programs reflected this sentiment as well: their CBE programs also were designed to serve a particular kind of student, and intake processes were designed to help identify the right candidates.

But this selectivity doesn't serve students who have the potential to benefit from CBE but need additional support or training to realize that potential. Creating a more flexible model that adjusts to meet the needs of individual learners, rather than a more limited model that restricts access to meet the needs of the program, is an important step toward serving underprepared learners well.

Serving underprepared students requires a flexible CBE model that adapts to meet the needs of a range of college learners.

Placement at Community Colleges: Assessments are Inadequate Keys to Entry

Ninety-two percent of all community colleges use standardized tests to determine students' course placement upon entry.[13] These tests seek to measure foundational skills in reading, writing, and math—the core academic areas needed for more specialized study. The test results are used to sort students into courses (or course levels) based on minimum required scores in each area. These standardized tools are generally cost effective, easy to implement across a large institution or system, and allow for comparability between student groups.

However, many critics point to flaws in this system, noting that it does not necessarily adequately measure students' academic needs (in that the tests are not diagnostic) nor does it promote their postsecondary success (as evident from the large number of students who do not progress past developmental coursework).[14] Researchers point to two overarching causes of the inadequacy in the current landscape of assessment and placement—namely, inconsistent standards of readiness and inaccurate assessment instruments and practices.[15]

Inconsistent standards of readiness

First, high school exit standards for college readiness often do not align with the entry requirements of local colleges for credit-bearing classes that count toward a degree.[16] In addition, different institutions have varying standards for entry into college-level courses. For example, colleges within the same state may use different cutoff scores for entrance into college-level math courses, while some programs within a single college may have different entry requirements, as well.

Ultimately, the result is a confusing landscape with different targets for different programs. Some may argue that such hyper-localized responses to the skill levels of a particular region are well intentioned. But in reality, colleges whose mission is access for all end up reinforcing gatekeeping through requirements that are unnecessarily high or, sometimes, suffer dilution of

rigor from standards that are too low. Further, the lack of transparency in what constitutes readiness in these cases results in unevenness of academic standards. It also may reinforce inequities in substandard instructional practices and unfair requirements for certain groups of people.

Inaccurate placement instruments and practices

Much of the criticism around current community college placement practices is centered on the inaccuracy of placement instruments in both their predictive ability and their diagnostic capacity. Because standardized tests have high stakes for the test-taker, the results have a disproportionate impact on the student's ability to succeed in college. Because the instruments themselves are so blunt, they often mis-assign students—either under-assigning to remediation or over-assigning to college-level work—and complicate student progression toward degree completion.[17]

In two studies conducted on the accuracy of placement systems, researchers noted that mis-assignments to remediation were as high as 25 percent in math and 30 percent in English (reading and writing) in a single urban system. Statewide, they ranged from 14 to 28 percent across all developmental subjects. The implications of this mis-assignment and under-placement are startling. As the wide variety of research suggests, involvement with developmental education in longer sequences negatively affects degree attainment, and students run the risk of using valuable financial aid dollars on courses they simply do not need.

Researchers Hughes and Scott-Clayton cite three main causes for the inaccuracy of assessment practices: one-dimensional assessment that reveals only standardized test scores and whether an individual completed high school; students' lack of knowledge about the significance of placement tests and little preparation to take them; and poor alignment between the tests and the academic requirements of particular programs.[18]

Placement in CBE Programs: Some Customization is Common

While large-scale data about CBE placement practices across colleges is not available, due in no small part to the wide array of program types and idiosyncrasies of implementation, there are overarching trends that point to the use of more customized placement strategies than in traditional community college programs. These include various forms of prior learning assessment (PLA), portfolios, and other performance assessments. Such tailored assessment and placement practices are crucial to a high-quality CBE program because of the requirement for students to demonstrate what they know and can do. However, for the underserved adult student with a basic-skills deficit, many existing CBE placement practices can result in roadblocks, because they effectively weed out many underprepared prospective students through processes that are based on assumptions of high skill levels. While these practices may boost program completion rates, they exclude a significant number of adult students who could benefit from customized placement.

