Walking the Talk

COMMUNITY COLLEGES WHERE EVERYONE WINS

"I think about how time speeds up or slows down, how it measures a life. I used to be impatient. I wanted the hours to fly by... and that's just what happened. They flew away. With college, I've learned to think differently. I know it will take me a long time to graduate with a bachelor's degree, I can't count the number of years it will take. But each hour is precious now and I want them all. It's education that makes you special."

MEI YEN HUANG, 41
City College of San Francisco

MetLife Foundation Community College Excellence Award

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JOBS FOR THE FUTURE
NEXT GENERATION PRESS

Recognizing Excellence in Community Colleges

The **MetLife Foundation Community College Excellence Award** recognizes the crucial role that community colleges play in helping underserved youth and adults meet their educational and career goals. The award celebrates colleges that demonstrate a singular, institution-wide commitment to low-income students, first-generation college-goers and working adults.

From the eighty-eight colleges that applied for the 2004 MetLife Foundation award, seven finalists were chosen. Two took top prize: **City College of San Francisco** and **Community College of Denver**. The other finalists were: Albuquerque Technical Vocational Institute, Bunker Hill Community College, San Jacinto College North, San Juan College, and Tallahassee Community College.

Through determined leadership at all levels, an attentive eye and ear to the needs of their students and communities, and a culture that uses data to inform continuous improvement, these seven community colleges inspire us all. We applaud their passion and success at meeting their communities' unique learning needs.

Jobs for the Future, which has managed the MetLife Foundation Community College Excellence Award since its inception in 2001, asked its colleagues at Next Generation Press/What Kids Can Do to gather the voices of staff and students at the 2004 award-winning colleges to disseminate their experiences more widely. *Walking the Talk* presents the compelling stories of administrators, faculty, and staff working together to help students succeed—and of the students they motivate, challenge, and support.

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Introduction

The community college star has never shone so brightly. As the need for higher education increases along with tuition costs at four-year universities, student enrollments have soared; almost half of all Americans who enter higher education do so at community colleges. Open admissions are attracting students with pressing and diverse interests, and the necessary entrepreneurial spirit of these colleges has grown even more striking. If community colleges have been one of higher education's best-kept secrets, the secret is out.

Still, the biggest challenge facing community college faculty and students remains unchanged: forging success in circumstances of scant privilege. "We're all missionaries here," says Christine Johnson, President of Community College of Denver (CCD). As in most community colleges across the country, 60 percent of CCD students are the first in their family to go to college. Around the nation, low-income, immigrant, and minority students of all ages account for an increasing share of community college enrollments; to earn their credits, most must juggle work and family, often surmounting poor academic preparation or language barriers. It doesn't take extensive research to know that these students have needs as great as their promise.

Expectations for student outcomes have swelled, too. For years, the statistics traced a story of failure as much as success. Just under four in ten first-time students entering a community college in the 1990s obtained a certificate

or an associate's or bachelor's degree within six years. Race has consistently shadowed completion rates, with white and Asian students often outpacing African American and Hispanic students by more than ten percentage points. Now, numbers like these rightly get a second and third look. For the 11.5 million students who attend this country's nearly 1,200 community colleges to achieve their dreams, those colleges must hold themselves to the yardstick of improved retention and advancement.

Ironically, the rising hopes and pressures for community colleges frequently coincide with diminished state funding. Community colleges have long struggled to make do with little, but the squeeze grows steadily tighter. While enrollment at CCD grew 20 percent in 2002–2003, state support shrank 30 percent. The state reimbursement formulas that fund community colleges rarely factor in the additional costs of educating students who lack academic preparation. "We're like our students," CCD's Christine Johnson says, "working our hardest to triumph over challenge." Around the nation, community colleges brace themselves against the same challenges, and cheer for every triumph.

GOOD PRACTICE

A growing body of research has emerged on what helps underserved youth and adults enter and advance in postsecondary education. Based on this research, MetLife Foundation identified the following criteria for its award:

- Targeted, aggressive recruitment and outreach
- Programs, curricula, and schedules that respond to the realities of working students' lives
- Academic, social, and financial supports that are accessible, timely, and, when needed, intensive
- Smooth transitions at critical junctures—from high school to college, noncredit to credit, certificate to full-time, two- to four-year institutions
- Developmental and English as a Second Language (ESL) offerings that move students quickly and successfully through a coherent set of programs and courses
- Business and community partnerships that develop new skills and opportunities for working adults.

Exemplary colleges—like 2004 award winners CCSF and CCD—start with this knowledge about good practice and then add a commitment to tracking the outcomes of strategies and innovations, especially among traditionally underserved students, using the data to make informed decisions. The highest praise goes to easy-to-use data systems that help faculty and staff in their daily work. "It's a new era," says Robert Gabriner, Dean of Research, Planning, and Grants at City College of San Francisco (CCSF). "Gone are the days, I hope, when if you were faculty, data was a weapon to hurt you, and if you were administration, data bolstered decisions already made behind closed doors."

Not surprisingly, the campaign to increase excellence within community colleges also emphasizes several fundamental truths about institutional change. In any such endeavor, the entire institution must make a priority of improving outcomes. It must create a continual cycle of planning and assessment, and it must align its mission, strategies, programs, and budgeting.

To succeed at this, the best community colleges rely on leadership at every level of their enterprise, with administrators, faculty, and staff sharing a sense of purpose and focus. They collect, discuss, and analyze data on student outcomes, continually adapting programs to better support student learning. They break down the "silos" in the institution, collaborating across traditional boundaries to serve students at every stage of their educational journey. Finally, they use key research findings to guide not just strategies for change, but also budgeting and resource allocation. At every point, what these colleges say aligns with what they do.

WORDS INTO ACTION

As with all ambitious change efforts, translating grand words and intentions into enduring innovations requires painstaking work from all parties involved. "All my life, I've had dreams, but I didn't know the steps," as ESL student Mirna Luna, forty-four, put it. "Now, I have a concrete plan and the will to follow it. I can't be stopped."

The two community colleges whose faculty and student voices fill these pages share Mirna's determination. City College of San Francisco and Community College of Denver are far from alone in their institution-wide commitments to underserved students, but they have developed distinctive cultures of invention and practice that make them gateways to success rather than revolving doors to disappointment. They exemplify the qualities MetLife Foundation aimed to celebrate when in 2001 it launched its Community College Excellence Award.

At first glance, the two colleges could not look more different. Over 106,000 students attend classes at City College of San Francisco. Its ten campuses and 150 other sites take root in the city's vibrant and diverse neighborhoods and commercial establishments. At the Fort Mason campus near the Golden

Gate Bridge, students aged nineteen to fifty crowd the building's many art studios. At the Chinatown campus, two young Asian women are comparing the homework loads of credit versus noncredit courses, while an elderly Chinese husband and wife sit close together in a corner, waiting for their naturalization class to start. These are typical CCSF students, 44 percent of whom are English language learners and 34 percent of these Asian. Eighty-eight percent of CCSF students are twenty-two and older.

Community College of Denver, by contrast, has the tone of a busy metropolitan workplace, at once modern and utilitarian. It shares its main campus with University of Colorado at Denver and Metropolitan State College of Denver, creating a large higher education "complex" near the city center. Of its 14,000-plus students, 41 percent are white and 48 percent African American or Latino; reducing the gap between white and minority student achievement has become a top priority. Here the student body is younger, with 47 percent twenty-four and under; two thirds are first-generation college students. CCD's president, appointed in 2001, had worked as a teacher, principal, and finally superintendent in the Denver area, and sees outreach to the city's high school students as vital to the college's and city's future.

"I get the feeling that at this college they want everyone to be a winner."

Regardless of their differences, both of these colleges embrace large goals and thirst for excellence. They shine, however, in how they "walk the talk." They reach out aggressively to students and then move them along, creating and adapting programs to students' needs, rather than vice versa. They prize invention, collaboration, and integration; they bring passion to their work and coherence to complexity. They turn data into action. They sweat the details. And they know that most of their students need an "arm around" if they are to persevere and meet their goals.

The voices that follow provide a vivid glimpse of how such commitments affect the people who work and learn at these extraordinary institutions. Administrators, faculty, and counselors speak of the challenges of breaking old patterns and making new ones, evaluating what works and adjusting for what does not. Despite their difficulties and constraints, they describe deep satisfaction at helping students find their way to better opportunities in education and the labor market. And that pleasure and pride are echoed by what students say, as well.

"So many schools sort students into winners and losers," says Hazel, a high school senior in Community College of Denver's dual enrollment program. "I get the feeling that at this college they want everyone to be a winner."

Reaching Out and Moving Along

If we're not growing, not reaching out to urban students who need us most, not preparing them educationally the very best we can, then what are we doing? This is our mission.

DIANNE CYR, Director of High School/Early College Partnerships, Community College of Denver

TURNING RECRUITMENT ON ITS HEAD

Rather than wait for students to find them, today's best community colleges energetically seek out students, especially those who may not have considered higher education. They hold "awareness fairs" throughout the community, post information in prominent locations, partner with local organizations that may include potential students, and send recruitment letters to students who come to their attention. Community College of Denver and City College of San Francisco employ these strategies, too, but often with a twist. Community College of Denver, for example, sends student "ambassadors" to recruit in community venues like a night-time youth center whose music, recording, breakdance, and computer graphics studios exert a big pull.

