College Completion NETWORK

Five Lessons to Consider When Supporting Returning Students

Vanessa Coca, Amy Feygin, Trey Miller, Jenny Poole, Linda Choi, Mark Hatcher, and Sara Goldrick-Rab   December 2022

Develop and Implement a Strategy: College administrators should develop a strategy that connects new or existing policies, practices, and programs to support recruitment and retention of returning students. For example, they should consider how staffing decisions, the use of technology or data, and resource constraints may contribute to these efforts.

Tailor Academic Experiences to Returning Students' Needs: College administrators should consider customizing the academic experiences to the needs of returning students. Examples include offering 8-week course sessions, asynchronous classes, work-based learning credits, and evening or weekend virtual advising.

Get to Know Returning Students: College administrators should consider engaging in activities that build authentic relationships with returning students. Conducting regular outreach to students who may return, and taking an intrusive approach to advising once they return, may help administrators learn about the specific needs of their students.

Provide Financial and Holistic Supports: Returning students need access to an array of nonacademic supports. Reenrollment scholarships and fee waivers may help former students afford to return to college, while mental health resources, laptop or hotspot loans, meal or housing vouchers, emergency aid, and on-campus childcare may help keep returning students enrolled.

Foster Opportunities for Collaboration: College administrators should communicate and coordinate with partners within and outside the college to identify and address the myriad of challenges returning students face. For example, administrators could consider collaborating with neighboring colleges or universities, local industry leaders, and local nonprofit organizations to recruit returning students and develop supports or resources for them.

Note. This study focused on returning students—those who left college without a degree and either returned to college with the goal of completing a degree or who are being encouraged by the college to return.

Over the past 20 years, an estimated 30 to 35 million Americans have left college with some academic credit but no postsecondary credential.[1] Such students are more likely to be students of color, have dependents, face unmet financial need, or experience other hardships that cause them to struggle in associate's or bachelor's degree programs.[2] In recent years, colleges have sought to support students to return and attain a degree, particularly those who are only a few credits from graduation. However, little is known about the types of strategies colleges use to support returning students, and few studies have tested the effectiveness of strategies.[3] Further, there is increasing consensus that the types of strategies needed to support returning students must address a broader set of needs, such as those related to food and housing, childcare, and mental health.[4]

WHO WAS THE FOCUS OF THE STUDY?

This study focused on returning students—those who left college without a degree and either returned to college with the goal of completing a degree or who are being encouraged by the college to return.

This study sought to better understand how colleges support returning students. The study team conducted focus groups with administrators at 59 2-year and broad-access, 4-year colleges across the United States. The focus groups centered on strategies colleges use to identify, recruit, and support students who left college without a degree (hereafter referred to as "returning students"). Based on the information learned in the focus groups, this brief shares five lessons for practitioners interested in supporting returning students.

METHODS AND SAMPLE

The study team conducted 60- to 90-minute virtual focus groups with administrators at 59 colleges. The study included three samples: a nationally representative sample; a purposive sample of colleges that implement practices supportive of returning students; and a purposive sample of colleges that implement innovative and evidence-based strategies to support student success.

For the nationally representative sample, the study team identified a sample of 2-year and broad-access, 4-year colleges using data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System; administrators at 36 colleges agreed to participate in focus groups. For the purposive sample of colleges that implement practices supportive of returning students, the study team contacted administrators at 15 colleges that offer supports for returning students, such as flexible course-taking options; administrators at 12 of the colleges agreed to participate in focus groups. For the purposive sample of colleges that implement innovative and evidence-based strategies to support student success, the study team contacted administrators at 15 colleges that were recent Aspen Prize finalists or winners and winners of the Leah Austin Mayer Achieving the Dream award; administrators at 11 of the colleges agreed to participate in focus groups.

The study team coded focus group transcripts for main themes related to returning students using deductive and inductive approaches.

Full details on the methods and sample are in Appendix A.

Lesson 1: Develop and Implement a Strategy

College administrators spoke about the many policies, practices, and programs at their colleges available to support all students, and about the potential for these practices to support returning students. However, few were able to connect these practices to an explicit strategy to recruit and retain returning students. Among the few administrators who spoke about strategies to specifically focus on the returning students, they noted the need to revise or reconsider existing systems and processes, which included staffing, use of technology and data, and strategies for recruitment.

