



Community College
Virtual Symposium

Proceedings Report



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April 2011 Community College Virtual Symposium Proceedings Report

U.S. Department of Education
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U.S. Department of Education

Arne Duncan

Secretary of Education

Office of Vocational and Adult Education

Brenda Dann-Messier

Assistant Secretary

January 2012

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Contents

Virtual Symposium Overview	1
Opening Speakers.....	2
Summary of Panel Discussions	3
Panel 1. Promoting College and Career Readiness: Bridge Programs for Low-Skill Adults.....	3
Panel 2. Aligning Secondary and Postsecondary Education: Experiences From Career and Technical Education	4
Panel 3. Connecting Curriculum, Assessment, and Treatment in Developmental Education	5
Panel 4. Integrating Industry-Driven Competencies in Education and Training Through Employer Engagement	5
Common Discussion Themes	6
Conclusion	8

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Virtual Symposium Overview

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) hosted the Community College Virtual Symposium (CCVS) at Montgomery College in Silver Spring, Md., on April 27, 2011. The symposium followed a series of four community college regional summits, held February through April of 2011, and the White House Summit on Community Colleges, held on Oct. 5, 2010. These events engaged community college stakeholders across the country in conversations about community college research, policy, and practice. The CCVS furthered the dialogue by presenting preliminary findings from four forthcoming issue briefs focused on policies and practices addressing challenges faced by community colleges.¹

The event opened with remarks from President of Montgomery College DeRionne P. Pollard; Congressman Chris Van Hollen, (D-Md.); Secretary of Education Arne Duncan; Second Lady of the United States and professor of English, Northern Virginia Community College, Jill Biden; and Under Secretary of Education Martha Kanter. Following their remarks, Under Secretary Kanter moderated discussions among four panels of researchers from Abt Associates (Abt), the American Institutes for Research (AIR), the Center on Law and Social Policy (CLASP), the Community College Research Center (CCRC), and the Completion by Design Assistance Team.² Panel discussions centered on the topics of the issue briefs: college and career readiness for low-skilled adults; the alignment of secondary and postsecondary education, with a focus on career and technical education (CTE); connections among curriculum, assessment, and instruction in developmental education; and employer-community college partnerships to promote curriculum change.

Audience members included community college leaders, faculty, and students, as well as staff from state education agencies and workforce development and education organizations. More than 700 people participated in the live, online event, with 66 attendees present at Montgomery College.³

¹ The four briefs are available at <http://www.ed.gov/ovae>.

² The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation established the Completion by Design initiative, which works with community colleges to increase completion rates for low-income students under age 26. The Completion by Design Assistance Team, a group of education experts, helps colleges implement effective practices during the initiative (<http://completionbydesign.org/about-us>).

³ More than 700 online connections were made to the CCVS. It is likely that many more individuals participated, however, as several sites indicated they were providing a common viewing location for multiple staff (e.g., conference room, college theater, etc.).

Opening Speakers

Opening speakers addressed the importance of community colleges to the nation's economic development and the expansion of educational opportunities for U.S. students. Dr. Pollard introduced Montgomery College and its students. She emphasized the college's commitment to helping students complete postsecondary programs and shared examples of how community colleges can enhance both personal opportunities for students and the prosperity of local communities. Congressman Van Hollen highlighted the critical role that community colleges play in the nation's economy, emphasizing Montgomery College's commitment to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education.

Secretary Duncan spoke about the importance of community colleges to national economic recovery and development. He reminded the audience of President Obama's goal of leading the world in the number of college graduates by 2020 and the critical role community colleges play in achieving it. He also highlighted the Department's investment in community colleges, including increased Pell Grants and a partnership with the Department of Labor to fund the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grant program.

