

**The Missing Link:  
The Role of Community Colleges in the  
Transitions between High School and College**

A Report for  
**The Bridge Project:**  
Strengthening K-16 Transition Policies

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*Note: Although this report has received internal review, it has not gone through the same editing process and review that other Bridge Project documents have.*

## INTRODUCTION

This research project was conducted as part of *The Bridge Project: Strengthening K-16 Transition Policies*, a five-year study conducted in regions of California, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Oregon and Texas. This project, conducted under the auspices of the Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research (SIHER), was supported by The Pew Charitable Trust and the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement (NCPI) and its sponsor, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

The Bridge Project seeks to understand better the transition from high school to higher education by examining the policies and practices that shape that juncture. It is hoped that the findings will play a part in strengthening the compatibility between higher education admissions and placement requirements and K-12 curriculum frameworks, standards, and assessments. With the goal of providing descriptive analyses of the policies as well as of disjunctures that exist in the current policy environment, The Bridge Project has conducted field research in six states and in two educational settings within those states: K-12, and four-year colleges and universities. In three of those states — California, Maryland and Oregon — additional research was conducted at community colleges as part of an extension of the original research project. The report that follows presents the combined findings from the California, Maryland, and Oregon Community Colleges research projects.

The Bridge Project consists of two major phases. Phase I seeks to understand policies and practices related to freshman admission and initial course placement. It also examines secondary school curricula and testing requirements and analyzes the compatibility of content and assessment across the K-12 and higher education sectors. Phase II seeks to understand how these policies and practices are transmitted to, and understood by, students, parents and school personnel, including teachers, counselors, and administrators. There are some references in this report to that earlier research.

This research, the community college extension, focuses on:

- ❑ The admission and placement policies and practices for recent high school graduates who are attending community college;
- ❑ The transition environment for these students and whether there are observed disjunctures between high school and community college curriculum, skills assessments and course placement; and
- ❑ The types of transition services and programs (high school to community college, and community college to four-year institution) available to students.

## **Rationale**

- Community colleges are the point of entry for many higher education students. Over 1,100 community colleges in the U.S. serve over half of the U.S. undergraduate enrollment.
- Completion rates of first-time degree seeking students at community colleges are quite low.
- In many states, community colleges provide most of the costly postsecondary academic remediation needed by students to complete a two- or four-year degree.
- Community colleges have an extensive history of collaboration with high schools. Other postsecondary education institutions may benefit from these types of partnerships.
- In times of economic downturn, more people look to the community college for postsecondary education and training. An understanding of the role of these institutions in the preparation of young people for the job market can only benefit policy development.

The research for the California case was conducted by K.C. Boatsman. Ann McLellan led the research in Maryland. The research in Oregon was conducted by Andrea Conklin Bueschel and Andrea Venezia. Each of the researchers analyzed the data and wrote up the findings for her region. The key findings are summarized here and considered in a cross-case analysis.

All the researchers would like to acknowledge and thank the lead contacts at each of the campuses for facilitating this research by graciously coordinating the site review logistics. We also want to acknowledge the several other administrative staff on both campuses who assisted with coordinating the student focus groups. The students in the focus groups were generous with their time and candid in their responses. Without all of them, our work would have been considerably more difficult. Thank you to all of them.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This qualitative study, focusing on two community colleges in each region, consisted of interviews with key administrators, faculty and staff; focus groups with students; and document review, including websites. All of the community colleges in the study were visited at different points in 2001, which is when interviews and the student focus groups occurred.<sup>1</sup> Two campuses in each of the three regions were studied. Below are the campuses studied and the number of staff and students interviewed.

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<sup>1</sup> A complete list of interviewees is attached as Appendix A.

**Table A – Sites and number of participants**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Sites</b>	<b>Participants per Region</b>
Sacramento, CA	Sacramento City College	27 staff interviewed
	Cosumnes River College	48 students in focus groups
Baltimore, MD	Montgomery College, Rockville	22 staff interviewed 31 students in focus groups
	Community College of Baltimore, Catonsville	
Portland, OR	Mt. Hood Community College	28 staff interviewed 36 students in focus groups
	Portland Community College, Sylvania	

Andrea Venezia and Michael Kirst, directors of The Bridge Project for the Stanford Institute on Higher Education Research, designed the national study and provided the interview protocols used in this study.<sup>2</sup>

The administrators, faculty and staff interviewed by the researchers were in key positions to offer input from areas such as counseling, assessment, admissions, orientation, instruction, curriculum, and outreach. The student focus groups included mostly students who matriculated soon after completing high school, as well as some older students. The students interviewed seemed to be representative of community college students in terms of gender and ethnic diversity; the focus group participants were deliberately younger, when possible. In some cases, the focus groups were drawn from existing groups, for example, members of an activity board or students enrolled in a college success class. Although there may have been a bias towards more actively engaged students (not surprising when asking students to volunteer time for a study), students were still quite candid and critical, while also highlighting positive aspects of their experiences.

The documents reviewed included primarily institutional publications such as catalogs and schedules of classes; handouts and informational fliers given to students; documents required of students such as the application for admission; research reports where available; a perusal of campus websites; and other documents as appropriate.

This report includes the findings from each of the regional reports, but also includes a survey of the current literature on community colleges and their connections to other educational systems, both K-12 and four-year institutions, which is the next section of this report. Following that, an overview of the regional data is presented. Cross case analysis follows, highlighting points of commonality, as well as difference, across the regions. Finally, the report includes suggestions for additional research.

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<sup>2</sup> The protocols used are attached as Appendix B.

## CONTEXT FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION

### *History*

The first two-year institution<sup>3</sup> in the United States was Joliet Junior College, opened in 1901 in Illinois (AACC Website). In the 100 years since, the growth in community colleges has been dramatic, more rapid even than four-year institutions. Rosenbaum notes that between 1960 and 1990, four-year college enrollment doubled; for two-year institutions, enrollment increased five-fold (Rosenbaum 1999 citing NCES data). The dramatic growth in the 1960s was due in part to a newly created national network of two-year institutions. By the late 1990s, there were 1,166 public and private community colleges (about 1,600 counting separate multiple campus colleges) (AACC Website). Over 100 million students have attended community college since 1901, for everything from workforce retraining to English language acquisition to advanced mathematics for university-level credit. Currently, over half of the undergraduates enrolled in the U.S. attend community colleges (Bailey 2002).<sup>4</sup>

### *Enrollment/Profile*

Community college students represent a wide diversity of backgrounds. Students in two-year institutions are likely to be older, more ethnically and racially diverse and less affluent than their four-year counterparts. The American Association for Community Colleges (AACC), in conjunction with other surveys, provide this profile of community college students:

- 58 percent are women;
- 30 percent are racial minority (other surveys cite percentages as high as 60);
- 32 percent are 30 years or older (36 percent are traditional age: 18 to 22);
- 64 percent attend part-time;
- 65 percent depend on their parents financially (95 percent of four-year students do);
- half are the first in their families to attend college; and
- depending on the survey, 12 to 28 percent already have a postsecondary degree.

Community colleges are the least expensive higher education option, which explains in part why such a wide range of students takes advantage of them. The average tuition for community colleges nationally is around \$1,500, considerably less than the four-year institutions (AACC Website). The two-year institutions also have a different faculty profile. Doctorates are not required for faculty at most two-year colleges, and there is a higher percentage of part-time and adjunct faculty. Approximately two-thirds of public community college faculty are on part-time appointments; all faculty members are paid

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<sup>3</sup> Although this report uses the term "community college" for all two-year institutions, some references may still use "junior college." For the purposes of this report, the terms are interchangeable.

<sup>4</sup> A recent survey – The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (2002) – notes that only one in six undergraduates meets the stereotype of college student, that is, 18 to 24 years old, living on campus and attending school full time.

less than their four-year counterparts (AACC Website). The two-year colleges also have a distinct mission in higher education, which helps account for the diverse population.

One of the most significant trends in community college attendance is that community colleges serve as the point of entry for students who wouldn't otherwise participate in postsecondary education. Low-income students, students of color, recent immigrants, and students who are the first in their families to attend college are often overrepresented in two-year institutions. Because many of these students don't feel as though they have access to four-year institutions, the community colleges are the only way for many of these students to improve their opportunities. According to the Census Bureau, about 85 percent of the growth in the population of 18-24 year olds will come from minority and immigrant families over the next decade. Over 40 percent will come from low-income families (Kirst and Bracco 2002, p. 4). Given these trends, community colleges are likely to play a growing role in the higher education system.

### *Mission*

Community colleges are defined by their commitment to being open access institutions. Generally, if a student can benefit from education, she is welcome. This philosophy has ensured that community colleges continue to get students from all backgrounds. Community colleges have become comprehensive institutions, providing a wide range of academic, training, and service functions. Because these institutions were created to serve the public so directly, they are often changing to respond to the needs of the community. "Starting primarily as junior colleges with an emphasis on academics, the [community] colleges are now complex institutions taking on a broad array of educational, social, and economic functions" (Bailey and Averianova 1999, p.1). Some critics contend that community colleges need to narrow their focus in order to provide better service in fewer areas. Proponents argue that the mission dictates the need to continue to offer a wide, and often growing, set of services and programs.

Later in this report, research findings document the tension created on campuses in trying to maintain the commitment to open access and the need to uphold standards for both college-level work and industry-level expectations. Faculty and staff on community college campuses are often explicitly committed to the open access mission – and indeed believe that they are best positioned to respond to the needs of the community – but struggle to find ways to meet those needs. Grubb notes the particular struggle of those trying to balance the various standards in their departments and institutions (Grubb 1999). The mission of community colleges will likely ensure that they will continue to be necessary resources for all people in their communities. "Responding to educational needs often ignored by other institutions, community colleges have been profoundly transformed...These functions of community colleges define its unprecedented social and economic significance. No other institution has demonstrated so much flexibility in adapting to the community's needs" (Bailey and Averianova 1999, p. 5).

## *Remediation/Preparation*

For those unfamiliar with community colleges, the issue of remediation is likely to be their entrée to them. Many mainstream media sources have highlighted the issue, usually reporting the outrage of politicians alarmed that college students, particularly those at four-year institutions, can't read. For some the policy response is to move all remedial work to the two-year institutions. "A number of state and large urban public college systems are considering or have begun to implement policies that would locate all remediation within the community college sector (see, for example, Florida, California, Massachusetts, Georgia, Texas, Virginia, and the CUNY system in New York City)" (Shaw 1997, p. 284).

The need to remediate students who enter their institutions with limited basic skills has made remedial education<sup>5</sup> an increasingly important function for community colleges. Remedial courses address basic levels of reading, writing, and mathematics, skills that should have been taught before and during high school.<sup>6</sup> Though remedial courses are offered on college campuses, they are not college-level work and, therefore, cannot receive college-level credit. It is quite difficult to track exactly how many students require remediation (e.g., in some cases, students may be assessed to need it, but never enroll in the courses). Various surveys report rates of 1 to 95 percent of entering students, depending on how it's measured and which group of students is included (Shults 2002; The Abell Foundation 2002). Several estimates state the approximately one-third to four-tenths of first-time students are/were enrolled in at least one remedial course (Shults 2002; Rosenbaum 1999).