At City College of San Francisco, the college sometimes tailors courses and programs specifically for potential students it notices—perhaps when sorting through data, or from focus groups, or out of the corner of the eye. Staff at one campus observed that many of those standing in line to register for ESL

courses wore dirt-covered construction boots and were complaining about parking their trucks, so CCSF decided to create a program (with parking) specifically for construction workers. Sometimes students recruit the college, rather than the other way around. When new biotechnology companies began setting up shop in San Francisco's economically disadvantaged Mission Bay neighborhood, residents asked CCSF to help them gain entry-level jobs or internships there.

"We never create programs out of an abstract idea we cook up," says ESL Dean Joanne Low at CCSF, "but out of a need we recognize in the community, as we walk the streets, talk to residents, field inquiries from potential students. We're not a stand-alone institution. We keep our eyes and ears close to the community and get our ideas from it."

"We never create programs out of an abstract idea we cook up, but out of a need we recognize."

Sometimes these colleges put extra resources behind a particular category of student they seek to serve. Community College of Denver launched an institution-wide campaign to reach down into high schools and create dual enrollment opportunities. Faculty members teach courses at the city's high schools, high school students take classes on campus, and the college has helped start two new "early college high schools," where students graduate from high school with college credits in hand. For Christine Johnson, CCD's president and former Denver school superintendent, the campaign mixes pragmatism and idealism.

> Why wait until Denver Public School students have a diploma and come here only to spend their first year or two in developmental education, when we can get them ready for college while they are still in high school? Why wait until they have dropped out of high school and then work so hard to win them back, when we might have kept them engaged all along? Our high school students deserve better.

In this campaign, everyone benefits. Dianne Cyr, who retired as CCD's vice-president but returned to direct the college's high school and early college partnerships, notes:

> High school teachers find themselves teaching alongside college faculty. Students who never thought they were college-bound get to experience college first-hand and start taking school more seriously. High school graduation rates go up. The state of Colorado doesn't need to import so much brain talent;

AT A GLANCE

City College of San Francisco

Over 106,000 students take credit and noncredit courses at City College of San Francisco's Ocean campus, nine neighborhood campuses, and over 150 other sites. Although CCSF is huge, its leaders have charted a clear direction for the institution through strategic planning that guides program development, improvement priorities, and budget decisions. The college collects data on program performance and student outcomes routinely and makes it available to college faculty, staff, and others through a web-based Decision Support System. In 2003, the college completed a five-year strategic plan, identifying eight priorities that guide the college.

The CCSF student body reflects San Francisco's diversity. About 40 percent of new students take the English as a Second Language placement test, and ESL is the largest department, serving as many as 25,000 students a year. About half of the new students in degree and certificate programs are first-generation college-goers; 75 percent require at least one pre-collegiate developmental education course.

CCSF has developed a sophisticated education program to serve the city's immigrants. At one end of the spectrum, the college provides ESL citizenship classes: 90 percent of students pass their naturalization exam. At the other end, vocational and ESL programs help foreign-born doctors, dentists, engineers, nurses, and other professionals improve their English, gain valid credentials, and find employment in their fields. In between, diverse programs serve students with different language needs and educational goals. Innovative Vocational ESL programs—established with local community and business partners in hospitality, health care, child care, construction, food service, and other growth industries—enable students to move quickly into employment and, potentially, move up. Near the Mission campus, predominantly Hispanic day laborers who do not get work on a given day can go to a college-run trailer for literacy classes.

The results are impressive. The proportion of immigrant students among Associate's degree-earners has risen steadily, reaching 49 percent in 2001. The number of ESL students who transfer to four-year institutions has increased 63 percent in five years.

Other CCSF innovations have improved student retention. The college reorganized its counseling department into separate groups tailored to new students, continuing students, and transfer students. A tutoring center served 12,000 students for an average of twelve hours each in fall 2003. An Early Alert system for new ESL students having trouble in developmental courses has doubled course completion rates in classes where it is in place. CCSF offers classes in evenings and on weekends, with times and locations across the city customized to meet the needs of particular groups of job seekers and students.

While state funding has declined steadily over the past four years, enrollments have risen. Despite these pressures, the college is making steady progress on many of its key performance benchmarks. Student success in credit courses is rising, as is completion of vocational courses and occupational certificates. CCSF's transfer rate places it among the top community colleges in California: about 1,200 students a year advance to four-year colleges, a number that is steadily rising.

currently, only 37 percent of the state's high school graduates go on to college. And to the CCD faculty who consistently complain that their students aren't prepared, I say, "Here's your chance to turn this around."

The data systems at both CCD and CCSF help staff keep close tabs on what these recruitment efforts yield. How many of the high school students in dual enrollment programs actually end up enrolling at CCD? How do they fare the first year? Which community awareness fairs produce the most enrollments? Both colleges can see their data in extraordinary detail. For example, the Denver student who recruited at the local nightspot for youth made 90 "contacts" over six months, with half labeled as "intensive." Of these, thirteen ended up enrolling—a remarkable 29 percent yield.

MULTIPLE PATHWAYS, PLANS IN HAND

Like the countless train tracks leading out of Grand Central Station, the course listings at many community colleges can make a student's head spin. And students face even more daunting challenges if they do not speak English well, have not attended school for years, or fear they do not belong in college in the first place. First they must find the "right" track, then stay with it to their destination, and finally make something of where they land.

Poor choices and dead ends extract a large toll on community college students. They can leave students discouraged at spending modest financial resources on credits with no use. For those who do earn their degree, a wrong turn can add years to the accomplishment. Community colleges determined to do better by their students offer multiple starting points, multiple destinations, and crossovers along the way. "It should not matter where you enter," says CCSF's Joanne Low. "And students should never have to exit one system to enter another or retrace their steps."

Often success depends on the ease with which students can combine or cross pathways and the communications they receive about options. For example, each of the eight major campuses at CCSF offers ESL classes. Both credit and noncredit ESL classes are offered at three of these campuses so that students need not move to another campus to transition from noncredit to credit. Campuses are linked to one another, but are also sufficient unto themselves. Lower-level courses keep prerequisites to a minimum, so that ESL or developmental students can take "regular" courses in areas where they are up to speed. Eye-catching brochures and fliers fill the spaces where students gather. Online surveys help them identify interests and then map them to

AT A GLANCE

Community College of Denver

Community College of Denver serves more than 14,000 full- and part-time students on its main and branch campuses. It is the most ethnically and racially diverse higher education institution in Colorado, with 58 percent minority enrollment, primarily Hispanic and African American. Over 60 percent of CCD students are first-generation college-goers.

CCD is recognized nationally for addressing the attainment gap between white and minority students. In 1990, college leaders made a commitment to eliminating variances in persistence and degree completion. Changes in student advising, developmental education, and student support services pushed the percentage of graduates from minority groups from 20 percent in 1987 to 50 percent in 2002.

Self-reflection and continuous improvement are built into the fabric of the college. A cross-functional, college-wide team meets monthly to identify barriers to student success and recommend solutions to the President's Office. Action research by faculty sets priorities for improving practice.

CCD has pursued expansion aggressively in recent years, determined to increase its visibility and impact. Despite a nearly 30 percent budget cut since 2001, CCD enrollment climbed 20 percent in 2002-03.

The cornerstone of CCD's achievements is the integration of instructional innovation with case management and support services. For "gatekeeper" classes that present serious barriers to success in degree programs, the college has introduced learning communities that provide under-prepared students with extra academic support. Case management, pioneered in the college's First Generation Student Success program, has been expanded college-wide. All students are assigned an academic adviser upon admission, with many low-income and minority students receiving additional advising.

These and other supports make a difference. For example, retention in gatekeeper biology classes is 87 percent. The completion rate in developmental education programs, enrolling 44 percent of CCD students at any given time, is 70 percent. About three-fourths of developmental education students earn a C or better in college-level English composition and algebra courses. Degree and certificate completion rose 14 percent from 2002 to 2003, and students who advance to four-year colleges from CCD perform better than those who enter those schools as freshmen.

CCD has a long history of innovative partnerships with local industry and governments. Examples include: an online LPN-to-RN Health Academy, a short-duration skills development program that has placed more than 250 low-income individuals in jobs with high retention rates, and a dislocated worker program that has trained hundreds of older students in certificate or degree programs.

CCD recently made an institutional commitment to expand its services to two important groups: out-of-school youth and students in Denver high schools. CCD has one of Colorado's largest GED instructional programs, and new short-term training programs for out-of-school youth are giving seventeen- to twenty-one-year-old dropouts their first taste of college. A pilot initiative provides individualized learning, mentoring, and support for high school students who might otherwise not be ready to succeed in college.

relevant courses and career possibilities. Counselor Patty Chong-Delon explains:

> Students come to us with various goals, such as transferring to a university, vocational training, personal enrichment, upgrading job skills. Some students feel a need to be here, but don't know why. The abundance of information at the college reflects the abundance of opportunities available, and it's essential that students be aware of these possibilities.

Just as important, students must turn these possibilities into plans. "It's our job to help our students think ahead," adds Chong-Delon, "to help them expand or change direction as they grow in confidence and ability."