Biden underscored the importance of community colleges for individuals, citing examples from her personal experience as a college professor. She also reiterated the administration's commitment to investing in community colleges and shared lessons learned from the White House Summit on Community Colleges and the four regional summits. Dr. Biden described the regional summits as designed to promote dialogue around topics of importance to community colleges, including transition programs for adult learners, transfer policy and practice, partnerships with local and regional employers, and support for veterans. She also emphasized the need for ongoing discussion around community colleges, building on the conversations started at the national and regional summits.

Under Secretary Kanter described the symposium as a capstone event following the White House Summit on Community Colleges and the four regional summits. Information from the summits and the CCVS will contribute to the national discussion about how to achieve the president's 2020 completion goal and improve service delivery at community colleges. Under Secretary Kanter stressed the importance of aligning programs across educational levels and working across program areas to improve instruction. She also spoke about the importance of scholarly research in helping to identify effective community college policy and practice.

Summary of Panel Discussions

The four panels opened with a presentation on the preliminary findings from each issue brief, followed by discussions generated by both live and virtual audience member questions. Virtual participants were encouraged to submit questions via a dedicated email account in advance of the symposium, as well as in real time during the event. In-person audience members were encouraged to ask questions as well. Questions came from a wide range of stakeholders in the community college and adult education systems, including community college trustees, presidents, deans, faculty, and students, as well as representatives from federal and state government and educational organizations and associations.

Panel 1. Promoting College and Career Readiness: Bridge Programs for Low-Skill Adults

Panelists: Judy Alamprese, Abt; Katherine Hughes, CCRC; and Marcie Foster, CLASP

The first panel focused on bridge programs as a strategy for promoting college and career readiness among low-skilled adults. In the opening presentation, Judy Alamprese provided an overview and definition of bridge programs, which are designed to provide basic skills instruction and support services to help adults prepare for career pathways. She also reviewed promising efforts led by states, the federal government, and foundations to improve the transition from adult education to postsecondary education. These included the Department's Adult Basic Education Career Connections project, the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) initiative in Washington state, and the Joyce Foundation's Breaking Through initiative. Alamprese closed with a discussion of the four common elements of bridge programs: strong coordination among adult education, postsecondary institutions, and external partners; contextualized instruction; college and career awareness; and other advising and transition services.

During the question-and-answer session, two audience members asked about strategies for supporting bridge programs, given limited resources. One question specifically addressed how technology, perhaps a lower-cost option than other instructional strategies, can be used to enhance bridge programs. Panelists responded that more research is needed on technology and low-skill learners. That is, while online courses may not be the most effective approach for this population, hybrid or blended models using both technology and face-to-face learning may be more appropriate. The other question focused on how funding could be used creatively to provide comprehensive services with fewer budget resources. Panelists discussed using multiple funding streams, including federal, state, and local resources, to support different program components, referred to as "braided funding" (rather than blended).

Other questions for the panel addressed scaling up local programs and obtaining state agency support for bridge programs. Panelists noted that a model that has proven effective, such as I-BEST, is likely to receive more support from state leaders. I-BEST and other integrated education models require additional funds to

support team teaching. State and local governing boards and state legislatures can allocate additional funds to support such initiatives. Panelists also discussed the need for collaboration among multiple state agencies, colleges, and employer partners in the development of bridge programs. They cited the Joyce Foundation's work in five states to create and support interagency partnerships.

Panel 2. Aligning Secondary and Postsecondary Education: Experiences From Career and Technical Education

Panelists: Katherine Hughes, Thomas Bailey, and Shanna Smith Jaggars, CCRC

The second panel addressed strategies for improving alignment between secondary and postsecondary education, with a focus on career and technical education (CTE). Katherine Hughes made the opening presentation, speaking about the need for a shared understanding of what it means to be prepared for further education and training, and for the workplace. She profiled CTE efforts to improve secondary to postsecondary alignment, including Tech Prep programs, career pathways, and programs of study, noting that we lack strong evidence that these efforts have improved student transitions. She also provided examples of promising programs and policies, such as the dual enrollment program at Santa Barbara City College and the South Carolina *Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA)*, which promotes career awareness at all educational levels and the creation of locally focused programs of study.