Remediation in higher education highlights an important disjuncture between educational systems – K-12 and higher education. The growth in remediation suggests that it is not just returning students who are "rusty" in algebra who need basic skills help. Rather there seem to be more and more students leaving high school without having mastered these skills in the first place. It seems to be particularly difficult for community colleges to communicate their standards for college-level work given their explicit message to welcome all who want an education. Rosenbaum argues that "Students' failures arise not from barriers inside colleges, but from a failure of colleges (and especially community colleges) to convey clear information about the preparation that high school students need in order to have a strong chance of finishing a degree" (Rosenbaum 1999, p. 1). By linking preparation to persistence in and completion of higher education, Rosenbaum highlights an issue that Bridge researchers have focused on: translating access into success.

Rosenbaum seems to be taking the position that if students are aware in advance of what it takes to succeed, they will adjust their behavior in high school and work to

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<sup>5</sup> The terms "developmental" and "basic skills" are also used. "Remedial" is used most often by researchers. All will be used here.

<sup>6</sup> Most of the literature does not address how those skills are assessed. Bridge Project research focuses on the placement tests and their role in the high school to college transition. They will be discussed further in the section on Bridge findings.

achieve at a higher level before matriculating.<sup>7</sup> He notes that a sizable minority of students he surveyed (46 percent) agreed with the statement, "Even if I do not work hard in high school, I can still make my future plans come true" (Rosenbaum 1999, p. 2). The "second chance" message from community colleges (what he calls the "college-for-all norm") seems to be coming through clearly for these students. The message that they may not be able to take the courses they want or get college-level credit does not.

Rosenbaum argues that the way to pre-empt remediation and subsequent failure to persist and complete is to communicate the importance of the "first chance" to be successful in high school. He believes that the "college-for-all" norm may harm more students than it helps (Rosenbaum 2001). "Second chances are a fundamental American tenet. However, open-admission policies and remedial programs inadvertently convey to students that high school is irrelevant and that there are no penalties for poor effort" (Rosenbaum 1999, p. 3).<sup>8</sup>

### *K-16 Links.*

K-16 reform efforts range from elementary curriculum alignment to transfer between selective universities. For the purposes of this report (and for all Bridge Project research), the focus is on the transitions between high schools and colleges. Remediation and the lack of preparation of students coming out of high school calls attention to the lack of alignment between the systems regarding the standard for college-level work. While not all students who complete high school have to or do go to college, a vast majority state an aspiration to go, and upwards of 70 percent will actually enroll in a postsecondary institution within a few years after high school (The Education Trust 1999).

Rosenbaum argues that not all of the blame lies with the colleges in their failure to communicate standards. He says, "...guidance counselors do not tell students what level of high school achievement is needed for them to succeed in community college, so students are lulled into a complacency that leaves them unprepared for getting a college degree" (Rosenbaum 2001, p. 80). He does not address the other signals or sources of information for students; he focuses on the traditional "gatekeepers," who, in his research, play a very different role than they did a generation ago (when many would tell students they're not "college material").<sup>9</sup> Perhaps most importantly, implicit in his research is the notion that people and institutions from different educational sectors should work together to communicate appropriate signals to students. He is aware that this lack of coordination can have additional detrimental effects on students: "Poor

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<sup>7</sup> Although not conclusive, Bridge researchers have found that there are many possible influences and structures that could help address this signal. While Rosenbaum doesn't seem to ignore this, his emphasis is on student effort.

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that for many community college staff, the idea of second chances is integral. Bailey says, "Weak high school preparation will also continue to create a role for community colleges, essentially giving students a second chance to prepare for college-level work" (Bailey 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Although counselors in some schools can work with students on postsecondary plans, Bridge research found that many counselors can't even begin to address college plans for most of their students, suggesting that counselors may not play the role Rosenbaum ascribes them.

information allows many students to have high hopes but to use their high school experiences poorly, and thus they seem to be personally responsible for their failures" (Rosenbaum 2001, p. 58).

Transfer/Persistence/Completion. Another key juncture for K-16 work is between the institutions of higher education. Many students who enter the community colleges express an aspiration to complete their education at a four-year college or university. Reports of *intent* to transfer (a notoriously tricky measure to track) range from one-quarter to over one-half of community colleges (Cooley 2000; CCSSE 2002). Almost as hard to track is the *actual* rate of transfer for community college students.

Part of what makes data collection difficult on these measures is that so many students attend more than one institution during their careers, often going back and forth, a process some call "swirling," different from the linear path assumed. "Looking only at institutional data, it is difficult to track students' success because they do not always follow a straight path to a degree" (ACE 2002, p. 19). It is also important to note that institutional retention is not the same as student persistence. Just because a student doesn't persist at the same institution doesn't mean he isn't continuing his education somewhere else. As noted above, anywhere from 12 to 28 percent of college students attend more than one institution concurrently (CCSSE 2002; Phillippe and Valiga 2000). Reported rates of transfer from two-year to four-year institutions range from 14 or 15 percent to about 40 percent (Rosenbaum 2001; Wellman 2002; Young 2002). Regardless, of the actual percentage, consistently fewer students actually transfer than say they want to.

There are also data on completion of degrees. Again noting the difficulty in tracking transfer data, Wellman says that one-third of all first time degree seeking students transfer within four years of enrollment – one-fourth of four-year students and 43 percent of two-year students (Wellman 2002). Rosenbaum's research finds that around 60 percent of seniors who plan to get a postsecondary degree fail to get *any* degree in the next ten years, and the rates are worse for low performers (Rosenbaum 2001). Young reports that 37 percent of students finish their bachelor's degree in four years; one-quarter finish their associate's degree in two years (Young 2002). A recent ACE report sites that "among those [community college students] who intended to earn a bachelor's degree, only 39 percent actually transferred" (ACE 2002, p. 20). Bailey finds that "less than one tenth of students who begin in two-year colleges ever complete a bachelor's degree" (Bailey 2002, p. 61). Although four-year completion rates are not as good as they should be, starting at a community college is considered a risk factor for completion given much lower rates: "While more than half (57 percent) of the students who started at four-year institutions (in 1989-90) and sought bachelor's degrees had reached that goal by 1994, only 8 percent of those who started at two-year institutions in the same year had earned a bachelor's degree by 1994" (ACE 2002, p. 20). Again, it is clear that there must be better coordination of signals and expectations in order to begin to improve the level of work for entering students, and, therefore, their chances of persistence and completion.

Persistence and completion data is related to the issue of preparation. Additional analyses suggest that students who are less prepared and take remedial courses are less likely to persist, transfer and complete; Rosenbaum reports that "only 13.9 percent of seniors with low grades attained their college plans" (Rosenbaum 2001, p. 66). Bailey also relates poor preparation to lowered transfer and persistence: "Developmental education is a central component of the colleges' mission to provide access; however, large numbers of poorly prepared students complicate college efforts to improve transfer and graduation rates" (Bailey 2002, p. 61).

There are many other examples of K-16 links in the existing research and literature, including dual enrollment programs for high school students at community colleges, honors programs in community colleges for high achieving students intending to transfer to selective universities (see Winter 2002), and forums for faculty from high schools and colleges to discuss curriculum alignment and expectations. Examples of these emerge in the research done for this study.

This report now shifts to the findings from research in California, Maryland and Oregon. Although not a national study, these findings reflect many of the trends noted above.

## OVERVIEW OF EACH REGION

To understand better the community colleges in the regions in this study, it is helpful to have a general sense of the educational context in each of the states. In each state, a brief overview of the K-16 reform efforts researched by other Bridge Project staff is offered, as well as a general picture of the community college system in each state.

### **California.**

*Context for state.* California has made great strides in aligning standards with assessments in K-12, as evidenced by the development and implementation of the STAR testing program. Unfortunately, efforts to improve compatibility and coherence between K-12 and higher education have lagged behind such efforts. A theme that repeatedly surfaced in the interviews conducted for earlier Bridge Project research was the near-complete absence of communication between policymakers working or concerned with postsecondary education (especially community colleges) and their policymaking counterparts in secondary education. Clearly, the chasm of communication, mission, and shared history between the K-12 and higher education sectors of public education has resulted in the current state of misalignment among policies that affect postsecondary transitions to higher education. Ironically, differentiation of mission and function within public higher education in California, while promising to be efficient from a systemic point of view, may actually contribute to inefficiency with respect to serving the K-16 educational needs of the state.

California Master Plan for Higher Education. The role and function of community colleges in California gained clarity through the Master Plan for Higher Education in

California, the first version of which was written in 1960. Differentiation of mission and function created a three-tiered system of higher education:

- The University of California, a system of selective research universities for the top one-eighth of California's matriculating students;
- The California State University, a larger system of moderately selective institutions for the top one-third of California's matriculating students; and
- The Community Colleges, the most extensive system of open access institutions for any student who can benefit from continued education.

According to the Master Plan (as summarized by the University of California Office of the president):

The California Community Colleges have as their primary mission providing academic and vocational instruction for older and younger students through the first two years of undergraduate education (lower division). In addition to this primary mission, the Community Colleges are authorized to provide remedial instruction, English as a Second Language courses, adult noncredit instruction, community service courses, and workforce training services (UC Office of the President, May 1999).

The Master Plan established the principle of universal access to postsecondary education in California at the community college level, where all students “capable of benefiting from instruction” are to be admitted. The result is two systems continuing down a path of uncoordinated policy development surrounding student access to college.

There are 108 community colleges in the California System. A sixteen-member Board of Governors, appointed by the state's governor, oversees the 72 district, 108-campus system. The Board of Governors is granted authority by the state legislature to develop and implement policy for the colleges in the system. The Board of Governors’ Regulations for California Community Colleges are published in the California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Division 6. In 2001, the California Community College system served over 2.5 million students, making it the largest system of higher education in the world.

## **Maryland.**

*Context for state.* Maryland has a K-16 Partnership for Teaching and Learning – an active, voluntary alliance that has undertaken a variety of initiatives by involving a broad range of educators throughout the state. The Partnership was established through a formal commitment of the CEOs of the University System of Maryland, the Maryland State Department of Education, and the Maryland Higher Education Commission to develop "strategies for strengthening K-16 standards, competencies and assessments, the professional development of educators, and community engagement in the K-16 initiative." The K-16 Council includes leaders of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), MHEC, and the University System of Maryland (USM) and

corporate, civic, public and private education representatives. The USM Chancellor is widely recognized as being the driving force in establishing this partnership and in formulating its agenda. The goals of the partnership include:

- Setting standards and expectations for student learning;
- Increasing college participation and graduation rates;
- Creating a seamless web of postsecondary education in Maryland;
- Reducing the need for remediation;
- Reducing time-to-degree;
- Increasing the competitiveness of Maryland's businesses; and
- Improving productivity and accountability (Walhaus 1998).

“Maryland has had one of the longest running reform efforts in the nation, launching a statewide system of assessments more than 10 years ago. It has often been cited as a national model for systematic school improvement” (MSDE Press Release, January 9, 2002). Three tests important to note when considering high school preparation for college in Maryland include the Functional Test (7<sup>th</sup> grade level), the Maryland Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP), and the high stakes high school assessment that is scheduled to go into full effect with the 9<sup>th</sup> grade class of 2003.

The Maryland Code of Regulations, COMAR 13-B, outlines the basics with which all colleges are expected to comply. There are 16 Maryland community colleges. The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) is the regulatory agency and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC) is the organization through which the colleges lobby for legislative action in the state.