Consider Your Staffing

Administrators at a few colleges spoke about using college completion (or graduation) specialists or coaches to address the needs of returning students. These positions were flexible in terms of their hours and the duties performed but played a key role in outreach to returning students. College completion specialists would take on time-consuming activities associated with outreach (e.g., emailing students, making calls, responding to logistical questions, helping with paperwork to reenroll). When returning students needed academic or financial advising, college completion specialists would connect them to the appropriate advisors and support staff.

Use Technology

Several college administrators spoke about leveraging two types of technology to support returning students. First, administrators mentioned using alert systems, which allowed advisors to track students in real time and receive alerts when students experienced challenges related to their enrollment status, attendance, or grades, allowing advisors to intervene before the student withdraws. These alert systems may be particularly important for retaining returning students who have struggled during the transition back to college.

Second, college administrators mentioned using educational planning software to audit students' courses to determine whether they were on the path to completion. Some college advisors would schedule audits at specific milestones (25%, 50%, 75% credits) to prevent students from taking unnecessary courses and thereby risk not completing their programs on time. College administrators also noted that returning students often want to know the most direct path to a college credential. This technology, if accurate, could be especially important for returning students who need additional guidance to ensure they stay on track. A reliable planning tool could enable advisors to help students understand their course pathways if they return.

Use Your Data to Understand Patterns and Identify Solutions

College administrators often reported taking a deep dive into enrollment data to examine key patterns in persistence and completion that may provide insights into the reasons students left college without a degree. Such information could help colleges address common challenges students face. For example, administrators at multiple colleges reported that college algebra was a barrier to completion, particularly for older students who do not feel comfortable taking classes with students directly out of high school. As a potential solution, one college administrator recounted implementing a section of college algebra specifically for adult learners: *"They were nervous. They hadn't been successful in math before and that class was wildly successful. We had 22 students in the class. One had to drop out because of family obligations. The 21 students who remained, all successfully completed the class and completed their degrees."*

Some college administrators used data from other sources to deepen their understanding of the potential reasons students leave without a degree. For example, advising teams at some colleges used data from the National Student Clearinghouse to determine whether students who left without a degree went on to enroll in other nearby colleges and complete a degree. This information can help administrators determine potential postsecondary partners with whom to collaborate to support returning students.

Although administrators at several colleges reported reviewing data on students who left college without a degree, few reported disaggregating their data by student background characteristics, such as racial or ethnic background, Pell status, or first-generation college student status. Such explorations can help college administrators identify specific practices or policies that hinder students from historically marginalized communities from meeting their goals. Moreover, these data can inform efforts to recruit students from historically marginalized communities to return to college.

Consider Strategies for Identifying Returning Students for Outreach

Several college administrators mentioned their limited resources for conducting outreach to returning students. In the face of resource constraints, administrators had to be thoughtful about identifying a finite set of students for outreach. They often focused on students who left recently, who also needed limited number of credit hours to complete their program, who were not enrolled elsewhere, and who were in good financial and academic standing at their college. Some college administrators reported reaching out to former students enrolled in nearby colleges or universities to let them know they may qualify for an associate's degree based on the number of credits they had completed (referred to as reverse transfer).

Lesson 2: Tailor Academic Experiences to Returning Students' Needs

Several college administrators spoke about the need to adapt and customize programs, practices, and policies to meet the needs of returning students, who are often older, working, and parenting. They described several efforts that tailor the academic experiences to the needs of returning students, such as customizing course length, course modalities, credit offerings, types of degrees offered, and advising modalities.

> *From the very point of entry, we've certainly focused on making sure that returning adults, in particular, have options that don't look the same. As [staff colleague] said, they show up and oftentimes want to know how they can get out quickest, so for a long time, we've had things like orientation sessions that are in the evenings, and shorter, and different, and not the overnight experience that, oftentimes, our traditional-age freshman are seeking.*

Several college administrators spoke about the importance of expanding course-taking options. For example, administrators at a few colleges mentioned the use of mini-semesters or 8-week terms to meet the concerns of students who want to come back but are reluctant to commit to a full 16-week term. Also, if students need to pause their education to deal with a family emergency or work needs, they could enroll in the subsequent 8-week term and not have to wait as long before reenrolling, thereby maintaining momentum.