During the question-and-answer session, audience questions focused on improving coordination between secondary and postsecondary systems and identifying effective dual enrollment models. Panelists' responses addressed the importance of strong institutional partnerships and policies that encourage collaboration and alignment. While state agencies can facilitate partnership development, local institutional relationships are essential to promoting alignment. Strong local partnerships are also critical in developing and scaling up strong dual enrollment programs. For example, Santa Barbara City College shares staff resources with the high schools in its dual enrollment program.

Along with curricular and instructional collaboration, panelists discussed the need to improve alignment between secondary and postsecondary assessment systems, especially for college placement exams. For example, developers of commonly used college placement exams, such as the Accuplacer and Compass, are considering how these assessments can be aligned with assessments being developed to measure achievement based on the Common Core State Standards in secondary education. Panelists stressed the need for assessments to measure both what students learn in high school and the skills needed for entering postsecondary-level courses.

Panelists also responded to questions about the role of state policy in alignment and the possibility of shared accountability systems across secondary and postsecondary systems. Panelists acknowledged that there is little evidence that shared accountability is occurring, but noted that the Common Core State Standards movement may spur further alignment. Finally, panelists noted that effective alignment requires integrated state data

systems. Such systems must be able to track students from secondary into postsecondary education and the workforce.

Panel 3. Connecting Curriculum, Assessment, and Treatment in Developmental Education

Panelists: Shanna Smith Jaggars and Thomas Bailey, CCRC

The third panel also focused on alignment, but in the context of connecting curriculum, assessment, and treatment in developmental education. In the opening presentation, Shanna Smith Jaggars provided an overview of challenges in developmental education, including long course sequences and the need for curriculum and assessment to be more closely aligned with the skills needed for college-level courses. Jaggars presented promising practices designed to address these challenges, including early assessment interventions, such as summer bridge programs for high school students, accelerated developmental course sequences, and co-enrollment in developmental and college-level courses. For example, the Statway program, funded by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, allows students to master and apply, in a relatively short time period, the important concepts from high school math and statistics that they will need in college-level courses. The Accelerated Learning Program at the Community College of Baltimore County places developmental students in both an English 101 class and a concurrent support class to help them succeed in college English.

In responding to participants' questions, panelists discussed students' need for both academic and nonacademic support, as many developmental students face noncognitive barriers to success. While some assessments focus on noncognitive or affective capacities, few are being used systematically. One approach to addressing this challenge may be to offer student support courses for all developmental education students to provide them with the necessary academic and nonacademic support.

Audience questions also focused on the need for career guidance to help students placed in developmental education define and achieve their education and employment goals. Panelists spoke about the need to develop stronger tools to help students determine their academic and career interests. Additionally, contextualizing developmental education or integrating courses with college-level work has the potential to improve student persistence and help them complete occupational degrees or training programs more quickly. In this way, students could receive contextualized developmental instruction in their chosen program of study.

Panel 4. Integrating Industry-Driven Competencies in Education and Training Through Employer Engagement

Panelists: Heidi Silver-Pacuilla, AIR; Thomas Bailey, CCRC; and Nan Poppe, Completion by Design Assistance Team

The fourth panel focused on college-employer partnerships that promote curriculum change, especially through integrating industry competencies into college curricula. Heidi Silver-Pacuilla made the opening presentation

and described a continuum of employer involvement, ranging from serving on advisory boards to active participation in the development of curricula. At the high-involvement end of the continuum, employers and colleges work together to analyze labor market trends and develop industry-relevant programs, such as the Automotive Manufacturing Technical Education Collaborative (AMTEC). Silver-Pacuilla described the need for more research to understand factors responsible for successful partnership outcomes, and to understand approaches to replicating local examples, as many partnerships are formed locally to address specific labor market needs.