Orientation at Community Colleges

Most community colleges conduct orientation activities for new students upon entry. Typically, these activities are conducted in large-scale events, often only a few hours long, and are focused primarily on providing students with logistical information—such as where to locate various departments, how to access specific college facilities, and other fairly standard practices of college-going. For students entering specialized programs, or coming from postsecondary bridge programs or other cohort-supported models, orientation can be slightly more customized, delivered in multiple formats, and longer in duration.

Orientation in CBE Programs

For CBE programs, particularly those developed in community colleges, orientation activities are often a bit more tailored to the details of the program and designed around specific features. Because CBE programs require more explicit student self-direction, CBE orientation activities typically highlight this need through information and counseling. At community college CBE programs, orientation is tied to recruitment and registration, so students are provided with more explicit information on what makes CBE programs distinct from traditional postsecondary programs. In addition, as these orientation activities are designed to augment institution-wide efforts and typically involve a smaller, more targeted group of students, they have the potential to promote students' sense of belonging and attachment to the institution.[19]

PROMISING EFFORTS TO REDESIGN ENTRY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

This section provides an overview of promising practices to redesign intake, placement, and orientation services at both community colleges and CBE programs, in hopes of illuminating which might be useful in a new, combined approach to developmental education.

We start with a summary of the core principles for redesigning developmental education that JFF and five other leading organizations in higher education collaborated to create—the *Core Principles for Transforming Remedial Education within a Comprehensive Student Success Strategy: A Joint Statement.*[20] These principles place developmental education in a broader context of student success: remediation is integrated into a student's journey to degree completion and this journey should move students along "guided pathways."

Guided pathways, as noted in the introduction to this paper, are structured academic and career paths designed to provide students with guidance, support, and clear routes to completion of a credential and entry into the workforce. Underpinning this approach is the growing recognition in the field that students are provided with too many choices and too little guidance, that students typically falter when asked to craft their own paths to degree completion and career selection, and that students need robust instruction that combines core academics and remediation with college-level work. Taken together, the guided pathways approach is holistic, relying on core redesign principles that restructure the student experience from entry, intake, and placement through instruction and transfer or degree completion.

Promising Intake Practices at Community Colleges

In the guided pathways model, the goal of intake is facilitating a student's selection of a program of study, typically within the first year. The guided pathways approach uses intake as an on-ramp, coaching students through the gradual narrowing of options, through the use of intensive advising and exploration activities that guide students to the ultimate selection of a specialized program of study.

*Guided Pathway Elements Related to Intake**

CLARIFY THE PATHS
Map out all programs clearly so students see detailed information on career and transfer paths, course sequences and required coursework, and embedded credentials.

HELP STUDENTS GET ON A PATH
Design programs that ensure students enter a pathway after structured and intentional exploration, with strong guidance and appropriate assessment practices.

HELP STUDENTS STAY ON THEIR PATH
Provide strong supportive services that advise, track progress, and ensure timely interventions for at-risk students.

ENSURE STUDENTS ARE LEARNING
Incorporate structures that help faculty and students outline program-specific learning outcomes, track mastery of learning, and provide enriched learning experiences that extend beyond the confines of the traditional classroom.

**Source: Guided Pathways: Planning, Implementation, Evaluation (Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges, 2017), http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Resources/aaccprograms/pathways/Documents/PathwaysGraphic462017.pdf*

Specifically, guided pathways encourage the design of clearly articulated academic or career pathway maps that spell out degree requirements and options for each program of study. These maps are explicitly aimed at providing students with choice as well as guidance. As students begin to prioritize course taking, they enter a somewhat narrower exploratory major—often called a meta-major—that aligns with their interests.[21] Student selection of and entry into a meta-major is generally done in consultation with a college advisor, often using career or academic interest inventories that help students identify personal goals. Meta-majors are large clusters of study (in STEM fields, or health careers, for example) that allow for further student exploration, but with a more specified set of courses and expectations, including clearly outlined entry-level targets. Students are then coached through course taking and the further refinement of their program of study until, ultimately, they select a major. Throughout this process, college staff—typically college navigators, support staff, or college success coaches—monitor student progress to ensure they stay on track.