Community College of Denver assigns every incoming student an adviser from the faculty, staff, or advising center. And CCSF wants each student taking credit-bearing courses to have a plan. One of the fliers around campus carries the headline: "Got A Plan?" It continues:

> If you don't currently have an educational plan, you need one. Studies have proven that students who have a clear educational goal and can see a clear path to that goal are much more likely to: attend class regularly, complete assignments, and complete their courses regularly. Even if your goal right now is as vague as "get an A.A. degree" or "transfer to a university," having a plan is one sure way to achieve that goal. Right now is the best time to develop an educational plan with a counselor.

Students entering a CCSF counseling office will likely find a mini-catalog titled *What's Next?* describing tuition-free noncredit courses, from microcomputer business applications to sign language, for students finishing ESL levels 7/8. A chart matches interests on the left with course divisions on the right. It will lead a student interested in hand crafts like weaving or furniture making to classes in Consumer Arts and Science, or direct someone interested in export-import to the Business/International program.

MOVING STUDENTS FORWARD

Community colleges increase the chances of reaching the students who need them most and giving them a good start when they recruit energetically and thoughtfully, provide multiple entries and exits, and then help students make sound plans. Still, advancement constitutes the bottom line. Ultimately, the college must help students reach their goals, exit with new skills and promise, or continue on in college. "Our goal is to help move students forward," San Francisco's Patty Chong-Delon asserts. "What pulls us together is that we really want to see our students progress to the next level. We help our students navigate the educational system, and we teach them to advocate for themselves."

At most community colleges, many students make their first stop at developmental education courses or, for immigrant students, ESL courses. At any one time, 44 percent of Community College of Denver's students are taking developmental studies. About 40 percent of new students at CCSF take its placement test for English as a Second Language, and with 25,000 students yearly, ESL is the college's largest department. Seventy-five percent of CCSF students also take at least one pre-collegiate course.

Making sure that these preparatory courses lead students on and up is one of the first hurdles community colleges face. Students can easily lose their momentum at this early juncture, but both CCD and CCSF can now count enrollment in developmental education and ESL as an indicator of success. Strong curriculum, attentive faculty, and state-of-the-art learning labs provide the intensive coaching, practice, and feedback so many students need. Programs such as CCD's Early Alert system also help; ESL faculty identify stumbling students early in the semester, and a counselor meets with each to talk and listen, think through problems, and suggest useful resources.

Student advancement also may break down at transition points. For example, personal circumstances over which students may have no control sometimes keep students from registering for the next semester or force them to cut back. The best community colleges, including CCD and CCSF, connect students with the basic resources they need to stay on track. Often, though, community college students stall when they have a hard time seeing their place in a career or academic ladder. Transitions test their vision and determination, and the college must act as their ally at this vulnerable point.

Sharon Seymour, who chairs ESL at City College of San Francisco, notes:

> Noncredit classes are our biggest feeder at CCSF. The majority of students come here because they've heard great things about our ESL program. It's our job to get them hooked on other aspects of the college—and to make that as easy as possible by having credit placement tests readily available at all of our campuses, by providing special orientations and priority registration.

Phyllis McGuire, the college's Associate Vice Chancellor for Workforce and Economic Development, adds:

> We're always thinking about career ladders, whether it's moving a student from being a medical interpreter to a bilingual physician's assistant or from earning a certificate in the Bridges to Biotech program to being a full-time biotechnology student at UC Berkeley. Helping students negotiate these transitions takes vigilance. Often, you have to see ahead for them.

Advancement also tests the acuity of faculty and staff. For years, ESL faculty at City College of San Francisco have engaged in self-reflective assessment and subsequent curriculum revision, aiming to get the course sequence and milestones right for ESL students. They conduct exhaustive research, examining initial student placements, course completion rates at each level, pass rates on completion exams, the reading requirements in a variety of CCSF academic courses, and the performance of students who complete the ESL sequence and continue to take CCSF English. What they find prompts changes just as comprehensive. A department newsletter reports:

> We instituted an Early Alert system, targeting sixth-week instructor referrals and multiple-repeating students. We encouraged students from our noncredit ESL program to remain in noncredit courses until they reached at least an intermediate level of proficiency. We shortened our ESL program from seven to six levels, reducing hours in the lower levels in order to add more hours at higher levels. We created a new ESL Computer Center. We replaced our required curriculum with a sequence of courses that: integrate language skills as they are integrated in content courses and the workplace; provide a more intensive language-learning experience; emphasize study skills and learning strategies at all levels, along with reading, vocabulary, and information; and prepare students for reading and writing tasks in a variety of academic disciplines. We pledged to revise our common finals so that they better measure the effectiveness of our credit curriculum and student progress through the course sequence and beyond. [Excerpted from CCSF: The Global Campus, Vol. 2, Issue 3, May 2003]

When it comes to student advancement, balancing challenge and support can be as tricky as getting the course sequence and curricula right. With so many students not acculturated to a traditional college system and its expectations, it makes little sense to put insuperable hurdles before them. But lowering the bar presents just as many problems. CCD's Michael Johnson explains:

> To the extent we make arbitrary decisions or policies and draw lines in the sand, then we'll have less success with our nontraditional students. Take time, for example. We mustn't judge our students by how long it takes them to achieve a specific set of competencies, but by how well they complete them, regardless of whether it takes six months or two years. We don't drop our expectations for what we want them to achieve, we just loosen rigid notions about how they get there. When appropriate, we give second chances. If a student attends a class and makes a good effort, but isn't getting a C or better, the instructor can give them a "satisfactory progress" and they can take the course again and try to raise their grade. They still have to master the same content, but our aim is to encourage them to persevere rather than give up.

At CCSF, students may exclude up to 24 units of D or F grades through Academic Renewal if current coursework is more reflective of academic achievements. "We don't see this as compromising academic integrity," counselor Patty Chong-Delon says, "but as giving our students educational opportunities. It can make or break their eligibility for the state universities and scholarships."

At times the staff does draw the line, though. Community College of Denver has started enforcing a long-unused policy that requires students to leave if they fall below a 2.0 GPA for three consecutive semesters. Dean of Students Kim Poast explains:

> When a student falls behind over an extended period, we now see this as a chance to intervene and, if other measures have failed, to encourage the student to withdraw or, at least, take a semester off. We all want to see students advance. But sometimes the best support we can give our students is helping them let go and see possibilities other than college.

Conscientious community colleges also take a hard look at differential rates of advancement within the student body. "We like to talk about the success stories, but we learn as much from the leakages," says CCD's Elaine Baker. In 1990, leaders at Community College of Denver pledged to eliminate variations between white and minority students in their persistence and degree completion. After the adjustments CCD made, the percentage of minority graduates rose from 20 percent in 1987 to 50 percent five years later.

On motivation, persistence, and encouragement

What younger first-generation students at CCD say motivates them to go to college and helps them stay on track.

Parents and family figure strongly in these students' drive for a college education—sometimes to make them proud, sometimes to prove them wrong.

KATIE: I've got eight brothers and sisters. I'm the first in my family to go to college. My older brother wanted to go to college, but then my father died and he had to work to support all of us. So one reason I'm going to college is for him, for the chance he didn't have.

NICOLE: Neither my parents nor by brothers and sisters graduated from high school—and college, too.

VALENE: My motivator is my mom. She is raising four kids, two of her own and two of my cousin's. If it weren't for her, I wouldn't keep coming. I want to help her pay her bills, but I also want to lift up her life.

CHRISTELLE: I'm going to college to prove everyone in my family wrong. They said I wasn't what you call college material.

DAVID: One of the big reasons I want to go to college is to be better than my dad. He was never the type to encourage you much.

HAZEL: When someone tells you that you can't do something, that motivates you to prove them wrong.

ISAAC: Persisting has a lot to do with finding your passion. My passion is performing music. Most people don't see that as a real career; they tell me "you're smart, you should be a computer programmer." They say you're wasting your time, that only a few musicians rise to the top. "Well, I'm going to be one of them," I say back. What's that phrase, "the best revenge is living well."

JACKIE: My family supports me going to college, but I know that in the short run, they'd be better off if I was self sufficient or could contribute to the family income. What keeps me motivated is having dreams. I'm determined to soak up the fruits of this place.

Striking out in a different direction from peers and relatives requires believing in oneself.

HAZEL: The majority of my friends are high school dropouts, and because some of them have become successful, or think they're successful, without a college degree, they don't think college matters.

LESLIE: The focus at my high school wasn't on college. In fact, kids resented you for going to college; they took it as a sign that you thought you were superior to them.

ISAAC: It's not that my friends discourage me, but they don't believe they can better themselves, that they can take control of their future. What they don't realize is that in today's world, education goes beyond high school. I try to argue back. I tell them that it is possible to take control of their future.

DAVID: A lot of my friends start off in a good direction, but then they lose confidence.

HAZEL: Or they lose their way. It isn't always their fault. Things happen that you can't control, sometimes they crash down on you.

JACKIE: It's especially hard if you are first-generation. Then it's not only your friends who don't understand you or why you're striving, but sometimes it's relatives, too. They'll say, "Why are you using such big words? Have you become too good for us?"

LESLIE: Sometimes you really have to force yourself. I'm not a college person; there are days when I think, "Why don't I just get a job?" The homework is always hanging over your head, it never goes away. I think how I could just be chilling with my friends instead of stressing about school. Some days I come home in tears. But I say to myself, "Pull yourself together." There's something about getting over almost any obstacle. It makes you believe in yourself.

A teacher or counselor's encouragement, both persistent and timely, can make a big difference.