Maryland's community colleges, not unlike community colleges nationally, follow open admissions. This means that students are not denied access to college courses and programs on the basis of standardized test scores or high school grades. Students under sixteen, as well as students without a high school credential, are eligible to enroll.

## **Oregon.**

*Context for state.* Oregon has been active in the school reform movement, particularly over the last decade. The legislatively mandated K-12 reforms, including the Certificates of Initial and Advanced Mastery (CIM and CAM), began as wide-ranging assessments, but have essentially become another set of standardized tests. The Proficiency-based Admission Standards System (PASS) is an effort by the Oregon University System to better determine college readiness in high school students. PASS successfully articulated its standards, but has had only limited impact, in part because it does not have a legislative mandate and is present in a limited way in only half the public schools. While there has been some K-16 effort between K-12 and the four-year institutions in Oregon, there has been no state- or system-wide effort to include the two-year institutions.

The state of Oregon has a community college system that includes seventeen colleges, with over sixty campuses and centers. The 1959 Oregon Legislative Assembly formed the education districts, later to become community college districts (Community College Handbook, p. 1). The Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD) has oversight for all public, two-year education in the state. Most generally, its mission “is to contribute leadership and resources to increase the skills, knowledge, and career opportunities of Oregonians” (Community College Handbook, p. 3). The CCWD is headed by a Commissioner appointed by the State Board of Education, which has oversight of all K-14 education in Oregon and which also serves as the State Board for Technical and Vocational Education (Community College Handbook, p. 3).

The Oregon higher education system – including the seven Oregon University System institutions – has capacity for qualified students who meet minimum standards, so the desire for better prepared students is less about selection than about overall minimum competency for college-level work.

## COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF CASE FINDINGS

This section presents findings from each community college case. After a brief introduction to the campuses studied, the report compares findings in areas of admissions/financial aid; placement/transfer; advising/counseling; remediation/developmental education/overall preparation; transfer; and outreach/K-16 links. Following these sections, cross-case findings are presented, and the report concludes with points for additional research.

*Background/mission.* While the backgrounds for the case campuses vary, these community colleges, like community colleges nationally, share a strong commitment to providing educational opportunity for any student who can benefit from it. As one director of admission explains, "You know, so we have everything from the kid who barely reads to the kid who, you know, could be at Harvard." From 12 to 28 percent of community college attendees already have bachelors' or other advanced degrees; anywhere from 25 to 80 percent require some remediation. The commitment to meet students where they are is the most defining characteristic of community colleges. It is often also the greatest challenge. Below are descriptions of the campuses studied.

### California Case Campuses:

As a result of a March 1964 election, Sacramento City College (SCC), founded in 1916, joined the newly organized Los Rios Junior College District, which comprised Sacramento City College and American River College. The name of the district changed to the Los Rios Community College District in 1970, which is when the district opened a third campus, Cosumnes River College. In the Fall Semester 2000, Sacramento City College enrolled 21,186 students. The student body is 58 percent female, ethnically diverse (42 percent White, 21 percent Asian, 15 percent Hispanic, 12 percent Black) and relatively young (55 percent of the students were 24 years of age or less—the same is true for 48 percent of community college students statewide). International students come

from approximately fifty-five different nations. As one administrator put it, “our campus is blessed with wonderful diversity.”

Cosumnes River College (CRC) was founded in 1970 as the third college in the Los Rios Community College District. Though Cosumnes River College enrolls over 16,000 students, it has the feel of a small campus. The student population is just over half of that of its sister colleges, American River and Sacramento City. There is a physical center to the campus, and a populated student center, which probably allows for more casual interaction than other campuses can facilitate. On average, there is less ethnic and racial diversity at CRC, and, like other campuses, there are more women than men.

Maryland Case Campuses:

Montgomery College (MC) is Maryland’s oldest community college. The College was founded in 1946 and was originally the higher education division of Montgomery County Public Schools. Campuses are located in Takoma Park, Rockville and Germantown. Research for this study was conducted at the Rockville campus.

Montgomery College, Rockville Campus has the highest credit student enrollment of the three campuses. For the Fall 2001 semester Rockville had 14,334 students enrolled. In Fall 2000 collegewide, the mean age was 28.7 and the median age was 23.6. Approximately 35 percent of the students attending MC were full-time (at least 12 credits). A higher percentage of Rockville students are full-time (39 percent) than at the other two campuses. Half of the students (54 percent) attend classes only during the day, one-fourth attend only in the evening, and 20 percent attend both day and evening. Most students (9 out of 10) live in Montgomery County and approximately 25 percent of Montgomery County high school graduates attended Montgomery College in the fall of 2000.

The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) is a tri-campus public college located in the suburbs of Baltimore, Maryland. CCBC was created in 1998 as a result of a state legislated restructuring that combined three independent community colleges into one institution. CCBC is one of the largest community colleges in the state of Maryland and the number one provider of undergraduate education and workforce training in the Baltimore metropolitan area. Research for this study was done at the Catonsville campus.

CCBC serves approximately 17,793 credit and 33,000 non-credit students annually by offering a broad array of transfer and career programs and services. The Catonsville Campus of CCBC has the highest credit student enrollment of its three campuses and the largest minority enrollment. Of the over 9,000 credit students enrolled during the Fall 2001 semester, 33 percent are African-American, 6 percent Asian, 2 percent Hispanic, 52 percent White, and 7 percent Other/Unknown.

Oregon Case Campuses:

Portland Community College (PCC) is the largest of the Oregon community colleges. With three campuses and six academic centers, PCC enrolls 23.42 percent of the state's community college students (Oregon Community College 2000-2001 Student Profile). Research for this study was done at the Sylvania campus, which enrolls 26,000 students, the most of the three PCC campuses. Historically, the average age of the students at the Sylvania campus is 30 years, lower than the PCC average of 36. However, for PCC the most frequently listed age is 20. Twenty-six percent of students are between 18 and 24 years old. There are approximately 55 percent women at all three campuses. Sylvania is a whiter campus than the PCC average.

Mt. Hood Community College (MHCC) is also located in the Portland Metropolitan area. It opened in 1966 (funded in 1968) and approximately 27,000 students enroll at either the main campus in Gresham or at one of the centers that makes up MHCC. In 2000-2001, MHCC had a full-time equivalent (FTE) of 9,730.29 students, though over 27,000 individual students enroll in at least one class. Of those students, 40 percent were enrolled in professional/technical programs; 41 percent were in college transfer courses; and 19 percent were in other educational programs. Twenty-eight percent declared an intent to transfer. MHCC has a younger campus than others in the community college system; 60 percent are under 30 years old. There is also a majority of students who are women.

**Student View of Institutional Mission.** The reasons for attending community colleges are as diverse as the student body. In the focus groups, researchers heard students cite location, cost, specific programs, lack of other options, and convenience. Several of these responses (and others) mirrored the mission of community colleges cited above to provide convenient, low-cost education. Consistently, researchers heard these reasons, and the "second chance" message came through clearly too. Below are some of the student voices explaining their choices. There were many responses like these in the research.

CA student: I chose CRC because I live five minutes away, and I also went to high school across the street.

CA student: I came here because I really didn't know what I wanted to do yet. And it's like the only school that's somewhat near me...and it's cheap.

CA student: The reason why I came here...I didn't have a high school diploma, and I really needed to do something, and I hadn't had a job, didn't have any job skills...so I came here.

MD student: I'm here just because it's the most convenient option for me. It's closest to home and it's the easiest to get to and get in and out and just get these credits out of the way...it's easier to go to a commuter school which you can just basically come and go to class and get out and just, you know, get my foot back in the door and get back into the swing of things as far as school is concerned.

OR student: I had made lots of bad choices and stuff, and then one day I kind of woke up and said, what am I doing? I don't want to be a clerk at 7-11, you know, for the rest of my days.

The message of access, convenience and second chance seems to be coming through to students. What's less clear to them early on is what it takes practically – in terms of enrolling and matriculating. Few students knew beforehand what was expected. Below some of the logistic aspects are described – admission, financial aid, tuition. More time is spent below on placement and related preparation issues.

*Admission/enrollment/tuition/financial aid.*

*Admission/enrollment.* Because all of the institutions in this study (and most community colleges in general) are open admission, the role of admission staff on these campuses is not the traditional gatekeeping one. There is some recruiting at area high schools, but because students can come from almost any background, the admission office serves primarily as the point of entry for enrollment and registration (and is often the first college entity to communicate placement requirements). As one researcher noted, it is primarily a data gathering point. Students can walk in the day before classes start, and, with certain basic requirements met<sup>10</sup>, enroll for that term. This ease of enrollment embraces both the mission of the institution – providing opportunity for all, and the challenge of working with students who may have little sense of what they want. As one Oregon advisor explains, “The one thing – it's both the good thing and the bad thing about community college, I would say – is that a student can come here with absolutely no forethought, you know?”

At all of the community colleges studied, recent high school graduates made up a significant subset of enrolled students (at some colleges, it was the largest subgroup). In Oregon, several staff members and students note the growth in the enrollment of recent graduates. Some suggest that there is less stigma about attending community college, which has encouraged some higher achieving students to attend. Although this trend was described only in the Oregon research portion of this study, it reflects the effort described in the *New York Times* article of higher achieving students attending community colleges (Winter 2002). However, in all three states, the growth in the enrollment of recent graduates has raised concern also, primarily because it highlights the level of preparation of the recent graduates. Many respondents in this study reported a greater lack of preparedness among this population, a trend highlighted above that will also be discussed further in a section below.

Given the presence of these recent graduates, the community colleges in the study tend to have relationships with area or district high schools. Admission staff speak to high school students generally about community college. In many cases, existing

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<sup>10</sup> The most common requirements for admission: a high school diploma or GED, or being eighteen years or older. For high school students (and in some cases international students) there are often different procedures.

programs and partnerships, described in a later section, are the point of contact between high school students and the community colleges.

In Oregon, there is capacity for growth in the community colleges, and as funding is enrollment-driven, staff members are eager in most cases to attract more students. In California, however, individual colleges and districts generally do not have aggressive outreach practices. There is even a funding dis-incentive in place for recruiting too many new students. When colleges go “over cap” by enrolling more students than projected by the Chancellor’s Office using past enrollment figures, the apportionment, or amount the college gets paid per Full Time Equivalent Student (FTES), is decreased. Thus, unless a community college is experiencing declining enrollment, there is no economic incentive to increase enrollment in California by recruiting more students.

An interesting point to consider about the open admission philosophy at the community colleges is the fact that they must still find a way to maintain standards for college-level work, particularly as relates to transferable courses. As the Maryland researcher notes, the open admission policy may convey the impression that any student may register for any course, when in fact mandatory placement tests and course placement policies that require developmental education completion prior to college-level enrollment are also in effect. In many community colleges, open admission is preserved by ensuring that the first course in a pre-requisite sequence is open to students of all abilities. In general, staff are committed to the open admission policy and philosophy, as there are always examples of students whose lives are changed by the experience. As an admission officer explains,

I see students every day who don’t believe they belong in college, and, you know, they kind of want to take a class and so, maybe, they’ll take a typing class or they’ll take a, you know, and all of a sudden it’s a college class, even though it’s not a transfer class. And they get some success and then they build and the next thing you know, they’re transferring with a degree, and you know, it’s just awesome.