Promising Placement Practices at Community Colleges

In the realm of developmental education and community college redesign, there are significant reforms centered on assessment and placement practices. The following are some particularly promising redesign strategies for placement that could be used in a CBE model for underprepared learners

Multiple Measures of Assessment

As much of the traditional assessment and placement landscape is dominated by single- measure, high-stakes tests, researchers, policymakers, and reformers have called for a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to assessment through the use of "multiple measures."[22] This approach seeks to assess each student's strengths and challenges using multiple sources of data. These measures typically include both cognitive and noncognitive measures—through both standardized placement tests and noncognitive assessments like the Learning and Study Strategy Inventory (LASSI)—as well as high school or transfer college transcripts and GPA, writing samples, or student interest inventories and interviews. A wide body of research suggests that these measures, particularly the high school GPA, are in fact much stronger indicators for success in college-level courses than a single standardized test.[23] The use of multiple measures is an attempt to develop a more nuanced and comprehensive picture of student skills, abilities, and interests to inform placement into college courses. While this practice is still somewhat novel for community colleges, it is important to note its similarity to the more thorough entry and placement practices of selective four-year colleges and universities, which routinely use high school grades, extracurricular activities, and work samples for entry.

Test Preparation

Reliance on standardized college placement tests, even if they are not the sole measure of assessment, requires that students become more aware of the both the significance of the tests and the content they are expected to know. Many researchers have called for more robust test preparation at both the feeder institution (either high schools or adult education programs) and at the college itself. Test preparation activities often consist of mini "boot camps" that combine advising with academic instruction so students can firm up their existing skills and, ideally, test into the most appropriate academic course levels.

Program-Specific Assessments

Because there are pronounced misalignments between many college-prescribed cutoff scores and program-specific entrance requirements, many researchers and policy advocates have called for the use of diagnostic and program- (or meta-major-) related assessments. These specialized assessments typically focus on measuring the particular skills students need for a specific program of study—such as high-level math for a STEM field—and have some diagnostic capabilities that illustrate where a student's knowledge is lacking.[24]

Guided Self-Placement

Many reformers have called into question the idea of developmental education as the default for the vast majority of students, citing the mounting evidence that assignments to remediation are not only often inaccurate but also ultimately ineffective.[25] To remedy this, many have called in part for greater use of guided self-placement practices. In self-placement, students are presented with their assessment scores and asked to place themselves into a particular entry-level course with guidance from college staff. A related alternative is default placement into gatekeeper or college-level courses for many "on-the-cusp" remedial students.

Promising Placement Practices at CBE Programs

The following are placement practices used at some CBE programs that show the most promise for a new CBE model serving underprepared learners.

Prior Learning Assessment

Many CBE programs employ some form of PLA to recognize the skills and abilities of adult learners who have had previous college, work, or military experience but did not earn a credential. Some use standardized tests to measure prior learning (e.g., the College Board's Advanced Placement program and the American Council on Education).[26] However, these instruments differ from other forms of standardized entry tests in that they are designed to capture learning gained in both formal and informal settings and award some measure of credit for that learning upon entry into the CBE program.[27] Some colleges also offer localized or institution-specific PLA exams that can place students into programs using metrics particular to the college and program of study. PLA practices, which capture much of what an individual knows and is able to do, can help situate returning students at the right point in a program so they do not have to duplicate courses or material they have previously mastered.

Portfolios and Performance Assessments

Similar to PLAs are portfolios and performance assessments, which also seek to capture the formal and informal learning of adults returning to school, but by using a collection of artifacts or performance-based activities to indicate learning, rather than standardized tests. Some portfolio assessments, such as LearningCounts from the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, act like mini-courses designed to bridge returning adults to college. They offer online guidance on collecting artifacts of learning, including the application of "real-world" experience from work or the military to demonstrate college-level competencies.[28] Other, more immersive practices like Lipscomb University's Customized, Outcome-based, Relevant Evaluation (CORE) act as performance-based on-ramps that combine faculty coaching, evaluations from assessment experts, and troubleshooting exercises that mimic real-life scenarios.[29] In this model, students act in teams to complete a project that ideally showcases a wide variety of skills that are then assessed by Lipscomb faculty for credit upon entry.