DIANE: Coming to a college campus, when you're not sure you belong there, you feel scared, you're scared to be pushed into life, afraid you'll fail, afraid you're not equipped. You need someone to be on your side.

KIM: That's where a counselor's support comes in. They push you, they problem solve with you, they cheer you on.

HAZEL: My counselor is like an army recruiter. She's always after you. But she's also there to back you up. I was passing all of my college classes, but I was terrified that I really didn't know anything. She listened to my doubts and put things in perspective.

KIM: With me, she kept asking me what my plans were for after high school. I kept saying I wanted to quit high school, that my plan was to *not* graduate. But for every reason I gave her, she had an answer back. I wouldn't be sitting here today if it weren't for her.

RONNIE: One of the things that really helps a student is when their teacher encourages them. One of my teachers told me, after I'd done well on an assignment, "Some day you'll take over my job." I remember those words and how good they made me feel.

JACKIE: I'm a person who needs a lot of support. When I transferred to CCD, I signed up for Accelerated Biology. I knew I didn't want to get discouraged right away, that I wanted to believe in myself, that I was smart enough to be in an advanced class. So at the same time I signed up, I got a tutor for biology. It's made all the difference.

On the differences between high school and college

What younger first-generation students at CCD say distinguishes, for them, high school and college.

ISAAC: High school has a certain format to it. So much of it is based on attendance and test scores. Here, it's knowledge that counts, especially knowledge that you can apply to the real world. Also, at regular high school, you don't get to set your own pace. Here you do, you need to know what to do to get work done, and then do it, regardless of how much time it takes.

HAZEL: Once you've experienced a college-level class, you're hooked, you want to learn more and more. High school classes are filled with busy work, copying out vocabulary words, silently reading the textbook. College work makes you pay attention and participate. You get to have intelligent conversations on an adult level, something few students experience in high school. Another thing is that here you can track your progress, you can see it. In high school it seems invisible.

ISAAC: The advice and help your teachers give you is sincere. Here, teachers aren't just concerned about how you are doing in their class, but about where you're headed in life. In high school, it's often how you did on a particular test, or how students' test scores reflect on the school that matter. It's more about the school than about you as a student. Here, I get the feeling that students come first.

HAZEL: When people talk to you and tell you you have all this potential and you don't use it, you feel like you've failed. At least that's the way it was for me in my old high school. And I did fail. I dropped out. In college, they support and push you. They're straightforward, they encourage you, but they also give you a reality check. You can't just think you know it all, you realize how much you have to learn.

KIM: I feel challenged beyond what I'm used to, but that's good. It makes me want to rise to the occasion.

HAZEL: The magic of a college education is that it opens doors—and once you've opened a few, you never want them to close.

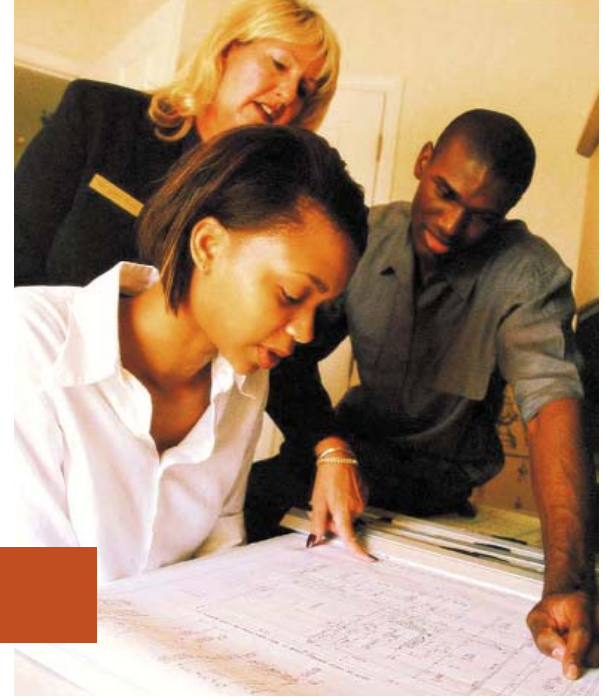
CHRISTELLE: It gives you opportunities you never thought you'd have, it makes you go for new strengths you didn't know you had.

DIANE: I thought I'd never go to college, that I was broken, that my family was broken.

ISAAC: Every course, every test you pass, makes you feel better about yourself.

HAZEL: It's nice to know that you're doing it, that you're putting your own effort into it, and when you do well, you feel wonderful.

ISAAC: And what makes you feel even more proud is that you're only seventeen!



Constant Invention

Something new is always bubbling up. It's my job to take a look at the bubble, figure out who needs to come around the table to examine it, and then, based on this discussion, to determine whether we should do something with it or not. We never stop brainstorming.

Phyllis McGuire, Associate Vice Chancellor, Workforce and Economic Development, City College of San Francisco

INNOVATIONS ROOTED IN PRACTICE

Community colleges have always been entrepreneurial. Chronic budget constraints, if nothing else, have accustomed them to making more with less. However, the best community colleges also engage in constant invention, especially as they embrace nontraditional students, from single mothers leaving welfare to new immigrants with advanced degrees but no English. "We're always looking at our students and asking what program we can create that best serves their needs," says CCSF Dean Joanne Low.

At CCD and CCSF, inventions flow from first-hand experiences with students and community partners, as well as from the growing body of knowledge about what works with nontraditional students. Often, the innovation comes in the form of a new program, and at both these colleges the list of new and maturing programs runs long. [Examples include (from CCD) Latina Scholars, First Generation Student Success, Student Success Seminars,Early

College High School, Essential Skills, GED Institute; and (from CCSF) Vocational ESL Immersion Program, Project SHINE, Bridges to Biotech, Welcome Back, El Civics, Hotel Labor/Management Training Programs.]

The most successful of these programs garner local or national attention and accolades. CCSF's Vocational ESL Immersion Program, for example, was a semifinalist in the prestigious Innovation in U.S. Government Award competition sponsored by Harvard University and the Ford Foundation.

Since they are new and typically supported by "soft" funds, these programs also command close tracking and scrutiny of results. The trend line often matters most. Staff directing CCD's First Generation Student Success program knew they were on the right track when changes they made in response to its first year's low enrollment rate produced a 45 percent jump the following year. Other adjustments raised program graduation rates by 55 percent. When eleven hotels approached CCSF in 1994 to help them reduce tensions between labor and management, no one knew whether the hotel employees would "play." Ten years later, over 1,600 employees have participated in the college's new Hotel Labor/Management Training Programs, and both hotel managers and employees report increased satisfaction with their interactions.

The more we listened to our students for whom college was a stretch in every way, the more we realized that they needed a go-to person.

Gathering less attention, but just as important, are the smaller ways the best community colleges regularly scan for problems students encounter and then develop solutions. The head of CCSF's Chinatown campus tells one such story:

> We had an office training class that included internships, and we kept finding that our students easily mastered the technical side, like filing, but stumbled socially. As we listened to the students and their co-workers, we figured out that their troubles lay with making small talk, the social glue we all take for granted. Instead of discussing, say, the weather with colleagues, they were asking them questions like, "How much do you make?," thinking it was small talk and not knowing it was actually a pretty socially taboo question. So we created a new class called "Social Communication" that teaches the art of fitting in on the job.

Michael Johnson, the Title V Training Coordinator at CCD, describes the origins of that college's case management model:

> The more we listened to our students for whom college was a stretch in every way—from the homeless to the economically displaced to first-generation students—the more we realized that they needed a "go-to" person. They needed someone they could turn to with financial questions; when they wondered how long studying for a particular career would take; when they had difficulties around health, child care, transportation, housing; when a dysfunctional relationship was proving crippling. It made no sense to parcel these out across a number of offices or counselors. These students needed one person they could count on—and just as importantly, to whom they were accountable. We invented the "educational" case manager position and its parameters, bit by bit, always returning to the students and their needs and negotiating the fit.

Phyllis McGuire, CCSF's Vice Chancellor for Workforce and Economic Development, explains a very different route to innovative programs. In this case, the client is business and industry (not students, at least directly), and the inventive process involves DACUM, a structured brainstorming tool used for forty years to create and update training programs around the world.

> A year ago, we learned there was a demand for motorcycle fabricators in the Bay Area. We also had students we knew would be interested. We gathered together a panel of experts—mechanics and owners of small motorcycle shops in the area like

> Bikeyard and Hole in the Wall—and spent two days charting every duty and skill required to build a motorcycle, from design to lacing wheels to painting raw parts to repairing broken cycles. We mapped desirable worker behaviors, along with the tools, equipment, supplies, and materials required to start the program . . . gas analyzers, grinders, stretching machines. We identified future trends and concerns, from smog requirements to attracting young riders. We ended up with a program and a curriculum we were able to implement immediately.

The DACUM process made assessment ongoing and simple. The same panel of experts that helped CCSF create the new motorcycle training program now observes the program in action, reports on what it sees, works with staff to iron out any kinks, and hosts student interns.

CREATING NEW PATHWAYS AND INTEGRATING OLD ONES

"When we develop these programs," notes Phyllis McGuire, "we always think, how can 'a' lead to 'b' and 'b' to 'c'?" In the fluid world of community colleges, invention also involves creating fresh pathways for students and consolidating old ones.