*Tuition.* While there is no tuition at California Community Colleges, there is an \$11/unit enrollment fee. Maryland and Oregon community college fees are also the lowest cost alternative for higher education in the state. In Maryland, the tuition is \$72/unit. The Oregon community colleges cost between \$40 and \$50/unit for tuition and fees. There are often other fees in addition to class materials – parking, technology, student activity, etc. All the institutions in the study charge higher fees for out of state and international residents. In most cases, some of the applied programs, e.g., dental hygiene, have higher fees associated with them.

*Financial Aid.* All the institutions in the study have financial aid offices. They coordinate federal, state, local, and institutional support for all students who qualify. All of the campuses have seen an increase in demand for aid. As an Oregon financial aid officer says, “We have like a 30 percent increase in the number of financial aid applications this year.” The downturn in the economy and the “echo boom” are offered as explanations. One of the most difficult aspects of the community college financial aid

officers' jobs is the timing of aid requests. Unlike most four-year college students, many community college students don't know several months in advance that they need to apply for financial aid. Aside from a general lack of awareness about filing deadlines, lots of these students don't decide to attend community college until right before the academic term begins. It is often a surprise when they realize that they will not be able to get the aid immediately upon enrolling.

Another point of concern is financial aid and developmental or remedial education. A student who requires several terms of financial aid for non-credit work must be careful not to use up eligibility for government support. Currently, there is a 150 percent rule that allows for additional pre-credit coursework and provides additional eligibility, and federal aid is not be provided for elementary school-level coursework.

*Placement.* Placement policies highlight several of the important disjuncture issues raised by the Bridge Project. In earlier project research and in the community college focus groups, it was clear that the majority of students were unaware of the existence of placement tests at any college or university, let alone what the content of those assessments might be. In community college, students were particularly surprised, given the message of open access and the general understanding that anyone can attend a community college. Placement assessments communicate, indirectly and belatedly, that there are standards for college-level work, and many students are surprised when their skills are assessed below that level. A Maryland staff member describes,

[Remediation is] a big issue with a lot of incoming students, and that's why we have the developmental ed. faculty come and talk to them about those courses at the group orientation at the end of the summer. So many students come to this college with not a clue that they're under prepared. They get those test results, and they are sometimes very upset ... I've had people walk out. You know, if I can't get credit, then I don't need to be here. So yeah, that's always an issue. It really is, and it's, I think in many ways it's a high school issue because they've got some very false expectations. I mean, we have people here who got Bs in English and test into developmental English, and they think they know how to write and read, so it's a surprise. You know, basically, if they've graduated from high school, I think they have a reason to believe that they have passed the basic requirements.

The colleges in this study have all evaluated, and overall strengthened, their placement policies. Assessments vary from state to state and from campus to campus (and in some places from department to department). In most places, reading, writing, and math skills are assessed. Below are descriptions of the policies and a table with the assessment instruments at each institution.

There are no standard placement tests in the California Community Colleges. There is a list of approved assessments from the Chancellor's Office. The placement process is also somewhat proscribed by Title 5, which disallows any single instrument from being used to place students into the curriculum. Instead, multiple measures must be used. In practice, campuses often use an assessment test score in conjunction with

other predictors of student success, such as high school GPA, recency of related coursework, etc.

Less than a decade ago academic remediation at the community colleges in Maryland was not reported to the Maryland Higher Education Commission, and its provision was not a major focus of policymakers. In 1997-1998 community colleges in Maryland standardized their testing and placement policies. Although four-year public institutions use a variety of placement tests, the community colleges in the state use the same test, the ACCUPLACER, and the same cut-off scores for placement into developmental courses in reading, English, and mathematics. There an Appropriate Course Placement Committee, and the placement policies have become more stringent over the years. A staff member explains the evolution,

With the placement test scores, we're not allowed any longer to look at their high school grades. They're basically considered irrelevant. Used to be that an advisor could see somebody with scores that are kind of towards the top of the scale who's done well in high school, and in talking with the student, we were allowed to use professional judgment to say well, you know, there's different reasons why people don't do well on these tests. Let's give this a try but look at these different ways of supporting you. Now, it's all done by means of that one test.

In Oregon, the placement policies have also evolved, with varying success. At PCC, students must take the ASSET test (the untimed COMPASS is also available). PCC has recently made the COMPASS test available to district high schools as a way to prepare students for placement. At MHCC, students take the ACCUPLACER. There has been considerable debate at MHCC regarding the best assessment for placement, and while not everyone has embraced the ACCUPLACER, it seems to be the best overall solution so far.

As the table below highlights, there are still multiple assessments that some students face. Although ACCUPLACER and COMPASS – national products – are becoming more widely used, there are still many assessments students are facing that they are not aware of (especially in California). The lack of standardization and signaling can be overwhelming: “In the southeast United States, for example, in 1995 there were 125 combinations of 75 different placement tests devised by universities with scant regard to secondary school standards” (Kirst 2000, p. 3). Given that most recent high school graduates have already faced several standardized tests in high school (given the extensive K-12 reform), it is not clear how students are made aware of and keep track of the many assessments they are expected to take.

**Table B – Assessments Used at Each Case Campus**

California	SCC	ACCUPLACER
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	CRC	CTEP and MDTP
Maryland	MC - Rockville CCBC - Catonsville	ACCUPLACER for all in the state
Oregon	PCC – Sylvania	ASSET/COMPASS
	MHCC	ACCUPLACER

Many of the staff were asked by researchers about the possibility of using one of the existing statewide assessments used in K-12 for placement.<sup>11</sup> Each state in the study has a high school level assessment that could be considered a measure of students’ skills and abilities. None of the respondents had considered this usage, even those who had been part of committees responsible for exploring the possible assessment tools for placement at their schools. While a few acknowledged that there might be possible use when asked directly, it would likely be used in conjunction with, not in place of, their existing placement exams, thereby not reducing the number of assessments students face in the transition from high school to college.

Interestingly, student reaction to the placement process in the focus groups was varied. While most students talked about being surprised by the placement assessment,<sup>12</sup> few reported being upset about the requirement. Particularly for the recent high school graduates, testing and assessment are a very common part of their educational experience. “We just took so many tests of those tests in high school, I don’t even...we just took them and, you know, didn’t really even pay attention to what it was about.” Others were definitely thrown by the requirement: “So I did my orientation, and they told me something about testing. I was like, what? You have to do a test? So, oh man, I wasn't ready to do this because usually, you know, everybody said, if there’s a test, you have to get ready, you have to study, but no one told me about them when I graduated from high school.” Overall, however, the fact that the placement test could often be re-taken lowered the stakes for most students.

There is also variation in the reactions to the outcomes of the assessment. Many staff report students who are stunned by their performance on the placement tests. They are particularly upset when they realize that they can only enroll in courses that don’t receive college-level credit. It is at this point that students become painfully aware of their lack of preparation (and in some cases the consequence for not working hard in high school). These moments are examples of Rosenbaum’s concern that students are ill-served by the college-for-all norm. According to one counselor,

Well, I think the biggest thing for them is, here, they’ve graduated from high school but they come and take our placement test and they’re still in, you know, pre-college reading, writing and math and they don’t understand that if they stop

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<sup>11</sup> There is some indication that the California State University is considering using K-12 assessments for placement. If they do, perhaps more community colleges will consider that option.

<sup>12</sup>The exceptions were students who had access to their local community college assessments while they were still in high school. Some institutions have partnered to expose students to expectations from the community colleges. Some of these partnerships will be described later.

taking math in their sophomore year that, you know, they don't get it... no one...and I think the sad thing is that they say, and I don't know what really happens, I suppose it's different at every school, no one told me that I should be taking math all the way through. They just weren't warned or they don't remember being warned, so now they're having to pay for it and sit through, and that is extremely frustrating. I think it's embarrassing, especially with reading and writing. It's embarrassing to them. And they'll almost start crying because, well, I graduated.

While all the cases in this study reported examples of students who were stunned by the results, there are notable exceptions. In California and Oregon, most students said they were not fazed by the placement tests. They understood the need for the assessments and were generally fine with where they were placed. One faculty member in Oregon said, "...and I remember a complaint, many more complaints about [placement] in past years, but in the last few years many students that say that are just accepting." Although students rarely know in advance, what is clear is that all of the colleges are communicating the requirement to them quickly upon admission to the institution, as it is often a required step before registering. One student describes how he got the message loud and clear,

Oh, man, they wouldn't let me move forward without placing. I couldn't even get into the school without taking a test. I mean, they wouldn't even look at me twice with my money in hand. They'd say, go take the test.

Placement tests play an important role in community colleges, particularly given the absence of entrance examinations. There is tremendous emphasis for high school students on the K-12 assessments, but they have no impact on their options for community college (or most other postsecondary options). The large number of students starting in the community colleges warrants greater emphasis on the role of placement tests before they matriculate.

#### *Advising/Counseling.*

Given what researchers found in these three regions, advising and counseling takes on similar forms on many community college campuses. In some places, there is a more formal distinction between staff and function in the counseling and advising department: counselors usually had different professional training and dealt with personal issues. Advisors tended to focus on things like scheduling and academic planning. Inevitably, there are limited numbers of advisors and counselors for several thousand students.

An issue advisors face regularly is the practical application of the community college mission to admit anyone who can benefit from the educational opportunity. Advisors are prepared to work with anyone who comes through their door, but often have limited options for some of their less prepared students. This advisor highlights the challenge of meeting that mission,

The bad thing is though, as it gets closer to registration, we tend to see the more poorly prepared students who have the lowest test scores come in at the end, and suddenly all the little hoops that we set up to, hopefully, make them start thinking about what they're doing, those all just disappear. So, we're, you know, our policy is, you know, if you come in the day before classes start, as long as you can get that placement test done and your admission form filled out, we'll register you even though you probably haven't really had time to think about how you're going to pay for it, how it's going to impact you, so the least prepared students get the least level of service because they come in right at the end, so we do a disservice to them by letting them register, when we probably should be saying, why don't you wait a term? By then your financial aid will be in place, and you'll have time to get proper advising.

Again, the issue of preparedness is central to how staff are able to best serve their students. Every day community college staff struggle with the best way to preserve the mission of the institution while confronting the practical issues students bring.

Although some students griped about not knowing what they were supposed to be doing – in regards to what classes to take, what requirements to meet – others were clear that help was available if you sought it out. Despite the best efforts of staff members, there was no handholding reported from staff or students. Although almost all the respondents who were asked about advising believed that their campuses could use more staff for advising, it was also acknowledged that it was hard to accomplish given limited resources. A couple of student responses:

Because, I think, that so many people just, basically, just get screwed. They go, whoa! Why didn't I know this? I mean, you're not required to see an advisor at all, and I really sense, like, only, maybe 10 advisors and, like, you know, thousands of students but I think at some point in your curriculum and your planning, you should be required to see an advisor because they know what they're talking about, and most people that come here don't exactly know what they're doing.

I think that's a big issue too that the amount of advising and help that you receive is dependent on how much initiative you take. I mean, if you want to find out what classes you need to take to be able to transfer, blah, blah, blah, you need...nobody is going to come to you.