Promising Orientation Practices

There is a growing recognition that many new students need intensive supports upon entry and extending into the critical first year of postsecondary education. As such, many colleges have implemented "student success" courses that function as extended orientation activities and cover a broad range of topics aimed at bolstering student engagement and success.[30] These courses typically offer some small amount of credit and include both logistics-oriented material, such as how to access academic support and other student services, as well as key strategies for college going, such as study skills and time management. Research has shown that these courses bolster student confidence and have positive effects on student retention.[31]

Additional Considerations

As promising as many entry-redesign efforts are, they remain somewhat narrowly implemented to date at a subset of postsecondary institutions. Further, many underprepared learners face barriers even within the most promising redesign efforts, particularly older adults and those with multiple skill deficits. In addition to continuing to scale up promising redesign strategies, the following barriers need to be addressed in fusing CBE and developmental education in order to best help underprepared students:

- Guided pathways approaches are often, in practice, somewhat disconnected from developmental education so intake can remain fractured.
- Multiple measures of assessment and other assessment redesign efforts in community colleges tend to favor younger students, specifically in regards to using high school transcripts for entrance (where older students' transcripts may have passed the time frame of usability, often 7 to 10 years out of school).
- PLA efforts, while promising, often benefit undercredentialed but skilled adults, and do not take into account those students who indeed require basic skills instruction.
- Many students lack college-going habits, self-advocacy skills, and cultural capital, which can complicate self-placement and awareness of the significance of test results.

Student success courses can help underprepared college learners succeed in CBE programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Designing CBE Intake, Placement, and Orientation for Underprepared College Learners

Below are specific and actionable recommendations for designing effective entry practices for community colleges interested in developing postsecondary CBE for underprepared learners. These recommendations combine best practices in modern CBE programs with promising redesign from developmental education and the guided pathways framework.

While no institution could be expected to implement all of the following recommendations at once, it may be helpful to consider each element and weigh the benefits and challenges it would bring your institution. Further, clarifying the institutional climate for reform can help determine which changes to implement and why.

INTAKE

REQUISITE INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS

To redesign intake policies and procedures for a postsecondary CBE model for underprepared learners, it is helpful first to take stock of the interventions currently under way at one's institution. Because JFF's approach to developing CBE approaches builds on the evidence base of corequisite developmental education programs and guided pathways, colleges should have the capacity to employ an advisement-heavy approach to intake. Specifically, colleges that want to embark on this work would be wise to be ready to implement significant interventions to help students craft articulated programs of study (including the use of organized meta-majors) and provide detailed academic pathway maps for students. Colleges also are likely to need significant existing capacity for student guidance and advising.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Build on the guided pathways approach and use additional elements that take into account diverse student needs and experiences.**
   - Employ intensive advising and personalized guidance for all incoming students.
   - Use intake interview protocols that take into account student academic and career goals, both short term and long term.

2. **Organize programs of study into meta-majors that promote entry into a specified program within each student's first year.**
   - Organize competencies into clear, sequenced programs of study by way of academic pathway maps.
   - Ensure students are made aware of meta-majors at entry, and guide them toward making a selection in their first year, with assistance from college navigators, guidance staff, or others.

3. **Make available a comprehensive set of student support services, including academic and college success courses and non-academic supports as necessary.**[32]
   - Explain the full range of support services available to students, including academic and non-academic supports, such as tutors, success coaches, college navigators, peer mentors, and others.
   - Assess what colleges need to put in place to facilitate the effective use of these supports and determine how students can best connect to them (e.g., through mandatory advising or self-selection).
   - Determine how support services are delivered and monitored. Determine whether a centralized data system has the capacity to maintain individual student records and keep track of staff-student interaction. Outline who has access to this information.

4. **Use an equity lens to design intake protocols that are culturally and individually sensitive and responsive.**
   - Consider racial and ethnic diversity when hiring frontline employees.[33]
   - Assess for a full array of social needs upon entry, even if the college is not equipped to provide such services (including housing, financial services, child care, transportation, etc.).
   - Establish relationships with and referral protocols for community and governmental service providers

(e.g., community-based organizations, workforce investment boards, and local offices that distribute federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families funds).

- Use institutional data to be intentional in designing programs for equity.
  - Collect and disaggregate data on student persistence, completion, and other metrics. Leverage data for quality improvement purposes.
  - Empower institutional research offices to study student demographic trends in program selection, entry, and success.
  - Determine if your state, system, or institution has explicit racial or ethnic targets for degree attainment, or work to declare such targets and formulate a strategy for reaching those goals.