A community health center request to CCSF for bilingual aides, for instance, grew in time into something much larger. McGuire elaborates:

> The centers came to us looking for bilingual employees who could work alongside their professional medical staff. We responded by creating a course that exposed students to basic health terms, plus a general understanding of the health care system and where community health centers fit into the larger community health care system. As our students met with on-the-job success, they wanted more. We designed a certificate program, then additional courses, and finally a full-fledged transfer program that could position ambitious students to end up with a masters degree in public health.

As another example, CCSF Chancellor Philip R. Day Jr. describes the decision to create an "on ramp" to the college's highly touted Bridges to Biotechnology program, which has trained minority students from some of San Francisco's poorest neighborhoods to work as technicians in Bay Area biotech firms:

> We had to respond to community demand for accessible training in biotechnology. Not doing so would have been unconscionable, particularly since CCSF is home to Bio-Link, a national center for biotechnology education and training funded by the National Science Foundation. While the Bridge program eased students into the biotechnology certificate program and dramatically increased their success, it only reached students with tenth- through twelfth-grade skill levels. A significant portion

> of the residents in the area surrounding Mission Bay (the new biotechnology hub spurred on by the development of a forty-three-acre UCSF campus) had skill levels between sixth and ninth grade and desperately needed general job readiness training. The On-Ramp program, born in collaboration with SFWorks, a workforce intermediary and long-term CCSF partner, would meet this need.

Todd Ramirez, a case manager at CCD, recounts how he and his colleagues recently took two separate programs serving first-generation students and integrated them into a coherent whole. They are watching the data closely for whether the merger benefits students as they intended.

> There are lots of reasons this makes sense, even if it means initial discomfort for staff. The two programs, First Generation Student Success (FGSS) and TRIO Scholars, served many of the same students, in sequence, as they gained credits and moved from FGSS to TRIO. The approach in both was the same, including case management and learning communities. By combining them, we simplify communications and maximize resources. It will be much better for students who don't see them as discrete programs, don't care about their funding sources, and are just looking for the tools to be successful.

FLEXIBILITY AND MID-COURSE CORRECTIONS

Finally, invention in the best community colleges calls upon a willingness to be flexible and the openness to rethink assumptions. They must treat time, for example, as perhaps their most precious commodity. Students and faculty alike balance competing demands from family to work. (Most community college faculty nationwide are part-time, holding down additional jobs or teaching positions.) Adaptations such as evening and weekend classes, satellite campuses and online courses, and shorter courses suited to working students all help students and instructors fit coursework into busy lives.

Sometimes what works best for students comes as a surprise. At CCSF's Chinatown campus, the staff has discovered that the most popular time for ESL classes is Sunday morning. "We run sixteen to eighteen ESL sections on a Sunday morning," says Joanne Low. "Many of our students work six days a week or are at the mercy of their employer and are kept late and can't get to evening classes. Sunday mornings may be their only 'free' time during the week." On the other hand, it turns out that

"I want to make friends with America."

YUXIAN CAI,
City College of
San Francisco

On learning English as a second language

Reflections from ESL students at the City College of San Francisco

YUXIAN CAI, *20, came to San Francisco from China two years ago. She was too old for high school and enrolled in a noncredit ESL class at CCSF's Chinatown campus. Now she's taking ESL courses for credit.*

The first few weeks I started school here, I was so nervous I would cry. In China you are given a schedule, but here you can choose, which was confusing. Most of my classmates were older. I felt alone. After one semester, I got to know some students my age, and that helped. When I'm with ESL students, I'm not afraid to talk. But when I'm with native speakers, I'm still afraid. I'm afraid they'll make faces or laugh or won't listen. My language skills put me at the lower level of American society.

A few months ago I applied for a sales job, but I had difficulty with the questions the store manager asked me. I didn't have confidence about doing that job. When I got a good grade in my class, I thought the teacher must have made a mistake.

I want to be a teacher, but I don't want to hold my students back because of my language problems. What moves me along to speak English? Seeing my parents toil so hard in the restaurant where they work and coming home with their heads down. I want my life to be different.

NANCY GUEVERA, *29, emigrated from Peru two years ago. She came without any family and lives alone.*

Life here has been hard for me. Three years ago I was a midwife in Peru, I taught at a university, I planned to get my doctorate. But then my parents got divorced and other things happened. My life turned upside down. I left and came here by myself. My first job was cleaning floors, work I'd never done before, at the bottom. I signed up for ESL classes as soon as I could, also at the lowest level. When I took the placement test, they gave me a label 1-30. I didn't know what that meant. When I received my first quiz grade and got a C, I felt terrible. I thought, maybe they placed me at the wrong level. I thought, maybe I should drop out. Then I reminded myself that I came here to reach high, not to be on my knees. I dug in and studied harder. Now I'm getting As and Bs. I gave a class presentation on Machu Picchu, my country, and the teacher said she understood every word I said. My dreams have gotten smaller. I no longer hope to get my doctorate. I hope to be a nurse in this country. But when you think about it, that's still something important.

JIA LI LI, *21, has lived in the United States, with his parents, for "one year, three months." He studied English in China for nine years, but never had to speak it, he says.*

When I first started taking classes, I was afraid of talking to other people, that I'd make mistakes. I wanted to speak perfect English, right from the start. I hoped I could fake it. But I couldn't, so I closed my mouth and didn't say anything. One day when I was waiting for the bus to take me to school, the person next to me started making small talk. I just stood there and nodded my head. On the bus ride, all I could do was think bad about myself. Then I thought, why not take that negative feeling and use it for motivation, to make myself study harder and not give up. I think about that a lot. I have a math class, the teacher is from Russia. He has a strong accent. At the beginning of the course, I didn't know what he was talking about. Now I've got accustomed to his accent, and I'm doing well in the class. I feel like this is a success story, that my listening skills have improved. Still, you can work on your English for twenty years, and have obstacles to overcome. Being an ESL student takes patience.

XIAO YAN LIAO, *23, moved with her parents and sister-in-law from China to San Francisco in the past year. She had two years of English in high school in China.*

I would feel sad about myself when I couldn't communicate my thoughts and feelings. I remember when I went to the Division of Motor Vehicles and didn't know which bus to take to get there. I tried my best to explain to the driver where I wanted to get off, but couldn't get the words out right. Fortunately, there was a Chinese person on the bus who helped me talk to the driver. After that I told myself, "You need to study English harder." And I did. Two months later, I was on a bus and this time I could ask the driver. I even helped another person who spoke no English.

I had a friend who was applying for a job at a health clinic, and she said I should come along. She had her interview. I sat outside, imagining myself working there, speaking to the patients. But I knew that if I really worked there, I couldn't make myself understood. She came out and said, "You should apply for a job here, too." I said, "I'd never get it."

Still, I'm progressing. At first, I couldn't imagine writing five paragraphs in English. But now I can turn in my humble essays. It's amazing that I can write 400 words. Learning English is a long journey, and I still have a long way to go. But I'm on my way. It means so much to me.

construction workers prefer to stop at ESL class at 6:30 p.m. on their way home, rather than heading out for a class after supper.

Within the classroom, as faculty members work to draw students in and push them ahead, flexibility can also be an asset. Jana Zanetto, an ESL instructor at CCSF, says teaching ESL students requires "constant orchestration."

> What works for one student often doesn't work for another. Every class is an incredible mix. You'll have a Russian student who's grown up in an education system that's pretty sophisticated, where questioning is rewarded, who may have attended college in Russia, and sitting next to him will be a Chinese student who completed five years of school in China, in a system where questioning or class discussion are unheard of, who is scared to death to speak in your class, who may want to be noticed but keeps entirely to himself. Each requires a different approach.

The process of innovation can also require rethinking assumptions and changing directions, even when an initiative is well under way. Robert Gabriner, Dean of Research, Planning, and Grants at CCSF, spent six years developing a comprehensive data management system for the college that ultimately proved a failure.

> We knew what we wanted: an information-rich system that anyone could access in service of their work, that they knew would include accurate and up-to-date data, and that they didn't need to be a technician to use. We invested enormous resources and time building software we kept thinking we could make fly. But it never did. We suddenly realized that creating a decision support system that sat on the web would be much preferable and scrapped the software. Continuing to go down the first path, just because we'd invested in it so heavily, made little sense.

The web-based system the college now uses has transformed its decisionmaking.

At CCD, President Christine Johnson recalls, "As we began reaching out to high schools and high school students, we soon realized that we'd been trying to align the curriculum in the wrong direction." Rather than aligning the curriculum upward, from high school to college, "we needed to align downward, from what we were teaching at CCD to what was being taught in our city's high schools." Her close connections with the public school system buttress that ambitious endeavor, which demands continuous learning on the part of secondary teachers, as well as their students.

Collaboration in Real Time

At CCD there is a culture, an environment, where you get used to working collaboratively. It's what makes this place thrive. Every committee crosses disciplines and units. Every team is cross-functional, bringing together hourly/clerical staff, technical/professional staff, faculty, and administration. All meetings are open.

KIMBERLEY THOMPSON, Director of Institutional Planning, Community College of Denver

MAKING COLLABORATION A NORM

Higher education has long carved out turfs that separate departments and centers, administration and faculty, and historically, independence trumps collaboration among them. Sharon Seymour, the ESL Department Chair at City College of San Francisco, tells a familiar story:

> It used to be that ESL noncredit was its own division and ESL credit [courses] fell under English. Even though it didn't serve anyone well, even though it made the transition from noncredit to credit harder for students, it was just the way it was done.