College administrators also mentioned offering asynchronous, virtual, evening, and weekend course options. These course-taking options may be particularly attractive to working students who are unable to take classes during traditional hours.

> *I think our flexible course delivery model is something that is paramount when I think about things that we have in place to support students' continuous enrollment. I think it's important that we keep on the forefront of our minds all that our students are balancing and the barriers that they are facing on a daily basis because they are adult students, they have a lot of responsibility.*

Students who left college because they had to take full-time jobs, care for children, or join the military may be hesitant to return because they believe the courses they have taken no longer will count toward graduation. In addition, they may be reluctant to take introductory classes with their younger peers. To address these concerns, some colleges have created sections of common introductory courses specifically for returning adults (see example of college algebra section for adults discussed on the bottom of page 2).

In addition, college administrators are increasingly recognizing the value of students' lived experiences and what they bring to the classroom and campus community by offering credits for competency- or work-based learning and military experience. As one college administrator put it, **"our curriculum is designed to allow students to bring their knowledge into the program and recognize that their learning is valid, and their experiences are valid … and that learning doesn't only happen inside of a classroom."** These flexible credits are appealing to returning students not only because they recognize the life experiences of adult learners, but also because they reduce the time and money needed to finish their programs.

WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY?

Rigorous evidence on the efficacy of these various academic options on student outcomes is limited and nonexistent for returning students.

In addition to implementing flexible credits, several college administrators reported the use of short-term certificates, stackable credentials, or micro-credentials. Administrators saw these options as particularly attractive to returning students with full-time jobs, who may need additional training or a credential for a promotion, or those who are recently unemployed, who may want to add skills to their resume while they look for employment.

Finally, many college administrators described the need for more accessible advising. For example, they began offering virtual advising at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and after receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback from students, continued to offer virtual advising in addition to in person advising. As one college administrator put it, **"Advising has become one of those things that students really do prefer to receive virtually. I believe some of it is they can do it from their phone, from their car, from their work, from wherever and they don't have to actually drive to campus."** Some college administrators also expanded access to advising by offering evening or weekend availability for students unable make standard campus office hours.

Lesson 3: Get to Know Returning Students

Many college administrators reported engaging in activities that helped them build authentic relationships with returning students. Through relationships, administrators continuously learn about students' needs, allowing them to develop and refine outreach efforts and tailor resources and supports.

Conduct Regular Outreach to Returning Students

Some college administrators reported conducting recurring outreach campaigns focused on recruiting returning students. The campaigns used a variety of methods to contact students, such as postcards, phone calls, emails, or text messages. Across colleges, a range of staff were responsible for conducting outreach, including advisors,

college completion specialists, enrollment staff, and marketing staff. However, the messaging was fairly consistent. Typically, colleges provided students with detailed information about how many credits they needed to graduate, highlighted the campus academic and wraparound supports available, emphasized financial resources to support reenrollment, and specified the next steps to reenroll.

Although not a common practice, a few college administrators reported tailoring their outreach to students with particular characteristics. For example, one college administrator reported an event called "Café con Completion" in which administrators would email Latinx returning students and connect them with various campus resources. Focused outreach can be part of an intentional and thoughtful strategy to support returning students, but college administrators must ensure that their outreach is culturally informed and does not unintentionally stigmatize or otherize the intended participants.

Outreach to returning students often created feedback loops such that college administrators participating in these campaigns would learn about the various reasons returning student left and why they felt they could not return. These rich discussions can inform future outreach efforts as well as the policies, practices, and programs to support the needs of these students when they return.

Take a Proactive Approach

Administrators at several colleges mentioned shifting to an "intrusive," "intentional," or "proactive" advising model—a strategy that many believed to be particularly helpful for returning students. For example, college advisors are acutely aware of how even small academic decisions (e.g., postponing taking a course in a term due to scheduling conflicts) made by students can take them off track. Administrators reported that anticipating and proactively addressing student challenges helped build trust and rapport.

Intrusive advising is resource-intensive and may be too costly to implement widely; many colleges use it to support a relatively small group of students, such as those deemed "at risk." The intrusive approach may be especially important for returning students who may need acute and personalized guidance to complete their programs.

WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY?
One recent, rigorous study found that a comprehensive case management program in Texas had a positive effect on persistence and degree completion.[5] Another rigorous study found that students who received intensive coaching were more likely to persist and complete college.[6]

Lesson 4: Provide Financial and Holistic Supports

College administrators know that returning students need access to an array of nonacademic supports. These supports center on addressing financial barriers not addressed by traditional financial aid packages and meeting students' basic needs.

Provide Financial Supports

Most college administrators recognize financial obstacles as a consistent reason why returning students left college. To address that essential need, some colleges have developed financial incentives specifically for returning students. For example, administrators at several colleges reported offering a scholarship specifically to returning students. These scholarships—referred to as enrollment scholarships—were typically a set amount (e.g., $500, $1,000, $2,000) and could cover tuition, fees, or outstanding balances.

Administrators also reported using tuition and fee waivers to help reduce students' out-of-pocket costs and shorten the amount of time needed to complete a degree. For example, at one college, students who took a set number of credits in the fall and spring semesters were eligible to enroll at no cost in the summer. From this

administrator's perspective, *"…[the program] was an incentive for these students to one, increase their course credit hours, but then two to get free courses during the summertime."* Similarly, administrators shared using fee waivers or forgiving small balances to further reduce barriers to reenrollment.

Although not specifically used for returning students, several college administrators spoke about using emergency aid to ensure enrolled students, particularly those nearly finished, do not get sidetracked from their education goals due to unforeseen expenses. These administrators spoke about sharing this resource in conversations with enrolled students, which is consistent with research on how information on emergency aid is usually shared.[10] Colleges might consider sharing such information with students when recruiting them to return to college; some students may feel more comfortable returning knowing that they could receive help if unexpected costs arise.

Develop Wraparound Supports

College administrators across colleges in this study reported an array of wraparound supports that could be helpful for returning students. Examples of the campus services offered to all students include food pantries, cafeteria meal tickets, clothes closets, housing vouchers, on-campus childcare, free transit rides, laptop or hotspot loans, book vouchers, and mental health resources. Many college administrators reported the importance of connecting students to these resources in a proactive way, even prior to enrollment. As one administrator noted, *"… we do our best to connect with them before there's an issue that happens to try to prevent unexpected things as much as possible."*

College administrators have come up with a range of creative strategies for providing wraparound supports to returning students. For example, one college administrator noted that their college is an official Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training provider: *"So, for students who are on food assistance, they can come and there are certain programs at [College] that qualify for the work requirement."* This opportunity may be particularly helpful for returning students who worry that reenrolling in college could compromise their access to SNAP benefits. Another college administrator reported connecting parenting students who cannot afford full-time childcare to a few local childcare centers with drop-in services, which benefit parenting students with shifting work schedules. Finally, one college administrator noted the use of free snack bins around campus.

College administrators also emphasized the value in offering virtual options for wraparound supports like tutoring or mental health counseling services. For example, one college administrator reported partnering with their Career Services office to offer the use of virtual job shadowing as one of their offerings. Another college administrator talked about their online appointment system where students can book appointments online for a variety of services, including wraparound services, in one place.

WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY?

Research has shown that reenrollment campaigns paired with a one-course tuition waiver improved the likelihood former students return to college.[7] Emergency aid programs vary widely across institutions in terms of eligibility criteria, application process, and award amount.[8] Given this variability, it is not surprising the limited set of rigorous evaluations of emergency aid on student academic outcomes is mixed.[9]

WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY?

Research on wraparound supports and services is emergent. The findings from two studies of comprehensive case management programs—Stay the Course and Single Stop U.S.A.— were mixed.[11] Stay the Course also provided emergency financial assistance and one-on-one advising and mentoring from a social worker. Stay the Course had a positive effect on persistence and degree attainment for female students but no effect on these outcomes for male students and no effect on GPA or credit accumulation. Single Stop U.S.A.'s Community College Initiative had a positive effect on 1-year persistence but no effect on credit accumulation. Another recent study found a positive effect of subsidized transportation supports on college persistence and completion.[12]

Connect Returning Students to Other Adult Learners

College administrators also cited affinity groups, usually by racial or ethnic background, gender, or parenting status, as a valuable resource for returning students. For example, college administrators spoke about the need for returning students to have a peer network that could empathize with the challenges faced by adult learners and could share strategies. In turn, college administrators would refer their students to these affinity groups.