#### *Developmental/remedial education/overall preparation.*

As is clear from the many references both in the review of other research and the early sections of Bridge findings here, the level of academic preparation of community college students is of central importance. Not only is it the most obvious example of the lack of alignment between K-12 and postsecondary education in their academic standards (that is, preparedness to do college-level work), it presents perhaps the greatest challenge for those charged with addressing the gap. All community colleges offer remedial or

developmental courses.<sup>13</sup> This function has been part of the mission from their inception. In the past, the assumption was that returning students who were rusty in their skills would need opportunities for review of basic concepts. However, it became clear that in lots of cases, both for returning students and recent high school graduates, many students have never learned the basic skills in the first place.

On all of the campuses in this study, staff described students who were coming to the community colleges without basic skills. This trend is primarily responsible for the changes and strengthening of placement policies. Although the reported remediation rates range from small minorities of students to sizable majorities on each of these campuses,<sup>14</sup> all of the colleges consider remediation an important issue. Below are some data on remediation at the case campuses.

California: At SCC, one-quarter of the math sections offered are considered remedial, while approximately two-fifths of the English and English as a Second Language sections are considered remedial. At CRC, one-third of the math sections are considered remedial, while nearly two-thirds of the English and English as a Second Language sections offered are considered remedial (39 percent of English; 77 percent of ESL).

Maryland: During the fall 2001, 2,649 students attended the Rockville Campus of Maryland College straight from high school. The following are the percentages of recent high school graduates needing remediation collegewide: 40 percent English; 63 percent Math; and 30 percent Reading. There was a consensus among MC administrators interviewed that the policy changed over the years to meet the growing numbers of academically unprepared students graduating from Montgomery County high schools. Over the past several years, CCBC has enrolled approximately 34 percent of the graduates from Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS). For fall, 2001, 44 percent of BCPS graduates attending CCBC needed developmental English, 44 percent were in need of some math review, and 40 percent needed at least one reading course.

Oregon: Although the data weren't available for all the regions, in Oregon there was evidence that students in remedial coursework were less likely to persist in their education. This finding is supported by earlier research and literature noted above. An interesting exception to the laments of unpreparedness of recent high school graduates is at MHCC where recent graduates are less likely to need remediation. Typically, 40 percent of MHCC new students fail to meet standards for college-level work, but only 21 percent of recent graduates do. This finding is in line with the reporting in Oregon that there were some higher achieving recent graduates enrolling.

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<sup>13</sup> For further information and discussion of remedial/developmental education, see for example Grubb (1999) and Levin and Koski (1997). [CONFIRM CITE]

<sup>14</sup> One of the challenges of this research is getting accurate counts of remedial courses and enrollments. Given the growing importance, most community colleges now do regular institutional research not only on enrollment, but also persistence and completion of students in this population.

The students also talked about their lack of preparation. Some expressed frustration with their high schools, upset that they had been passed along or told that their performance was acceptable.

In my high school they didn't prepare you for college at all. Well I had college prep classes, but my school, they're so quick to pass you ...when I got here I was so used to bein' in a fly by class, I was like, OK these teachers they don't care if I come or not. I'm not gonna come. But when I got my transcript it was a totally different story. I was like, they're not playin' here.

That's like me right now. I only have four credits this semester and I feel cheated. Like in math, I took Algebra II and in Algebra II it was [in high school]...when I'm sitting in [remedial] class [now], like there's no point in being there. I sit there and pay for the class, you know. I have to do it cause I paid for it. But you sit there like what am I doing here. I may as well not even come...I feel like I'm going to be here forever. I feel like I'm going to be here forever and it's like it just drags you along.

This is the thing. I've always done well in grammar and I've always done well in English. I got A's throughout high school, and I was placed in the lowest English.

I didn't get any preparation in high school either. Like I said, I came to college for a fresh start...now, you know, there's respect for the teachers, there's [more] respect for learning here than my high school, there was no respect for learning. I mean, some people, yeah, but a lot of people, no.

Others took responsibility for their lack of preparation. This student described how he goofed off in high school and didn't take advantage of what was available. His lack of connection with education has completely changed at the community college. This student is one of the ones who has clearly benefited from the second chance opportunity.

...and when you come here, it's like, whoa! It's an eye opener, and you see all these different people, and you see people that are older than you as well. And that's one thing that really drives me here is you see these people that are older coming to school, you know, trying to do something. And you're saying, well, look at how young I am. Look at how much time I have. Why am I wasting it? You know? And you end up, you know, getting your stuff together. The whole atmosphere at community college I like.

The ones who did feel prepared were often the higher achieving students who were expecting to go to a four-year institution, but for whatever reason didn't.

I felt like I was really prepared from high school. But it was hard for me my first semester. I didn't want to be here. I really wanted to be at Berkeley. And my grades weren't as high as they were in high school. But I got the hang of it here and I said you know, I still want to go to Berkeley and so in order to do that I

need to get out of here first. So, it was really rough. Just because a community college, like, my friends claimed it had the reputation of being an extension to high school, and it really isn't. And I just I was really grateful that I came here because of the environment, I mean the atmosphere is just, it's like, it really brings you down to earth. So, I thought my transition was like, it took a while to get there, but it's good.

Remediation, and the related issue of preparation, will continue to be a central focus for community colleges. It will also provide the best opportunities for partnerships with K-12 and the four-year institutions. Examples of K-16 links are described below.

#### *Transfer/persistence.*

Although intent data is difficult to track in community college, more and more students in the two-year colleges aspire to complete their degrees at the four-year institutions. Many of the students in the focus groups described plans, often very specific, for getting their bachelors' degrees (in some of the focus groups, every student planned to transfer). One challenge to tracking intent is that students don't need to complete the associate's degree to transfer to a bachelor's program. There are various agreements between two-year and four-year institutions regarding the transfer of students. In some cases, the articulation agreements are quite formal, offering statewide standards for all public institutions. In others, the partnerships are local, between two institutions, including some private colleges.

California: In California, the Master Plan for Higher Education charges the UC and CSU systems with giving preferential admissions to qualified California community college students. Generally a student is considered qualified if they have completed 56 transferable units with a grade of C or better. There are no specific intersegmental transfer policies—each community college or district must work out articulation agreements with individual UC and CSU campuses. Some individual community college campuses and districts have developed Transfer Articulation Agreements and specific guaranteed admissions plans with public and private four-year colleges and universities. Both SCC and CRC have multiple articulation agreements with institutions throughout the state.

In addition to individual Transfer Centers in California, there is an official statewide repository of transfer information in the form of a web-interfaced database, called ASSIST (Articulation System Stimulating Interinstitutional Student Transfer). This database designed for student as well as professional use, lists by institution accepted transferable courses, and specific articulation agreements between two campuses. All public postsecondary institutions in California are included in the database, but private/independent colleges are not.

Maryland: A major premise of the Maryland public higher education system is that a student should be able to progress from one segment of higher education to another without loss of time or unnecessary duplication of effort. The objective of MHEC is to ensure that a student who intends to complete a bachelor's degree and begins his or her

work at a community college is able to move toward the completion of that degree by transferring to a four-year degree granting institution without loss of credit or unnecessary duplication of course content. The University System of Maryland (USM) maintains a computerized information system (ARTSYS) that provides students and advisors information about the transferability of credit from one institution to another in the state. There are articulation agreements with both public and private institutions.

Oregon: By completing the coursework for the Associate of Arts-Oregon Transfer degree, students can meet the lower division requirements for an Oregon University System (OUS) institution, however the AA-OT is not required for transfer. Research at PCC finds that PCC students who transfer to an OUS institution do as well as “native” students. The dean of students at PCC describes a conversation with a colleague at a four-year institution:

I got a call at one point from one of the folks from a university...who called actually to complain that we weren't properly orienting our students to life in the senior institutions. I said, really? Tell me more about that. Well, they won't take “no” for an answer. They don't respect things like faculty office hours and they're haranguing our professors for more out of class contact and tutoring and support. And I said, you may think we're not preparing students for your environment, but I like what you're telling me.

Although they are relatively new and not yet widely used, co-admit programs at both PCC and MHCC have streamlined the transfer process for students transferring to Portland State University.

Persistence and completion data can also be difficult to track (in part because intent data is difficult to track: e.g., did that student intend to take only one class?). Most community college institutional researchers try to track term-to-term persistence. As noted in the literature above, generally persistence rates are lower at two-year than four-year colleges. The explanations offered include the different populations (age and background), different financial and family commitments, different levels of preparation, different intentions. It is clear though that students who are required to take remedial or developmental coursework are more likely not to persist or complete. Another explanation has to do with the path students take through their education.

Community college students do not often follow a linear path through their postsecondary education. In an effort to understand better how students in the Portland Metropolitan Area were progressing, several postsecondary institutional researchers studied student paths. They found not only that many students' paths were a “swirl” – moving in and out of several institutions – rather than a line (two-thirds of students demonstrate a “swirl” pattern), but that the nature of that swirl affected the students' progress and attainment (Bach et al. 2000). Perhaps not surprisingly, within the current system, those who followed the traditional, linear path were most successful in attainment.

*Outreach/special programs/K-16 links.*

All of the community colleges in this study have relationships with other educational institutions, from formal articulation agreements to informal relationships between individuals on the campuses. All of the institutions provide opportunities for high school students to get to know the community college. In most cases, students can enroll in community college classes on campus (with appropriate permission and skills assessment), can take community college credit level courses at their high school, can take one of the community college assessments in high school, among many other options.

Despite these multiple points of connections between systems, there was a very clear message from all of the community college respondents that the K-12 reforms – standards and assessments in the high schools – had very little or no bearing on what happened at the community colleges. The colleges are still going to do their own assessments of students’ skills and abilities; they want no part of the myriad reforms going on in K-12. What little was known about the reforms came from having children in the system or from local media. As noted above, none of the respondents had considered using existing K-12 assessments to measure incoming students’ skills in the placement process. In some cases, students also spoke disparagingly of the high school reforms. Several respondents echoed one staff member who said wryly, “we prefer to remain ignorant of that.” Another administrator said, “I think it’s fair to say that the community colleges are not horribly anxious to get involved in [the state reforms].... our students, when they transfer, do as well as native students,” implying that the college’s system of assessment was suitable for their needs.

One thing that became clear in the course of this research is that although there are few, if any, formal K-16 efforts state- or system-wide, there are many, many local partnerships between K-12 and the community colleges. Below are some examples:

- At SCC, the Assessment Center offers placement tests during the spring at local high schools through a program called Senior Assessment for College (SAC). High school seniors are invited to complete basic skills assessment in math and English on their high school campus, and then are invited to attend an orientation at Sacramento City College. Once they complete the process (which includes some counseling at orientation) they are granted priority registration. Approximately 1,200 students were assessed at sixteen local high schools in Spring 2001.
- English 1A and 1C are taught regularly by Sacramento City College faculty at neighboring McClatchy High School. The College is limited to offering only coursework that is above high school level on site at the high school, and at times it is difficult to get enough qualified interested students to enroll in these classes. Still, the English department plans to offer classes at other local high schools in the future. SCC no longer has a 2+2 vocational program; it ended when the high schools discontinued their vocational programs.