A stepped-up commitment to institution-wide collaboration opened a new chapter, however.

> We took a hard look and merged the two departments. We also decided to use the same certification for instructors working in both programs, encouraging them to have a global understanding of the instructional needs and styles of ESL students.

The ESL Department, in turn, appointed an ESL coordinator at each of the six major campuses, and the coordinators began to meet weekly. Now these initial experiences with collaboration have spawned others. At CCSF's main campus, a buddy system pairs new and experienced ESL instructors, and at voluntary cluster meetings teachers compare and reflect on instructional strategies. "This collaboration has hidden benefits," says Jana Zanetto. "When you see faculty around you going the extra mile, you're inspired to do so yourself."

"When you see faculty around you going the extra mile, you're inspired to do so yourself."

Both colleges have also experimented with "learning communities" that provide an occasion for faculty to work across disciplines. Instructors in CCSF's Bridges to Biotech program, for example, mesh their courses in mathematics, language, and biotechnology so student learning in one class reinforces that in the other two. At CCD, instructors sometimes form pairs to provide back-to-back courses that feed off each other, like computer instruction and study skills, psychology and freshmen writing. "One of the biggest barriers for our nursing students was learning the math required to convert dosages," explains Jim Bryant, who helps promote and implement learning communities at CCD. "This started us thinking about all the ways the medical careers we were training students for called on computational skills. We began coupling courses like pharmacology and math, creating a two- to three-hour block of time with joint instruction."

One of the strongest examples of faculty collaboration at the community colleges of Denver and San Francisco involves instructional departments and student support services. At most colleges, teaching and counseling live and operate separately—but not at these two. CCSF's Patty Chong-Delon explains:

> As counselors, it's critical that we build and tend to relationships with instructional departments. Without these relationships, we are hard pressed to advocate for students, guide them wisely, and bring student experiences to bear on instruction. You can't wave a wand and have collaboration magically materialize. You have to build it over time. But it's invaluable. Now when we see a need, we join forces with the instructional division best positioned to deliver it and put it in place. Sometimes the collaboration involves figuring out what's getting in the way and getting rid of it.

Michael Johnson at Community College of Denver grinningly describes the purposeful campaign, started in 2001, "to sneak our best student-support generalists behind 'enemy lines,' into teaching and learning." He continues:

Historically, there had always been a breakdown between instructional and student support services. For the good of our students, we vowed to end it. We took four case managers and placed them strategically in a handful of academic centers. To our amazement, they quickly became the "go-to" person in the centers, for both faculty and students. The gains in trust since then have been phenomenal. Case managers represent a value system that's considered radical by faculty: that instruction needs to adapt to the needs of students as much as the other way around.

To this list of what aggressive collaboration yields, City College of San Francisco's Chancellor would add better decisions. "We can't do without shared governance," says Philip Day. "It is the means by which we engage many people in the process of consultation and decisionmaking. There is no doubt in my mind that our decisions are better when as many voices as possible engage in the deliberative process."

CREATING TOOLS TO SUPPORT DIALOGUE

Collaboration will not happen without time set aside for people to meet, communicate, and plan. Meetings and committees provide the most common forums for these exchanges, and at CCD and CCSF intra- and inter-department meetings fill staff calendars. But both colleges employ additional communication tools, from daily emails to monthly departmental newsletters, that link and inform faculty and staff.

Until funding ended, a newsletter published by CCSF's ESL Department, *The Global Campus*, regularly included a feature story about how the college served language minority students. One issue highlighted seminars on academic literacy across the curriculum, which brought together faculty and staff in child development, business,

social science, health science, graphic communications, Asian American studies, behavior science, and the pharmacy technician program. The same edition also described the latest research on helping second-language learners respond to written text. And it included results from a focus group in which ESL students talked about teaching strategies that helped or hurt their learning. (Examples of what helps: making time to answer student questions at the end of the class, being specific about the goals of homework assignments, breaking down large projects into small steps. Examples of what hurts: lecturing without writing sufficient notes on the board, assuming students understand current events.)

"We're always brainstorming. We value the data and we value the need to set aside time to reflect collaboratively on what it means."

At Community College of Denver, the communications office issues a daily email that brings staff and faculty "breaking" news from its branches, centers, and departments, along with a constantly updated calendar of major staff meetings and college events taking place in the upcoming four weeks. Most items include a link for more information.

Both these colleges gather faculty members to examine data and use it for assessment and planning, which has proved an indispensable (though often provocative) tool to spur collaboration and dialogue. Several years ago at CCSF, for example, the data routinely collected about course completion rates suggested there was a bottleneck in the six-course pre-collegiate sequence in English. When that faculty took a closer look, it discovered that students bogged down in a handful of courses toward the middle of the sequence. Researcher and planner Robert Gabriner recalls:

> As faculty went further into the data, they identified individual instructors whose curriculum and approach were out of synch. It was not a sweet process; indeed, there was some uproar. But when it ended, faculty had come together and aligned the curriculum in a way that worked for students and teachers alike. They also took their collaboration a step further and created a common exit exam for pre-collegiate English, which they now use regularly to calibrate their teaching.

Gabriner adds, "My office was part of the supporting cast of this story."

At CCD, the dean of students keeps a close eye on enrollment and retention data, watching for downturns in any department. When one occurs, she and her staff meet with that department's faculty, figuring out together what the numbers suggest and how they might turn them around. "We're always brainstorming together," Kim Poast says. "We value the data and we value the need to set aside time to reflect collaboratively on what it means."

WELCOMING COMMUNITY PARTNERS AS EQUALS

Facilitating collaboration "in real time" is what her job is all about, explains CCSF's Phyllis McGuire. As Associate Vice Chancellor for Workforce and Economic Development, McGuire allies with over one hundred employment groups, from a hiring hall that recruits day laborers for hotel banquets to a small company that makes advanced sound systems. She sees herself as the liaison between "outside groups" with immediate needs and a fast timetable (such as employers, unions, and community groups) and "inside groups" with a broader view and a much slower pace (such as CCSF faculty and administration, or local and state government offices). She notes:

> The success of so many of our programs depends on sustained relationships with community partners and bridging the very different cultures of higher education and the workplace. We collaborate at every step: agreeing there's a need for a specific program, co-designing it (with the students' needs foremost), troubleshooting, contextualizing it, and then creating or securing employment opportunities that represent a step up for students. You can't do it half-heartedly. You can't undervalue the first-hand experience community partners bring to the relationship.

Community College of Denver used several complementary strategies in its collaboration with that city's high schools, knowing that no one tactic could achieve their mutual goals. With the Denver Public Schools, it now offers an on-campus summer school for rising tenth- through twelfth-graders. Supported by the state of Colorado, it provides juniors and seniors with dual enrollment in any of CCD's courses. It also opens its classes to students at the Emily Griffith Opportunity High School, an alternative school for former dropouts, as well as offering college-level courses at the high school itself. In 2002, CCD co-designed and launched the city's first "early college high school" and in 2004 started Southwest Early College, a Denver charter school as its second, with more early college openings in planning. Most recently, in several Denver high schools the college has started reading, writing, and math labs that use individualized learning strategies honed in CCD labs over the years.

Each of these programs requires its own complex web of partnerships at the secondary level. "Our working relationships with area high schools are simply priceless," CCD's high school recruitment director, Ari Rosner-Salazar, says.

When the need requires, these colleges collaborate with their communities at a very fine-grained level. For example, a Bay Area firm making high-tech sound systems approached CCSF for help teaching its foreign-born employees commonly used American idioms, conversation patterns, and job-related vocabulary.

CCD's Director of Workplace Learning, Elaine Baker, often serves as interpreter between her students and their employers, easing the social translations that confront women leaving welfare for the workplace.

> Our students have few safety nets and their main safety net is each other, making loyalty critical. Their world is hugely interpersonal. The world of work, on the other hand, is transactional, and it's an enormous leap for these women to go from the interpersonal to the transactional. We help our students decode the transactional world, which also requires that they understand themselves, and we help their employers appreciate the interpersonal frames these women carry and how they may get in the way. The work world is performance based, and our students take everything so personally. We try to de-sensitize them and work with their employers to support them as they struggle to become contributors, instead of women holding on to a structure of dependence for their survival.

Data informs these collaborations in many ways. It can prod faculty together to ask hard questions and reconfigure instruction, and it then provides a yardstick to measure the results. Elaine Baker and her staff, for example, saw hard evidence that their attention to students' social translations paid off. In 2003-2004, 86 percent of the women found jobs, and 84 percent of those placed the previous year remained on the job.

Occasionally, surprising results of collaboration show up through informal data as well. Both parties in the partnership between CCSF and the sound company were pleased that the eighteen participating employees improved their listening and clarification skills and expanded their work vocabulary. But informal interviews revealed that they also grew more outgoing, improving the work environment for everyone and taking advantage of advancement opportunities.

An Arm Around

So many of our students are brave souls, striking through what feels like a wilderness to them, coming from extraordinarily humble circumstances. If we believe these students can succeed—which we do—then we have to support them in every way we can.