Lesson 5: Foster Opportunities for Collaboration

Several college administrators reported the need for intense collaboration, noting that communication and coordination among various actors in and outside the college were critical to addressing the myriad of reasons why students leave college. In essence, no one office or department can move the needle on its own.

Collaborate Within and Across Departments

Many college administrators detailed an extensive amount of collaboration within and across departments to develop practices and programs specific to the needs of returning students. For instance, college advisors had to collaborate frequently with faculty and academic departments to develop flexible courses, credits, or credentials. They also had to collaborate with enrollment and institutional research offices to explore their administrative data, identify returning students for outreach, and connect with these students. Advisors also reported collaborating with student services and career services personnel to ensure that they had the most up-to-date information on programs offered, eligibility requirements, and so on.

> *We're a small institution, but we also make sure that we are connected with one another, that we have group projects that involve tremendous collaboration, that we pay attention to data, and we change pretty quickly, if needed for the benefit of the student.*

Use an Inclusive Alert System

College advisors and faculty members often use alert systems to track student progress and alert one another when academic issues arise. However, some college administrators reported using a more inclusive system in which a variety of college personnel could create or manage these alerts. Such a system allows advisors to see alerts from the financial aid office, student services, career services, and more. With this information in hand, the advisor could also step in to connect students to relevant resources and supports. This inclusive approach could be particularly valuable to returning students who return to college and may not have time to figure out whom to contact to get the resources they need.

A common challenge discussed with these more inclusive alert systems is securing consistent buy-in and engagement from staff (particularly faculty). Having the technology to support students is not enough. Staff must regularly participate in these systems; otherwise, college administrators can lose valuable time and information necessary to intervene when needed.

Develop Rich External Partnerships

In addition to highlighting the importance of coordination and cooperation within colleges to address the needs of returning students, college administrators discussed the benefits of leveraging external partnerships with neighboring colleges or universities, community-based organizations (CBOs), local government agencies, or private businesses.

Partner With Nearby Colleges and Universities

Many community colleges administrators reported working with nearby universities to improve the transitions of returning students by sharing information or sharing resources. For example, one administrator from a community college in the Southwest described a close partnership with a local university: *"We meet every fall with [advisors at a neighboring college]. We get to give them big groups [of students] and we go over degree plans, courses, changes, transfer guides, the whole thing."* Some college administrators even reported having their counterparts from nearby institutions join broader strategy meetings or vice versa. Sharing information and strategies to support returning students with nearby institutions may reveal challenges administrators would not otherwise see.

Neighboring universities may also be able to share supports for returning students. For example, an administrator mentioned a new program where some of their students could get access to residential housing as part of a joint project with a neighboring university.

Partner With Local Industry Leaders

As another example of leveraging outside partnerships to serve returning students, one administrator described how connections with local industry shaped efforts to recruit returning students: *"... we do spend a lot of time talking with our industry partners and always stressing to our industry partners ways that they can help those employees that are partially completed, help them to complete."* Other colleges also reported that outreach to local industry to better understand training and credential needs helped them develop innovative programs to meet those workforce needs and recruit currently employed individuals to complete their programs.

Partner With Local Nonprofit Organizations

These external partnerships were also leveraged to connect students to an array of nonacademic supports. As one administrator at a community college reported: *"…[our partnership with the local housing authority] provides an opportunity for students who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness, to give them an opportunity to be placed in stable housing so that they are in an area where homelessness does not impact persistence or their completion through their educational journey."* Similarly, another administrator recounted partnering with a local CBO which has a long history of connecting eligible individuals to state and federal public benefits: *"[CBO] benefits hub is able to quickly connect students to state support and help them apply for different programs they may be eligible for based on their economic status or circumstances."* Administrators at many colleges, particularly at community colleges, have limited resources to develop rich wraparound supports but recognize the need for those supports. Local government agencies or nonprofit organizations could be valuable partners in leveraging existing infrastructure to connect returning students to the resources they need.

What's Next?