- Sacramento City College has many innovative programs with four-year colleges and universities. California State University, Sacramento offers students at Sacramento City College the chance to take one free class through the Crossover Enrollment Program. This program allows students who are enrolled in nine units at SCC to enroll in one class at CSUS for no fee other than the cost of books and materials. The University of California, Davis allows students who have fall semester Transfer Admissions Agreements (for guaranteed transfer) on file to take one free class the spring prior to their full-time enrollment at UC Davis.
- At CRC, various faculty members interact regularly with high school teachers, especially in the areas of math, English and ESL. The math faculty met with high school math teachers around the issues of math high school graduation requirements, and better articulating high school math with college math. Math instructors at both levels have also discussed approaches to teaching math with the goal of coordinating services. The English faculty has a long-standing relationship with local high school English teachers. In the past, high school English teachers would suggest course placement for former students now enrolling in English courses at Cosumnes River College. When the college realized this practice was contrary to Title 5 regulations, it was discontinued, but the English instructors continued to meet. Currently, the high school instructors in the Elk Grove Unified School District are hired as readers to evaluate and norm the final essay examination for CRC students enrolled in English 57. In addition, many of the CRC courses taught at the high schools are taught by high school instructors who meet the minimum qualifications to be community college instructors.
- The Montgomery College (MC)/Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Partnership was started as a pilot in three MCPS high schools in FY 1998 and expanded to include eight high schools in FY 2000. Partnership activities currently include all MCPS high schools. This joint initiative is a response to the needs identified by the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) Maryland Student Outcomes and Achievement Report (SOAR). Data from this report indicate that too many graduates of Maryland's public schools require developmental courses before they have the skills necessary to succeed in college level courses.
- There are early entry and tech prep programs available for high school students in Maryland. There are also dual enrollment programs.
- PCC and MHCC participate in a co-admission program with Portland State University (PSU). Students are conditionally admitted to PSU for up to eight credit hours per term. Students who take more than eight credit hours per term at PSU must meet PSU admission requirements.

- Both Oregon colleges in this study have early entry and dual enrollment programs for high school students in ECO, 2+2 and Tech Prep programs. Like other places, the college courses taught in the high schools use the high school faculty who have met the college requirements for instruction. At MHCC these programs have created opportunities for high school and college faculty to determine together what it means to be doing college-level credit work. As the coordinator of the program explains:

And I host meetings at least once a year in each of the various programming areas, so I'll bring all my...I'll stick with the same example. All my Hospitality, Tourism teachers from all of my high schools and bring them over here, and sit them down with my Mt. Hood faculty in Hospitality, Tourism and any program changes are shared and talked about. Any issues, any problems, if students are coming over here and they're not matriculating well, and they're not doing what they need to be doing, then we look at that school's program and, you know, what needs to go on.

- The Mt. Hood Educational Consortium is also creating a charter school that will link the area high schools to MHCC. The district has provided a grant for a new charter school for 500-700 eleventh and twelfth graders. "The college district and three separate high school districts [will work] as one collaboration to go to a neutral site and deliver instruction." This new institution will be run differently than existing ones, as the regional coordinator explains, "It will be run by a collaboration of Mt. Hood and the three districts as an inter-governmental arrangement with a separate board of directors rather than local school boards or the college board."

These various partnerships, formal and informal, are good examples of how K-16 work can occur in practice. It is clear that there are many people who are committed to finding ways to make students' educational experiences a series of successful transitions. While these efforts remain primarily local, they provide models for possible wider-ranging plans. One of the respondents sums up the sentiment that lots of people in this study share:

Probably just like everybody else [I believe it should be] a seamless flow for the students. The content, the knowledge they had in high school should be a foundation for them to be successful in college. That transition should be as smooth as possible. They should be able to walk into those [college] classes and feel confident.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

While each campus, region and state has important differences, there were several common findings across the cases. Below are the common and different findings for the community college research.

- There is a growing population of younger students on community college campuses. Some are recent high school graduates; many others have not completed. The community colleges have increased opportunities for formal linkages with high schools in course offerings, but there are examples of other arrangements, including home schooled children.
- The mission of community college seems to be realized in most of the institutions researched. They were low-cost, convenient alternatives with open access and high standards. The commitment of staff and faculty was clear.
- The growth in the population of younger students has highlighted the lack of preparedness of many high school graduates. Unlike older returning students who tend to just be a bit “rusty,” some recent high school students may never have learned the material. As one California staff member says, “We’re seeing students coming out of high school not ready for community college work, and community college students not ready at the CSUs.” Additional remediation is necessary, but the disjuncture highlights the need for better alignment of standards and expectations.
- Many students entering community college don’t seem to appreciate that they won’t be able to do college-level work if they didn’t achieve at a certain level in high school. One instructor says, “The transition between high school and the community college is an odd one for many people. For some students, the first year of community college is grade 13; it seems that they are just continuing on—all of their friends are coming here, they are just moving along with the pack. There’s not even necessarily for some of the first year students an acknowledgement per se that this is even college.”
- Despite lack of information about myriad placement assessments, students generally seem unfazed about having to take the tests. Although some talked about being unhappy with the results, fairly liberal re-take policies allow for some negotiation.
- The connection to four-year institutions is becoming more formal in some places. While articulation agreements are common, only co-admit or dual enrollment arrangements produce specific curricular discussions among members of the campuses.
- Many faculty talk about the tension of being “in-between.” Community colleges can be perceived as an extension of high school and the start of a bachelor’s; they accept anyone who enters, but have advanced and restricted entry programs. Most believe strongly in the mission, but acknowledge the difficulty of balancing it. One faculty member explains the dilemma, “So, what’s the message that we want to send? That you can always come here and because, you know, it’s never too late to change your

life? Or do we want to say, well, if you want to get here, you need to, you know, you need to shape up right now.”

- There is a general lack of awareness on the part of administrative staff and faculty of K-12 reform efforts (especially standards and assessments faced by high school students), or even K-16 efforts in some cases. What is known tends to be a result of general perception (e.g., media coverage) or of personal connection (e.g., child in the system). There is little sense of any formal efforts to work between the systems, for example, by using one of the high school statewide assessments as a placement tool. However, individual partnerships between specific community colleges and high schools seem to be flourishing on many campuses.
- In Oregon, there was evidence that there seems to be less stigma for high school students to go to community colleges than even ten years ago, so there is a population of motivated younger students who are more proactive in their education (e.g., applying and registering several months in advance instead of the day before classes).
- In several of the colleges, but especially in Oregon, many students spoke positively about their choice to attend community college, usually highlighting convenience, cost, and smaller class size. They note that there is no “handholding,” but that resources are available to those who seek them. One Oregon student said, “I think what high school students need to know is community college isn’t just...like the last resort. Community college is a good place to take classes and really seriously think about what you’re going to do with your life, and even if you’re taking classes and don’t know what you want to be, it’s a really good place to actually find out more about yourself and...every credit that you get generally goes towards your major so it’s not a waste of time at all.

## POINTS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

The research by Bridge staff on the community colleges was able to address only a limited number of the important issues surrounding K-16 reform and the role of the two-year institutions. There are several points that should be addressed more deeply (or for the first time) in future research. Below is a non-comprehensive list of ideas for further consideration and research.

- Community colleges have a relative lack of prestige in postsecondary education. Despite serving the majority of undergraduates, community colleges have difficulty attracting necessary attention and resources to address the many important issues facing the institution and its members.
- As structurally and functionally different institutions, community colleges do not have the luxury to select the types of students they serve. They must continually balance seemingly conflicting missions to preserve the philosophy of open access and college level standards.

- Data are notoriously difficult to collect on community college campuses. More and more colleges have formal institutional research operations and more states are developing or refining statewide data sharing systems, but the transitory and “swirling” nature of student enrollment mean that some of the data collection problems will continue to be difficult to address.
- Few community colleges have had any role in state and national K-16 reform efforts. It would appear that the informal and local partnerships with K-12 would make community colleges prime candidates for inter-segmental coordination.
- However, the limited resources already in the two-year colleges means that there is unlikely to be funding for large-scale reform efforts.
- Community colleges, because of their relatively low profile in higher education, are often the most flexible in responding to change. Many of the two-years have capacity for more students (notable exception: California, which has caps), and they continue to be the point of entry for the majority of the growing undergraduate population.
- As that point of entry, community colleges are the place where a majority of first generation students and students of color begin their college education. While research has documented this trend and pointed out some of the issues associated with this growth, there needs to be additional research.
- Preparation for college is a growing and persistent issue, particularly for recent high school graduates. This report highlights some of the trend and responses, but there is need for more effort to use existing points of connection with K-12 and to develop new ones to address the problem.
- Despite a decrease in the skills and abilities of many entering students, aspiration to transfer remains high. Rosenbaum (2001) talks about how to temper those aspirations and to provide alternatives. Students need to understand not only what it takes to succeed in transfer, but that basic skills in literacy and numeracy are necessary for occupational and vocational programs too.
- Bridge research has focused heavily on younger community college students, the recent high school graduates. Most community colleges have tried to find ways to support their returning students. It would be helpful to learn more about how adults learn about community college opportunities and about what resources are necessary to help them succeed.
- There has been some research on community college faculty, particularly emphasizing the focus on teaching. However, the presence “freeway fliers,” part-time instructors teaching at several institutions concurrently, suggests that many faculty have little time or opportunity to work together to address the growing problems of lack of student preparation and solutions in remediation (among other things).

- There is little research on community college staff. Bridge research suggests that many of those who have chosen to work at two-year institutions have strong, personal commitments to community college students (and in many cases are alumni and alumnae of the community colleges).
- Recruitment is quite difficult for the community colleges, even when there is capacity for more students. While more students are coming directly from the high schools (and more admission staff are going there), it is difficult to find the places in the community where there are critical masses of potential students.
- The issues surrounding placement were significant in this report, but are often only addressed in other research with relation to remediation. Our finding that students don't always love the results of their placement, but aren't really fazed by it suggests that we may be making more of the consequences than they are. However, it is worth looking more closely at how that information is communicated to them and whether that makes a difference.
- It would be interesting to track signals to students in general around the expectations and requirements for entering community college. While the message that two-year institutions welcome everyone seems to be coming through clearly, there is a far dimmer signal about college-level expectations. There is a connection to be made to the preparation issue as well.
- One of the clear findings in community college research is that a majority of students who enter the two-years expect to transfer to a four-year program. While the higher aspiration can help influence attainment, a lack of good information about what it takes to transfer, particularly before entering, means that many students are not persisting or completing, despite their aspiration. Good data are needed on persistence and completion; the intent factor helps fill out that picture.

Community colleges play an important role in the United States system of postsecondary education, yet there is minimal research on that role and its impact. Given the growing number of students participating in a community college education (particularly students of color, low-income students and first generation students), it seems clear that this population and these institutions warrant greater attention. Bridge Project research has just barely tapped the rich data available for student and models for improvements, as well as best practice. Community colleges' unique position as a gateway in higher education and a link between high schools and four-year institutions make them not only valuable resources for their communities, but also subjects of study.