Michael Johnson, Title V Training Coordinator, Community College of Denver

TAILORING SUPPORT TO STUDENTS' DIVERSE NEEDS

Research on community colleges underscores again and again the importance of comprehensive supports for nontraditional students. So both CCSF and CCD think through the structure and staffing of student support services as carefully as they analyze teaching and learning. For example, CCSF used to have counseling staff act as generalists, housed under one roof but split by competing priorities. Reorganization has created distinct units focused on the needs of particular students: new, continuing, first-generation, international, and transfer. Counselor Chong-Delon explains:

> The students' needs are so diverse and the help they need so varied. With transfer students, they often come to us having attended two or three colleges. What they need most is someone to help them identify their goals and then combine their transcripts to create a plan that will get them their degree as efficiently as possible. With new students, especially high school students, the issues are often affective. Sometimes they come in quite lost: they arrive late for their appointment, offer little in the way of conversation, have no clue what courses they want to take. In these instances, we help students select classes that explore interest areas and apply to various goals. We also help them create a network of people and places on campus they can turn to for help. We tailor our support to students.

For some counselors at City College of San Francisco, tailored support includes reaching out to students' families, according to Joanne Low at the Chinatown campus:

> I cannot stress enough how important it is when working with first-generation students, especially Chinese, to embrace the whole family. We do best when we find ways to serve a family unit—the grandparents in naturalization classes, the parents in language classes, the children in credit courses. Linguistic isolation is the enemy for so many Chinese students.

At both these colleges, the instructional side and student support services—traditionally distant, if not at odds with one another—work hard to work together. CCSF considers its counselors faculty; they can affect policy, advocate for students, and sit on committees that make critical decisions affecting student progress. At CCD, case managers now work alongside instructional staff in several departments and wield influence throughout the college. Spreading academic advisement across the faculty and staff at CCD—every incoming student is assigned an adviser—helps seed a college-wide culture of student support.

CCD's case management model grew from its commitment to a holistic approach to students' development. "Case managers wear multiple hats, and that's just as it should be," Michael Johnson asserts. "They are academic advisers and, in effect, mental health counselors; they connect students with financial aid and registration; they are troubleshooters, problem solvers, crisis counselors."

> Making student support a top priority has transformed both these community colleges, as faculty, counselors, and case managers work alongside each other with shared goals. "We've perfected the opposite of the cookie-cutter approach," says CCD President Christine Johnson. "In its place, we've created a culture where staff at every level open their hearts to students. They set the bar high, and then help students reach it. Even more amazing, we've created this culture in an institution where half of the faculty are part-time."

TENDING TO THE LITTLE THINGS

"If we're to be effective as counselors, we need to see things from a student's point of view," says Patty Chong-Delon at CCSF. "Not just the big picture, but the little things that get in the way."

The Early Alert system in that college's ESL department, for example, helps faltering students in modest ways before they become overwhelmed. Jana Zanetto, the ESL instructor who oversees the system, explains:

> We try to zero in on students who need a small push, who are on the borderline—and not so far behind that they will never pass. Typically faculty refer around 150 students to me, of which roughly half show up for a fifteen- to twenty-minute appointment. At these meetings, I tell students how much their teacher wants to see them succeed and then quickly try to create a caring space that encourages them to talk about what's getting in the way. Sometimes it's big, like a death in the family, but other times it's something small, like the student who could not hear well and masked the problem by sitting at the back of the classroom. I suggested he sit in the front and bring a tape recorder. With many Latino students the issue is academic confidence. A few words of encouragement can be like a shot in the arm.

At the end of the semester, Zanetto always compares what happened to the students she counseled versus those who did not come in. "The ones I saw invariably fare better," she says. "It shows the power of small interventions that come at the right time." CCD's Michael Johnson also emphasizes the importance of timeliness: "Run around is the enemy for these students. More often than not, they need help within the space of three hours, not three days."

Both colleges also help students negotiate the foreign territory of college in numerous small ways: course registration, financial aid, even finding their way around campus. Michael Johnson describes some of the special attention CCD gives students enrolled in CCD's First Generation School Success and TRIO programs:

> We have an early registration system where we call students, bring them in, and make sure they sit right here and sign up. If they aren't familiar with online registration, we teach them what to do. We do the same with financial aid, making sure they apply early and helping them fill out the online forms. We give them maps of the campus and make sure they know exactly where they can find a particular office or resource. We train them in all of the little things they need to know, which otherwise can be intimidating.

"We also teach them how to ask questions," adds CCD counselor Ari Rosner-Salazar. "We lose students for silly reasons. Maybe they don't know where to get their picture ID, or when they see a 'TR' in the course schedule, they don't know it means Thursday. We tell them to ask when they don't know, that there's no such thing as a stupid question."

Many students need continuous intensive support. Counselors at City College of San Francisco may see a student seven or eight times in a semester; in between, they assign small tasks like attending a special workshop or seeing an instructor about a difficulty in class.

Easily accessible data helps staff pinpoint the places where students need assistance. The web-based CCSF data system allows counselors to get immediate answers to their questions about students, and CCD also has a user-friendly student information system. Both colleges regularly solicit student feedback on the counseling they receive; at CCSF, students even evaluate individual counselors.

The data collected at Community College of Denver could not be more fine-grained. Even the college's food bank records which items students request most, and keeps them in stock.

A PROACTIVE, ASSET-BASED APPROACH

"One of the most important questions we asked ourselves when we began to develop the case management approach is whether we were going to be proactive or reactive," CCD's Michael Johnson recalls. He and his staff elected to do the first, carving out an approach that is proactive, intensive and, in some ways, intrusive.

> We let students know what to expect up front, that we'll be checking in with them several times a month, that we expect them to contact us immediately when an issue arises. We ask their teachers to send us regular progress reports, noting their grades and classroom participation. We demand that our students engage with us, even more so when the going is tough, when their first instinct may be to check out. While a lot of the more independent, traditional middle-class students wouldn't respond well to this intrusive advising, these students, when they learn to trust us, are thankful.

"We work for them, but they must be active collaborators," Todd Ramirez, the case manager for first-generation students, emphasizes. The college sets clear rules of engagement: To stay part of the program and keep their financial aid, students must maintain a 2.0 GPA and complete 75 percent of their courses.

Sometimes the proactive approach requires helping students to renegotiate their identities. Many must discard the notion that they are not "college material" before believing that they deserve success and can achieve it. Occasionally, this renegotiation reaches even deeper, as Elaine Baker, who oversees CCD's efforts in moving students from welfare to work, attests:

> The women we work with no longer have a community that can support them living marginal lives, outside the mainstream, waiting on their next government check. In a certain sense, it's been freeing for those women who wanted to get a job and move on; they no longer are surrounded by a culture that works against this. Still, these women are hard pressed to see themselves as belonging here, in college. They bring the marginality of their community with them. Our task is to help these women help themselves, as students, as working members of society, as contributors, and not just dependents. It's not the instructional element that's hard. We can control that. What we can't control is how our students react to stress, to ambiguities. Our starting point is to create a "community of practice" where these women can begin renegotiating their identities in an environment that's safe.

"We no longer say a student failed or passed an assessment test, but where they placed. We prize what students can do instead of lamenting what they can't."

At the core of all these supports lies a deep commitment to building upon students' strengths rather than focusing on their limitations. Both these colleges resist using easy, disparaging terms ("failed the assessment test," "basement math," "remedial," "unprepared") to categorize students whose background makes higher education such a huge reach. Denver's Dean of Students, Kim Poast, tells of a colleague who quips, "Anybody can come to CCD and anybody does."

To shift that deficit-based paradigm takes not just sensitivity but hard work, and Community College of Denver and City College of San Francisco have made it their mission. Dean Poast notes:

> We put this shift into practice in ways that are big and small. In many colleges, for example, students who do poorly on an assessment test in one subject find themselves in developmental courses for all of their subjects. Here, we make sure that students in developmental courses also take regular courses, tapping their strengths at the same time that we support their weaknesses. We no longer say a student failed or passed an assessment test, but where they placed. These adjustments all add up to create a culture that prizes what students can do instead of lamenting what they can't.

In the end, "what so many of these students need is sheer encouragement," CCD case manager Todd Ramirez points out. "It's the key that unlocks so much potential."

As they dedicate themselves to the futures of 11.5 million students around the country, community colleges themselves also need and deserve that encouragement. By taking a close look at two of the best—City College of San Francisco and Community College of Denver—others may cull new ideas, practices, and tools for their own continued improvement and success. No more important work faces the nation than nurturing and developing the enormous assets of its people, especially those once swept aside. In this new era, community colleges have taken up that work with a will.

On the value of education and how it fits in a life

Two older students at CC San Francisco and Denver look back and ahead

MEI YEN HUANG, *41, came to San Francisco from Taiwan ten years ago with her son. Her father, a farmer, didn't see much value in girls attending school. In Taiwan, she finished fifth grade and then went to work in a skin care salon. She did the same work in San Francisco, supporting her son through college. When he graduated, she decided it was "my turn to breathe."*

For twenty years I worked so, so hard. I forgot how to think, how to live. I call it the Chinese way: work, work, work to make enough money to open your own shop, then work, work, work some more until you die. That's all many immigrants know. I was no different. Now I have the money to live on, and I want a chance to breathe and grow, to get an education. Making money can't be the only goal in life. It's a goal that can trap you in the end. That's what I think.