The lessons described in this brief are drawn from in-depth focus group conversations with administrators at 2-year and broad-access, 4-year colleges across the United States. College practitioners can consider these lessons when developing policies, practices, and programs to recruit and support returning students. Reengaging the millions of Americans who have invested time and resources in advancing their education, but who have not attained a degree, is critical to the development of a more skilled workforce.

Although the focus group conversations provide important information about current practices for recruiting and supporting returning students, more research is needed to understand which practices are most effective. In addition, future research should incorporate student voice, providing important insights into how students experience the policies, practices, and programs that are intended to support their success.

Appendix A: Policy, Practice, and Program Scan Methods

Methodological Approach

The methods and samples used for this brief build off a related study of college advising, *Advising for College Success: Policies, Practices, and Programs that Support Students on the Path to College Completion*. The study team conducted 60- to 90-minute virtual focus groups with administrators at 59 colleges.

Sampling Approach

The study included three samples: a nationally representative sample; a purposive sample of colleges that implement practices supportive of returning students; and a purposive sample of colleges that implement innovative and evidence-based strategies to support student success.

Purposive Samples

For the purposive sample of colleges that implement innovative and evidence-based strategies to support student success, the study team selected colleges that engaged in state-of-the-art approaches to advising. The study team set out to recruit 15 colleges that had a demonstrated record of success with advising, including recent Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence finalists or winners and winners of the Leah Austin Mayer Achieving the Dream award. Of the 15 colleges identified for the advising purposive sample, 11 agreed to participate in focus groups.

For the purposive sample of colleges that implement practices supportive of returning students, the study team set out to recruit 15 colleges that demonstrated using practices supportive of returning or adult students, such as offering workforce-oriented programs, credits for previous relevant work experience, flexible coursetaking options, and reenrollment scholarships. Of the 15 colleges identified for the returning student purposive sample, 12 agreed to participate in focus groups.

Nationally Representative Sample

For the nationally representative sample, the study team worked with Beth Tipton at Northwestern University to create a nationally representative sample of 2-year and broad-access, 4-year colleges. Tipton used data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System to sample colleges.

- The population to be sampled included community colleges and broad-access, 4-year colleges and excluded the following:

- For-profit colleges;

- Large online universities;

- Special-focus colleges as defined by the Carnegie 2010 classification;

- Colleges with an acceptance rate of less than 75%; and

- Colleges that did not have a Carnegie classification and had fewer than 1,000 students (these tend to be special-focus colleges).

The resulting population of 1,597 colleges was stratified on 12 variables using data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System:

- Urbanicity: Rural

- Urbanicity: Town

- Urbanicity: Suburb

College Completion NETWORK

- Urbanicity: City

- Control: Public

- *Size:* Log of the total number of students enrolled in an undergraduate program in the college

- *Minority-serving status:* Percentage of White students

- *Low-income-serving status:* Percentage of students receiving Pell Grants

- *Age:* Percentage of students older than 25 years of age

- Offers graduate degrees

- Average SAT score

- Average ACT score

Based on these variables, the sampling team conducted a *k*-means cluster analysis, varying the number of clusters. When there are seven clusters (strata), more than 80% of the variation in these strata is between strata, meaning that the strata themselves are mostly homogeneous (i.e., consisting of similar colleges on the given variables). Colleges were ranked within stratum, with the colleges that were "most average" for that stratum at the top and colleges that were "least average" for that stratum at the bottom. The sampling team provided a target number of colleges to recruit from each stratum and a list of colleges in ranked order.

Focus Groups Methods

Before conducting the focus groups, the team consulted prior literature to develop a discussion protocol. This discussion protocol was intentionally broad and used open-ended questions to guide conversation. The protocol included questions related to both advising in general and supports for returning students specifically.

The study team began recruitment for focus groups in fall 2020, relying on its network to facilitate outreach to college presidents when possible. When the team did not have connections at colleges, the team identified college vice presidents, deans, and provosts for outreach. The team offered four $25 Amazon gift cards that participating administrators could deliver to students as a small token of appreciation for participating in the focus groups. Ultimately, administrators at 59 colleges agreed to participate.

To conduct the focus group discussion, two members of the study team conducted a 60- to 90-minute virtual focus group with the three to seven administrators from each college. The administrators included college advisors, directors of student services, associate deans, and others who shape college advising. One member of the study team was the primary facilitator; the second member took notes. Each focus group was audio recorded and transcribed by Rev.com.