During the question-and-answer session, audience members asked about the various roles that employers can play to support community college programs at local and state levels. Panelists highlighted the importance of local collaboration and the need for colleges and employers to partner in response to changes in local labor markets. At the state level, employers can be public policy advocates in support of funding for community colleges. Business organizations, such as chambers of commerce, industry associations, and national corporations, also can play a similar role. Another important role for employers, noted by panelists in response to an audience question, is helping colleges promote career awareness, especially related to jobs in regional economies, and providing career exploration opportunities for students.

Panelists also responded to audience questions about strengthening noncredit occupational training at community colleges. They highlighted the need for better data collection to understand the scope and extent to which students are participating in noncredit courses and occupational training leading to industry-recognized certifications. On behalf of students, panelists called for improved articulation between non-credit and credit training programs to help students complete their educational and career pathways.

Common Discussion Themes

The CCVS was a valuable opportunity for community college policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to engage in dialogue about issues of importance to the field. While the panels focused on separate topics, several common themes emerged.

Sources and availability of funding to support innovative community college programs

Community colleges are facing increasingly severe budget constraints, even as enrollment and resource demands continue to rise. Audience members raised questions about possible sources and availability of funding for effective, innovative community college programs. In response, panelists commented on the importance of leveraging multiple funding streams and forming partnerships to support innovative practices. For example, Santa Barbara City College has received both Tech Prep and state full-time enrollment dollars to fund its dual enrollment program. The program also shares resources, including faculty, across secondary and postsecondary education.

Supporting and scaling up local initiatives

Panelists spoke about the need for improved data and evaluation to determine program effectiveness and approaches to scale up local initiatives. For example, the state of Washington's I-BEST program began as a local, faculty-led initiative. An evaluation of the program demonstrated it was effective, which led to implementation at all Washington community colleges, with the support of state policy and funds. In other instances, such as AMTEC, industry and employer partners can support the process of scaling up community college programs. AMTEC began as a partnership between the Kentucky Community and Technical College System and a single employer; based on the success of the initial collaboration, AMTEC now involves community colleges in 12 states and 34 employers. While panelists recognized the value of scaling up programs to have a wider impact, they also noted the importance of maintaining strong local partnerships and remaining connected to local labor market needs.

Role of state agencies in supporting adoption of effective practices

Throughout the different panel discussions, audience members asked about the roles that state agencies can play in terms of developing policy and providing funds to support innovative programs. For example, as part of the Joyce Foundation's Shifting Gears initiative, Illinois developed a statewide plan for adult education bridge programs—providing a state framework for local adoption. Likewise, colleges in Washington state receive programmatic support and funding from the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to implement I-BEST. State policy also can support improved alignment among different systems, including secondary and postsecondary education and the workforce. For example, the *EEDA* in South Carolina promotes the creation of locally relevant programs of study.

Alignment of assessments and curricula across educational levels and institutional structures

Assessment emerged as a significant topic of conversation, especially the need for improved alignment between curricula and assessment across educational levels. In response to a question on secondary-postsecondary collaboration, a panelist spoke about the importance of aligning high school exit exams more closely with postsecondary placement tests and first-year college courses. Another audience member asked about approaches to addressing students' nonacademic challenges. In response, panelists discussed the need for assessments that measure noncognitive skills to improve placement into developmental education.

Conclusion

Community colleges play an essential role in both national economic development and expanding academic and career opportunities for individual students. The CCVS offered the opportunity to continue conversations begun at the 2010 White House Summit on Community Colleges and the four 2011 community college regional summits around topics of interest to community colleges. It furthered these conversations by bringing together policymakers, community college leaders, and researchers to discuss policies and practices for improving community college programs. Researchers shared preliminary findings from four issue briefs on topics related to how community colleges can effectively meet students' education and workforce training needs, and the symposium discussions assisted researchers in refining the issue briefs. The briefs are available on the Department's website (<http://www.ed.gov/ovae>), along with other community college reports and resources from previous community college leadership events, such as the papers prepared for the White House Summit on Community Colleges, and the *Summit Report*.⁴

⁴The *Summit Report* can be accessed from: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/communitycollege>.

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