I signed up for ESL classes at the Chinatown campus, noncredit, but I wasn't satisfied. I decided to go all the way and become a full-time student. The first time I met with my counselor, she told me, "Mei Yen, you must have a plan. You need to know what you want to accomplish and how to make it happen." She's right. I have my goals, my plans. Even if they change, which can be good, I have a direction. And I'm always checking in with my counselor.

I think about how time speeds up or slows down, how it measures a life. I used to be impatient. I wanted the hours to fly by when I was at the beauty salon. Before I knew it, that's just what happened. The time flew away. With college, I've learned to think differently. I know it will take me a long time to graduate with a bachelor's degree, I can't count the number of years it will take. But each hour is precious now and I want them all. It's education that makes you special. You need to use your time to better yourself.

Being a good student takes a strategy, my counselor says. I have mine. I always, always ask questions when I don't understand. I make my teachers respond to me, even if they say "Mei Yen, not again!" I break down what I have to do into small steps, and I'm happy for each one I take.

Education gives you a choice. If you only work hard and make money and do nothing else, you have only one card in your hand. Many immigrants think getting ahead is like a card game, that it's all about luck. I tell them it's about good ideas, not luck. I want to have a lot of cards in my hand. I'm not waiting for luck.

BERTHA CERDA, *44, is from Nicaragua. She immigrated to Los Angeles when she was a teenager and, foregoing school for work, built up a small wholesale flower business in South Central LA. In 1991, the riots that followed the Rodney King case set her business in flames. She lost everything and decided to start fresh in Denver, with her three daughters. Four years ago one of her daughters died suddenly.*

When my daughter died, life lost its importance. I decided it was time to go back to Nicaragua. But when my oldest daughter said that she was going to stay and move in with her boyfriend, I decided to stay, too, and keep her under my roof. But I was lost. I looked for work, wandered around, and one day found myself here at the CCD campus. I went to the registration office and asked about how you signed up for a course. A woman asked me about my experience and my interests and I mentioned day care. She told me about early childhood education and said to take a few courses. "I have a problem," I said, "I don't have money for school." She said, "Well, I bet you qualify for a grant." I did. For both of my daughters, I paid for their education. I didn't know there was such a thing as financial aid. Nobody told me how to do it, that I could do it. What's happened since has changed my life.

So I finished the early childhood courses, but then I realized I'd earn only $8 an hour. I decided to study more and get my certificate [to be an early childhood provider]. Then I thought, is that what I really want? Why stop there? Yes, here I am forty-four and wondering what I want to do with my life. I decided I'd go to school for four years and get my B.A. degree. Slowly but surely, I'll get that four-year degree. It's like lifting weights. In high school, you lift fifteen pounds, at CCD you lift thirty, at the university you lift sixty pounds. You build up your strength.

But it still takes will power. I put up signs all over my bedroom, I really do, to inspire me, especially when I'm feeling discouraged. I tell myself again and again, "I like school." You have to clean up the spider webs in your brain, the ideas that get in the way. My counselor here at CCD says the key is to find something you like, then you don't have to force yourself.

The value of an education isn't money but the wider perspective it gives you. Education is like planting a tree. You can plant a bush or a tree, a tomato plant or an avocado tree. With a tomato plant, you get fruit quickly, but the plant has a short life. If you plant an avocado tree, it grows slowly; at first there's no fruit, but in five years it will give you fruit not just for one season, but for a lifetime.

My mother is so proud of what I'm doing, my daughter, she's eight, is so proud I'm going to college. They had a ceremony for the graduates of the TRIO program and my mother and daughter came. How they smiled.

AT A GLANCE

MetLife Foundation Community College Excellence Award Finalists

★ Albuquerque Technical Vocational Institute

TVI serves a region whose residents are more than 50 percent minority, particularly Hispanic and Native American. In a state with very low high school graduation rates, improved student success is a top "Leadership Priority." TVI tracks retention rates, student satisfaction, number of graduates, and student job placement rates annually, comparing them to benchmarks set in the college's strategic plan.

Analysis of student outcome data has resulted in several innovations: more links between remedial and credit courses; a program to identify trade program students who are close to qualifying for their degrees but at risk of not completing; assessment of thousands of high school students annually with a mobile computerized testing station; and the development of for-credit college success courses. A unique innovation is the "achievement coach," a counselor funded in each department's base budget whose sole purpose is to help students succeed.

TVI has been particularly successful with Native American students; they enroll and graduate in percentages larger than their proportion in the local population. The developmental education division is helping TVI improve retention rates: of 2,800 first-time students who took remedial courses in 2001-02, 72 percent continued into the second semester, compared to 55 percent for those who did not take developmental courses. The division maintains a high proportion of full-time faculty, created an innovative learning communities program, and invests heavily in professional development.

★ Bunker Hill Community College

With the arrival of a new president in 1997, Bunker Hill Community College in Boston began a wholesale transformation process, bringing the college and the community face to face, to explore strategies to expand student access and success.

Approximately 60 percent of Bunker Hill students are Asian, Latino, or African American, with representation from 92 countries. The percentage of academically disadvantaged students increased from 48 to 62 percent in four years, and about 85 percent of incoming freshmen placed in at least one developmental course in 2002-03. Retention rates in developmental reading and writing courses are above 90 percent, with 70 percent of students passing with grades of at least C. Contributing to this success story are strong community partnerships with local public schools and industries.

Bunker Hill's investment in technology as an instructional and academic support tool bears witness to the institution's efforts to meet student demand. Online courses began serving 25 students in 1999 and now reach more than 1,600 students. Supplementing instruction, both advising and tutoring services are available to students online. In 2003-04, Bunker Hill established an Early Alert system. This web-based notification system triggers meetings with students to create an academic plan and benefit from campus support services.

★ San Jacinto College North

San Jacinto College North has seen its student demographic profile change dramatically in the past decade; today, 36 percent are Hispanic, most are from low-income families, and 95 percent are first-generation college-goers.

The college has restructured developmental education, increasing the number of full-time math and reading faculty, providing professional development, and introducing technology to improve students' literacy skills. The Tutoring Resource Assistance Center, which is closely integrated with Student Support Services, provides individualized and small-group support. Retention specialists keep students connected. As a result, 60 percent of developmental students who enter college algebra receive a grade of C or better, a stronger showing than for those who test directly into algebra. Since 1996, the one-semester retention rate has improved from 62 to 67 percent. The number of associate's degree graduates rose from 126 to 181 in five years. The school has reversed a slide in enrollments, which have risen more than 25 percent from 1996.

Creative grantsmanship has enabled the college to expand intensive student support services and to construct a community resource and training center in the isolated, underserved Galena Park Neighborhood.

★ San Juan College

For young people and adults across an expansive rural region in northwest New Mexico, San Juan College is the primary pathway to educational and economic opportunity. Almost 40 percent of the students are minority, primarily Native Americans and Hispanics; 85 percent are first-generation college-goers, and 98 percent of new students in 2001-02 placed into at least one developmental education course.

SJC uses collaborative processes, data-driven decision making, and strong leadership to continually improve its programs and student outcomes. Its Quality Council, comprised of faculty, staff, and students, focus on five priorities: student learning, student support, community linkages, technology, and organizational development.

An institution-wide faculty process has driven several innovations: college-wide Common Student Learning Outcomes; instructional support classes in English and reading; mandatory placement in developmental courses; and mandatory advisement.

SJC's Native American Program provides support from recruitment through graduation or transfer to students from over three dozen Native American tribes. This has helped increase the Native American graduation rate by 72 percent since 1996.

Business partnerships help local energy companies respond to worker shortages: 98 percent of SJC's Regional Energy Training Center graduates have found employment or advanced in their field. The college also provides social services, child care, and dental care to uninsured low-income residents.

★ Tallahassee Community College

Tallahassee Community College is well-known for its success as a stepping stone to four-year colleges, with its proximity to both Florida State University and Florida A&M. New leadership has added an institutional commitment to closing the achievement gap that has kept minority degree completion and transfer rates well below those of whites. Using data on student outcomes to assess and improve instructional and support strategies, TCC has made great strides. It has expanded and elevated the GED program as a bridge to college; invested in partnerships in largely African American Gadsden County; and strengthened developmental education through a new College Success course, extensive advising for incoming students, and redesigned remedial classes.

The turnaround is showing results. The percentage of African Americans attending TCC is proportional to the percentage of blacks in the region's graduating class. Improvement in developmental education is speeding the progression of incoming students into college-level English and math classes.

The college is an innovator in the use of technology to improve instruction. The freshman English composition class has been revamped to be more interactive and to promote web-based communication for feedback on writing assignments. The completion rate in this class is 72 percent, compared to 50 percent in the traditional remedial English class.

For more information about the **MetLife Foundation Community College Excellence Award**, contact:

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Jobs for the Future seeks to accelerate the educational and economic advancement of youth and adults struggling in today's economy. JFF partners with leaders in education, business, government, and communities around the nation to: strengthen opportunities for youth to succeed in postsecondary learning and high-skill careers; increase opportunities for low-income individuals to move into family-supporting careers; and meet the growing economic demand for knowledgeable and skilled workers. www.jff.org

Next Generation Press, a new imprint of What Kids Can Do, Inc., brings student voices to bear on critical issues facing schools and communities. Students are co-authors of the books NGP publishes. What Kids Can Do, founded in 2001, documents and shares online powerful examples of what young people, guided by teachers and other adults, can contribute and achieve. WKCD also funds and works with student action research teams in high schools across the country. www.whatkidscando.org

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