The study team developed a comprehensive codebook to support robust within- and cross-case analyses of the transcribed interview data using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program. Codebook development entailed two major steps: (a) establishing a preliminary set of codes based on key constructs of interest, and (b) using this preliminary set of codes to code a sample of the interview transcripts, using both inductive and deductive coding methods to generate a final set of codes. The team structured the final set of codes so that analysts could apply more than one code to the same interview passage. Throughout the analytic process, the team engaged in regular communication to ensure consistent application of the coding structure, strategies, and rules for coding the data. Specifically, to ensure that data were coded consistently and reliably, the coding stage involved a multistep process that first included practice coding and double coding a subset of transcripts as an initial assessment of interrater agreement. The team then discussed and reconciled the few discrepancies in their application of codes and finalized the codes and code definitions to guide the subsequent coding process. Each

researcher independently coded a set of the transcripts, and the full team met weekly to debrief, review, and discuss code applications and any challenges or questions arising throughout the coding process.

Based on this thematic analysis, the research team developed a list of strategies reported by colleges. Then the team determined the prevalence of each strategy across the two samples by counting their presence in each transcript. The research team drew on the counts, the thematic analysis, and direct quotes from administrators in reporting the findings.

Endnotes

[1] Higher Ed Insight. (2014). Adult college completion network: Building a learning network to support adult student success. Higher Ed Insight.

[2] Johnson, I. Y. (2006). Analysis of stopout behavior at a public research university: The multi-spell discrete-time approach. *Research in Higher Education, 47*(8), 905–934.; Schatzel, K., Callahan, T., Scott, C. J., & Davis, T. (2011). Reaching the non-traditional stopout population: A segmentation approach. Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 21(1), 47–60.; Terriquez, V., Gurantz, O., & Gomez, A. (2013). California's college stopouts: The significance of financial barriers to continuous school enrollment. Policy Report, 7.

[3] Higher Ed Insight (2014). Fishman, R., Nguyen, S., & Ezeugo, E. (2018). *Varying degrees 2018: New America's annual survey on higher education.* New America.

[4] Mayer, A., & Tromble, K. (2022). Comprehensive approaches to student success: An evidence-based approach to increasing college completion. MDRC.; The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. (2021). *#RealCollege 2021: Basic needs insecurity during the ongoing pandemic.*

[5] Bettinger, E., & Baker, R. (2011). *The effects of student coaching in college: An evaluation of a randomized experiment in student mentoring* [NBER Working Paper No. 16881]. National Bureau of Economic Research.

[6] Bettinger, E., & Baker, R. (2011). *The effects of student coaching in college: An evaluation of a randomized experiment in student mentoring* [NBER Working Paper No. 16881]. National Bureau of Economic Research.

[7] Nguyen, T. D., Kramer, J. W., & Evans, B. J. (2019). The effects of grant aid on student persistence and degree attainment: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the causal evidence. *Review of Educational Research, 89*(6), 831–874.; Ortagus, J. C., Tanner, M., & McFarlin, I. (2021). Can re-enrollment campaigns help dropouts return to college? Evidence from Florida community colleges. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 43*(1), 154–171.

[8] Goldrick-Rab, S., Hacker, N. L., Kienzl, G., Price, D. V., & Curtis, D. (2021). *When care isn't enough: Scaling emergency aid during the pandemic*. The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.

[9] Anderson, A. (2021). Edquity grantees cross the finish line at Compton College. Unpublished manuscript.

[10] Kruger, K., Parnell, A., & Wesaw, A. (2016). *Landscape analysis of emergency aid programs.* NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.

[11] Daugherty, L., Johnston, W. R., & Tsai, T. (2016). *Connecting college students to alternative sources of support.* RAND. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1740-1.html; Evans, W. N., Kearney, M. S., Perry, B., & Sullivan, J. X. (2017). *Increasing community college completion rates among low-income students: evidence from a randomized controlled trial evaluation of a case-management intervention* (NBER Working Paper No. 24150). National Bureau of Economic Research.

[12] Clay, J. R., & Valentine, J. L. (2021). *Impact of transportation supports on students' academic outcomes: A quasi-experimental study of the U-Pass at Rio Hondo College*. The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.