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## APPENDIX A

### List of Interviewees

#### **California**

##### *Sacramento City College*

Suzanne Chock Hunt, Vice President, Instruction  
Patricia Hsieh, Vice President, Student Services  
Jane Woo, Counselor  
Annette Barfield, Counselor  
Alice Murillo, Dean, Division of Science, Mathematics & Engineering  
Myra Kitchens Borg, Dean, Matriculation and Student Development  
Earnestine McKnight, Articulation Specialist  
Lawrence G. Dun, Dean, Student Services  
Karen Kunimura, Faculty/Academic Senate  
Mary Turner, Dean, Division of Allied Health  
Sam Sandusky, Dean, Student Services  
Julia Jolly, Dean, Division of Language and Literature  
Nelle Moore, Dean, Planning, Research and Institutional Effectiveness  
Pat Miyai Maga, Financial Aid

##### *Cosumnes River College*

Estella Hoskins, Assessment Counselor  
Shelley Massi, Orientation  
Teresa Aldredge, Counselor/Articulation  
Charles Braden, Instructor/Curriculum Chair  
Bill Karns, Vice President, Instruction  
Steve Krisiak, Counseling Spokesperson  
Claudia Hansson, Vice President, Student Services  
Katherine McLain, Dean, Science/Math/Engineering  
Rick Wallace, Dean, Counseling/Student Services  
George Railey, Dean, Humanities/Social Sciences  
Richard Andrews, Supervisor, Admissions & Records  
Dorothy Robrude, Financial Aid  
Tiffany Adams, Outreach Specialist

#### **Maryland**

Counselor, CCBC-Catonsville  
Research Analyst (untaped), CCBC-Catonsville  
SPARK Program Director, CCBC-Catonsville  
Director of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, CCBC

PEP Program Director, CCBC-Catonsville  
Director of Admissions, CCBC-Catonsville  
Mathematics Department Chair, CCBC-Catonsville  
Transfer Advisor, CCBC-Catonsville  
Coordinator of Freshman Year Program, CCBC-Catonsville  
Director of Advising, MC-Rockville  
Lead Recruiter, MC-Rockville  
Director of Developmental Education, CCBC System  
Director of Recruitment and Enrollment Management, MC-Rockville  
Director of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, MC-Rockville  
Director of Academic Initiatives, MC-Rockville  
Director of Admissions, MC-Rockville  
Director of Financial Aid, MC-Rockville  
Dean of Mathematics, CCBC-Catonsville  
Director of Student Life, MC-Rockville  
Dean of Student Development, MC-Rockville  
Director of Tech Prep, Baltimore County Consortium  
Dean of Business, Human Services Division, CCBC-Catonsville

## **Oregon**

### *Portland Community College*

Kenny Adair, Department Chair, Counseling and Advising  
Susan Bach, Director of Institutional Research  
Dennis Baily-Fougner, Coordinator of Admissions  
Craig Bell, Dean of Student Development  
Diane Delgado, Director of High School Completion Program  
Lucinda Eshleman, Academic Advisor  
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Alice Jacobson, Executive Dean  
Diane Mulligan, Division Dean, Student Support Services  
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### *Mt. Hood Community College*

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James Nystrom, faculty member, Language and Literature, Developmental Education  
Peggy Redmond, Director of Registration and Records  
Beth Sammons, faculty member, Language and Literature  
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## **Community College Protocol: Community College Student Transition Policy Environment**

This research project concentrates on determining and analyzing policies that affect students' transitions from high school to community college and to a lesser extent, from community college to four-year institutions of higher education. For the purposes of this project, the students of interest are students who enter community colleges directly from high school, degree-seeking students, transfer students, and students enrolled in dual (or concurrent) enrollment courses. The policies of interest are the transition policies that affect the aforementioned students' entrance into, academic placement and advising in, persistence in, and transfer from community colleges. Policies, procedures, practices and exceptions within specific campuses, within their systems and/or districts, and within the specific state contexts will be analyzed. Fieldwork and document review will determine the extent to which the policies of the selective colleges within a state are compatible and consistent with policies across other state education institutions and agencies, including public education and four-year public universities in the region. This research will target (1) descriptions, justifications, and implications of current, past, projected future policies; and (2) compatibility, clarity, and consistency of policies. This research project is a component of the Bridge Project. As with Phase 1 in the Bridge Project, this research will seek to answer:

1. ***What are the admission, placement, advising, remediation, matriculation, transfer, dual (or concurrent) enrollment, data collection and other related policies in the selected community colleges? For example:*** What are the policies, procedures, expectations, and practices within each institution? What are the exceptions made to these policies? What are the justifications for these policies? What are the implications of these policies? Are data collected, maintained, and analyzed within community colleges (e.g., regarding student persistence, students' completion of objectives such as transfer) and between community colleges and high schools? Between community colleges and four-year institutions?

2. *To what extent are policies, procedures, practices, and expectations compatible between the community colleges and the previously studied four-year institutions and state-level (K-12 and higher education) policies?* Are the community colleges' policies (categories are mentioned above) compatible and consistent with state education agency (SEA) requirements – such as high school graduation and relevant high school assessments? What is the relationship between the community colleges' expectations and the SEA's exit-level content and performance standards (including curriculum frameworks and state-wide assessments)? What is the relationship between the community colleges' expectations and the four-year universities' transfer expectations? Are both sets of expectations clearly articulated and aligned across systems? To what extent does a two-way communication of expectations and standards exist across state-level institutions and systems? Are there dual (or concurrent) enrollment programs, or other collaborations between the community colleges and high schools and/or four-year institutions? Do they have data regarding the efficacy of those programs with regard to the programs' goals and objectives?

The interviews for this project will be conducted primarily with individuals at the community college campus level. Document review will be conducted primarily with materials from the colleges. This information will be integrated with relevant information compiled and analyzed for Phases I and II of the Bridge Project. Interviews in, and review of documents from, organizations other than community colleges will be conducted when relevant.

The questions in this protocol need not be directed toward one individual in a college. Rather, they can be divided up and directed to the appropriate person (or people) overseeing each area. Some of these questions might not be “answerable” because the college(s) might not collect the data needed to answer some of these questions. That will be an interesting finding as well.

## **Section One: Initial Information**

Name and title of respondent:

Institution:

Total number of students currently attending the college – FTE and headcount.

Number/percent of students, and racial/ethnic breakdown, in the most recent entering fall class who

-matriculated straight from high school

-are academic degree-seeking students

-are planning to transfer to a four-year college or university

-are pursuing vocational/tech/professional training for no credit

-are pursuing vocational/tech/professional training for certification or degree

If you collect the above data, how do you use them (for example, do you know if an entering student who intends to transfer to a four-year university does or does not transfer)? What other types of student data are collected?

Do you collect data regarding students' academic intentions at, or after attending, your college? If so, what is the number/percent of students who complete their plans and go on to where they intended to go? If not, have you discussed collecting the data? Are there barriers to collecting the data and, if so, what are they (financial, staff time)?

Number/percent of students pursuing dual or concurrent enrollment (high school students taking community college courses for credit at both levels).

What percentage of students attending your college fulltime who matriculate directly from high school intend to:

- earn an academic degree (AA and AS)
- transfer to a four-year institution
- pursue vocational/tech/professional training for no credit
- pursue vocational/tech/professional training for certification or degree

How many "reverse transfer" students do you have (who left a four-year institution to attend your college)? Why do you think students do that? What usually happens to reverse transfer students (do they tend to finish a degree, certificate, not finish a program, etc.)?

Ethnic/racial breakdown of students in most recent entering fall class (percentage or numbers):

What is the average age of students at the college? Mode? Median?

What happens to high school students who take courses at your college? Do they tend to attend your college after high school? A four-year institution?

Are there any particular characteristics about this college that set it apart from others in the district, system, or state? (e.g., the strength/focus on specific subject, different requirements, etc.)

How many community college districts/systems are there in the state? How is this district/system different from the other community college district(s)/system(s) in the state?

What is your student intake process (admission, matriculation, outreach, counseling, transcription evaluation)? Who is responsible for each function?

List of primary feeder high schools, particularly within region of study.

Do you have any special dual credit/concurrent enrollment or other types of collaborative programs with local high schools? If so, please describe (including the goals and content of the program, who developed the program, how long it has been in effect, any evaluations completed, which high schools, why those high schools were included, and how many students participate).

Do you have an honors program? If so, who developed it? How long has it been in existence? How many students are in the program? What do students need to do to get into the program? To graduate from it? What are its goals? What is its success rate?

Are there course advisories or pre-requisites for any majors, certificates, or degrees? If so, what are they? Who developed those policies?

Do you do recruiting for prospective students? If so, what are your recruitment activities? Who develops and runs those activities?

California only: Do you receive Partnership for Excellence money (state funds for transfer, vocational program completion, basic skills completion)? If so, how is it allocated? What are the outcomes and how are they assessed?

Outside of California: Do you receive discretionary funds for transfer, vocational program completion, basic skills completion, and other such areas? If so, how are those monies allocated? What are the outcomes and how are they assessed?

Do you have a new student orientation program? Parent orientation? What traditionally happens during orientation(s) – what are the activities and events? Who runs orientation? Who attends (which students and/or parents)?

What are your financial aid policies? Who receives financial aid (number, percent, type of student)? Do you have merit-based aid? Need-based? What percent of your students receive each type of aid? Does it matter if they are degree-seeking or not? Transfer-intending or not? Does anyone keep data on financial aid recipients – particularly with regard to their academic status at the college – whether or not they complete a degree, transfer, etc.?

## **Section Two: Description of Institution's Current Admission and Placement Policies**

### **Current Undergraduate Admission Policies:**

Please describe your admission process. Do students submit applications? To whom? Are they reviewed?

Can students register and not apply?

Do you have online materials and an application?

Who or what group makes admissions policies?

- Are there ever “border-line cases?” How are these decided? By whom? What policies or informal guidelines govern these decisions?
- Please describe the general procedure through which admission and placement policies are established and modified.
- What is your policy regarding ability to benefit (if a prospective student has not graduated from high school or received a GED, but could benefit from instruction at a community college)?

How often are policies revised?

If college is part of a larger district and/or system, describe the structure and explain what it means to be affiliated with a district and/or system.

How much autonomy does this college have in setting, implementing, and influencing admission and placement, or advising, policies at this institution? What type of local campus or departmental discretion is allowed? Are there programs that are selective in terms of their admission policies? Who sets those policies? Why are those programs selective? What are their policies? Are data kept on those students’ academic paths (as compared to students in nonselective programs)?

Obtain information on the following: if applications are submitted, where are they sent and filtered; are there deadlines or timeframes for applications; do admission and financial aid applications work together or separately; how are students notified of acceptance and of upcoming placement procedures.

What are application and matriculation timeframes? May students enroll in the spring or summer, and is there typically an entering spring or summer class?

Does this college have a policy regarding:

- Limits on the number of students that may be admitted?
- Acceptance of previous academic course credit toward college credit?
- Acceptance of applied or “tech prep” or service learning course credit toward college credit? Who makes these decisions?

Are there exceptions made to these admission policies -- or, in what situations do you deviate from the written policies?

In what year were these policies updated?

Who or what entity has responsibility for updating policies?

Under what circumstances are changes made?

**Current Undergraduate Course Placement Policies:**

[We use the terms “remediation” and “remedial coursework.” If these are not the appropriate terms for the campuses you are working with, please use the appropriate terms.]

Is there an official college policy regarding student course placement or advising? How does the college determine if a student needs remediation? Please describe any policies/procedures for placing students into classes. Are placement and advising separate? If so, please describe the differences between the two functions. Are there system policies regarding placement and advising? If so, what are they, and do they differ from the college’s policies?

How would you describe your college’s academic standards or expectations for students entering directly from college who plan to earn an AA degree? What do you think the college expects students to know and be able to do (in terms of broad knowledge/skills and specific content knowledge)?