PLACEMENT

REQUISITE INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS

Postsecondary CBE for underprepared learners will require a redesigned placement process that takes into account a wide range of student skills, interests, and abilities. To capture these, community colleges will need to implement improved practices, redesign assessment instruments, and commit to collecting and using student data in new ways. For success, institutions require enough flexibility—perhaps through sufficient local control—in order to implement these design recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Implement multiple measures of assessment to determine appropriate academic placement with an expanded focus on underprepared adults.**
   - Compile student entry portfolios that include data on student work history and experience, high school achievement (whether a diploma, high school equivalency credential, GED, or transcripts), and standardized academic college placement exams.
   - Consider diagnostic and program-specific assessment instruments, developed with faculty for alignment with meta-majors and majors.
   - Implement PLA practices, as applicable, including records of noncredit or workforce courses and other academic and non-academic learning.
   - Employ performance assessments or use noncognitive instruments (LASSI and other assessments that test "grit" and other qualities) to explore each student's non-academic skills.

2. **Implement test prep and counseling.**
   - For institutions that use standardized placement tests, implement mandatory test preparation for all incoming students. Standardize entry procedures to include information outlining the importance of the tests. Create compressed test prep that features diagnostic elements to target specific skill needs.
   - Strengthen relations with feeder institutions and provide college placement preparation materials for use by incoming students. Employ community representatives to work with high schools, career and technical education programs, and adult education programs to provide informational and academic preparation materials. Facilitate stronger communication between intake personnel from the college and student guidance and support staff from feeder institutions.

- Allow for retesting within a specified amount of time and/or following documented completion of test preparation activities.

3. **Consider guided self-placement or "flex" placement.**
   - Implement processes that include coaching/advising around placement that allow students to have input into decisions about their starting levels. Empower students to have a voice in placement in consultation with guidance staff.
   - Clearly outline requirements of both remediation and college-level work so students are informed and aware of placement consequences.

ORIENTATION

REQUISITE INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS

Institutions will need the capacity to expand and/or leverage existing support services and orientation activities in order to successfully onboard CBE students. Because CBE differs in many ways from more traditional approaches in education—specifically in reference to the emphasis on student mastery, the flexible pace of learning, and the focus on performance assessments—students will need to be made aware of and prepare for what lies ahead. To do this, colleges will need to implement orientation activities that effectively inform, prepare, and support students as they begin the program. Institutions will need the capacity to build robust, potentially semester-long orientation strategies (including support courses, peer- and cohort-building activities, the use of success coaches, and others) that speak to the specific requirements of a CBE corequisite model.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Build a learning community to facilitate peer learning, support, and sense of belonging.**
   - Organize students into learning communities that move through the program as a group, even when specific academic competencies are individualized.
   - If possible, organize learning communities around meta-majors.
2. **Implement mandatory student success courses that build in CBE elements.**
   - Build courses that explicitly teach digital literacy, including preparation for technology-enabled learning.
   - Include "Intro to CBE: What is Different, What it Takes to Succeed" elements that clearly inform students about what to expect from the program (including guidance on performance or portfolio assessments and customized instructional approaches).
   - Build course content that explicitly outlines supports available to students, including academic tutoring, and concentrates on additional elements necessary for college success, including time management and study skills.
3. **Assign success coaches and mentors to incoming students.**
   - Assign student success coaches, separate from faculty, who can facilitate use of other support services and act as a college navigator and counselor.
   - Assign peer mentors, ideally those who have experience in the corequisite model and/or CBE program experience.

CONCLUSION

In this series so far, we have set the stage for why innovation in postsecondary CBE may help more underprepared learners succeed. We have positioned the approach within a promising developmental education strategy to accelerate students who have been relegated to remedial education, and considered best designs for intake, placement, and orientation to make the most of the first step into postsecondary education. In forthcoming reports, we will address the next steps that touch guided pathways within the community college experience: student supports, instructional pacing and delivery, competencies and curricula, and assessment. We will continue working to build these components with a redesigned, inclusive approach, with the goal of increasing access to CBE for all learners.

ENDNOTES

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