What do you think incoming students (particularly those who enter directly from high school and wish to earn an AA degree) know about your college’s academic standards or expectations?

What do you think incoming students know about your college’s placement procedures (prompt: about the fact that there are placement exams and about the kinds of knowledge and skills they need to demonstrate)?

Please describe, in detail, the use of any placement or advising tests, including:

- What test(s) are used for placement?
- By whom were the tests created/designed?
- Are there system-approved and administered tests? College-approved and administered? Departmentally-approved and administered?
- When are those tests administered?
- When do students/prospective students learn about those tests?
- Who goes through the placement process? Are all students assessed for placement?
- What is the timeframe in which placement decisions are made?
- What happens if a student does not meet the standard (based on the placement test score) set by the college?
- Are placement decisions final? Can students appeal the outcome of the placement exam(s)?
- What subjects do they assess? Are subject area departments involved in developing and implementing the test(s)?
- When (i.e., at what point in student’s life) and by whom are the tests administered?
- Do you consider placement or advising test(s) to be “high stakes”? (i.e. what are the consequences for the student if she/he does not meet the standard?)

- How and at what point is remediation attended to? (e.g., through college remedial courses, through intensive summer programs sponsored by \_\_\_\_, in the senior year of high school)
- What types of data are maintained regarding tracking/follow-up of students receiving remediation? If such data are maintained, how are they used? Who collects, maintains, and monitors these data?
- In your opinion, are these data accurately identifying remediation needs? (e.g., do they under-report, over-report, neglect certain areas of need, include specific areas that are less relevant than others?)

Are there exceptions made to your placement and advising policies -- or, in what situations do you deviate from the written policies? Please be as specific as possible. (Prompts and examples: if students do not meet the standard set forth by the placement exam? If students are not seeking a degree?). Who makes these decisions?

If there are exceptions: In your opinion, what impact have these exceptions to the placement and advising policies had?

What types of remediation needs do freshmen students matriculating directly from the K-12 system have?

What is the current percentage of students requiring remediation at your institution? (if by course subject or department, specify) Has this figure been constant, decreasing, or increasing over the past ten years (be as specific as possible)? Have the placement procedures changed rendering the collection of trend data impossible?

Do any universities in your area send their students to your college for remedial-level work? Do you provide remedial education on a local four-year campus? Does your college receive state funds for providing remedial education for students attending four-year institutions of higher education? If so, approximately how much? Are there any local or statewide policies about such actions (e.g., are community colleges required to provide remedial education courses for local four-year institutions)?

How many indicators/assessments are used for placement? Why is that the case (why do you use single/multiple indicators)? Do you have any assessments that were developed by individual faculty?

Do you give placement exams at local high schools? If so, why? Which high schools?

Can remediation affect a student's financial aid package? Could admission be postponed or reassessed if remedial needs are severe?

In your opinion, what causes the need for remediation?

Are the results of placement tests reported back to the appropriate high schools? If so:

- When do results get reported?

- How detailed are the results? (e.g., broken down by race/ethnicity, gender, class, grade, individual)
- Who receives these results and are the results used in any way (e.g., to reform the high school curriculum, to link high school and college academic expectations)?

How do high school students learn about the contents of and consequences associated with your college's placement or advising tests?

How do high school teachers and counselors learn about the contents of and consequences associated with your college's placement or advising tests?

In what year were these policies updated?

- Who or what entity has responsibility for updating policies?
- Under what circumstances are changes made?

### **Section Three: Policy Evolution--Former Policies and Possible Changes to Existing Policies**

#### **Former Policies:**

What were your college's prior policies (e.g., past ten years) regarding: (a) admission, (b) placement or advising, (c) remediation, and (d) merit aid?

Describe the historical evolution of the policies:

- How have the policies changed over the past ten years?
- In general, why have the policies changed?
- Who/what initiated the changes? Whose approval had to be sought? Can anyone initiate policy changes?
- What was the route the proposal followed?
- How often are policies reviewed?
- What effects have the policy changes had? Were these effects intended or anticipated?

What factors led up to the policy change(s)?

What have been the effects of those changes?

#### **Anticipated Changes to Policies:**

Are there current discussions about changing your college's admission, placement, remediation, and/or financial aid policies in the future? If yes...

- What are the proposed changes and why are they being proposed?
- Who or what entities have been the primary initiator(s) of these changes?

- Who (e.g., institution, level) would implement these proposed changes?
- What autonomy (within its district/system) does this campus institution have in making these changes?

Have specific targets or goals been established or proposed that are relevant for admission, placement, remediation, and/or merit aid policies at your institution? If yes...

- What are the proposed goals? Why have those goals been set?
- Who or what entities have proposed/established the goals/targets?
- Who would be required to make necessary changes to enable these goals/targets to be met?

Have there been any changes regarding the use of affirmative action in admissions or other practices? If so, what changes have occurred? If not, are any changes being discussed?

#### **Section Four: K-16 Connections and Compatibility of K-12, Community College, and University Policies**

Please describe the types of state-wide K-12 standards and K-12 accountability system or mechanisms in your state.

- Content standards
- Performance standards
- Assessments: How does the state assess K-12 progress? (e.g., state-wide assessments, subjects, grades). How are the results reported? (e.g., by individual, class, grade, school, district, state)
- State graduation requirements/plans

Does your state have K-12 curriculum frameworks? If so, please describe (e.g., subjects, grades, procedure for updating, individuals/institutions involved in creating, benchmarks, degree of university participation).

Do you believe the purpose and content of these K-12 policies are compatible (that the policies are doing what they are supposed to do)?

Do you believe the purpose and content of these K-12 policies are compatible with college admissions tests (for four-year institutions)? With placement tests (for two- and four-year institutions)? With any state postsecondary assessments or frameworks? Is the state asking students to know and be able to do the same knowledge and skills at the high school exit level and the college entrance level?

Please describe any process that is followed to ensure that college officials are aware of K-12 standards.

- Are there regularly scheduled meetings, joint task forces: Who attends? Who sponsors? How is the information used and by whom?

Please describe any process that is followed to ensure that K-12 state officials are aware of community college admission policies and placement exam contents.

- Are there regularly scheduled meetings, joint task forces: Who attends? Who sponsors? How is the information used and by whom?

Please describe any process that is followed to ensure that K-12 state officials are aware of state university admission policies and placement exam contents.

- Are there regularly scheduled meetings, joint task forces: Who attends? Who sponsors? How is the information used and by whom?

Please describe any process that is followed to ensure that community college officials are aware of state university admission policies and placement exam contents and vice versa.

- Are there regularly scheduled meetings, joint task forces: Who attends? Who sponsors? How is the information used and by whom?

What opportunities are there in the state for multiple uses of standards and assessments? (e.g., do community colleges use the results of any end of high school exam for placement?) In your opinion, would this type of sharing be possible or useful for the state?

Do you think the transfer function between your college and local four-year institutions is effective (do you think that students who intend to transfer do transfer)? Do you think the transfer function in the state as a whole is effective? Do you think that any improvements need to be made regarding the transfer function?

Does anyone at your college receive data regarding what happens to transfer students once they enter a four-year institution? Does anyone at your college know if they graduate? How long it takes for students to transfer? If they need to complete remedial coursework at the university? If they receive credit for the coursework at the community college?

How does your institution inform high school teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, students, and community members about the following:

- Admission policies
- Transfer policies
- Dual, or concurrent, enrollment programs
- Placement and advising policies
- Content of, and consequences associated with, any IHE placement tests
- Remediation policies
- Merit aid policies

Please describe the process through which your institution informs these individuals and groups about any new changes in policy.

In your opinion, are these individuals and groups adequately familiar with the admission, placement, remediation, and merit aid policies of your institution? If not, what might account for any gaps in knowledge? What could be some of the effects of the gap in knowledge?

How might your institution better inform these individuals and groups about policies?

In an ideal world, what would be the connection(s) between K-12 and higher education?

**Closing:** Ask respondents if they are available for follow-up questions in the future.

**Documents to Request:**

- Mission statement of college—district/system, if appropriate
- Course catalogue
- Board Policy Book, if possible
- Official college policies regarding: admission, remediation, placement, advising, financial aid, transfer, earning credit, and being granted credit for previous coursework
- Matriculation Plan (details college's plans regarding admission, counseling and advising, research, prerequisites, orientation, assessment and follow-up, and coordination and training across the campus)
- Office of Institutional Research materials on access, persistence, retention, transfer, placement/assessment
- If applicable, state policies re: college policies/mission, admission, remediation, placement, advising, transfer, earning credit, and being granted credit for previous coursework
- Relevant institutional statistics (e.g., demographics of students, admissions statistic, transfer statistics, remediation statistics)
- Admission and placement test/procedures packets, and/or college publications for prospective students and/or counselors
- Relevant internal documents, e.g. Faculty Senate guidelines, placement documents
- Statement of competencies or expectations of incoming students
- Copies of placement exams
- State legislation regarding colleges policies and/or mission(s)
- Materials produced by the college regarding K-12 policies on: assessment, content and performance standards, curriculum frameworks, graduation requirements, dual (or concurrent) enrollment
- Meeting summaries and charges (missions) of joint K-16 task forces
- Information on transfer requirements and dual (or concurrent) enrollment programs

## **Draft Community College Student Focus Group Questions**

I am here to learn more about your views about transitioning between high school and college. Everything that you have to say here is confidential. I am audiotaping this discussion so that I don't have to take notes now and can give you my full attention. The tape will be destroyed after it is transcribed. No one besides the transcriber and I will have access to the tape. It is very important that everyone feel comfortable to state their views, without being afraid that they will be judged. Let's please respect everyone's comments. At the end of this discussion, there will be a few minutes to answer questions; I will not provide answers for the questions that I ask you until then, because I don't want to influence your answers. Also, many of the questions that I am asking you have no right answers – I want to learn from you. This is your time to help researchers and educators understand how you felt about transitioning from high school to college. Finally, you do not need to respond to any of the questions if you do not want to, but I am very interested in what everyone has to say.

Did everyone here go to high school in this state? Is anyone from out-of-state?

How was your transition from high school to college, academically? Were there any surprises? [Probe: were you aware before you went to college that you would have to take placement exams? Did you feel prepared for the placement exams? Is there anything you would have done to prepare for the exams in high school if you had known about them then?]

Were there any other surprises about college – things you weren't prepared for (scheduling, advising, etc.)?

Do you think that you were prepared well, academically, for college? If not, what would you have done differently in high school? Is there information that you wish you had received in high school? Prior to high school?

K-12 Reforms [Oregon example; use others if appropriate for CA and MD]: Did anyone here earn a CIM (or CAM, depending on the high school the student attended)? Did the CIM (CAM) help prepare you for college? [Repeat for PASS]

How did you learn about this college? What are some of the reasons why you decided to attend this college?

At what point in high school (e.g., which grade -- 8, 9, 10, 11, 12?) did your counselors or teachers begin meeting with students to talk about college? Can you tell me about them? [Probe: What happens in these meetings? Is there information that you wish these meetings had provided you, but didn't?]

When do you think is a good time (grade level) to start preparing for college academically?

Who do you think decides whether high school students go to college? Who do you think decides where high school students go to college? [prompt: Students? Parent(s)? Counselor? Teacher? Someone else?]