

THE PELL INSTITUTE

for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education

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COMMUNITY COLLEGES PAVE WAY FOR NATIONAL TRANSFER PRACTICES TO INCREASE BACHELOR ATTAINMENT RATES AMONG LOW-INCOME, FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS

Six Texas Community Colleges Successfully Create “Culture of Transfer” on Campuses to Produce Some of the Nation’s Highest Transfer Rates

Washington, D.C., Nov. 19, 2009—In response to a rapidly changing economy, President Obama has been clear about his “2020” education goal that all Americans should complete high school and at least one year of postsecondary education. The President has placed community colleges at the forefront of this goal to help disadvantaged students—especially low-income and first-generation students who are either unemployed or underemployed—as they enter a shrunken job market that requires a bachelor’s degree. However, community colleges are challenged to retain and transfer these students to four-year institutions because this student population faces many economic, cultural, academic, and institutional barriers.

The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education today released a new report, *Bridging the Gaps to Success: Promising Practices for Promoting Transfer among Low-Income and First-Generation Students*, examining successful transfer strategies implemented at six Texas community colleges that continue to help low-income and first-generation students—many of them African American and Latino—obtain their baccalaureate degrees. The study highlights what is working to increase transfer rates for low-income and first-generation students at each institution (TCCD Southeast Campus, Trinity Valley Community College, Northeast Texas Community College, Laredo Community College, Victoria College, and Southwest Texas Junior College) while gleaning a set of promising practices common to each of the schools that can inform other community colleges on how to establish successful transfer cultures.

“We found that the community colleges in this study are deliberate and strategic about capitalizing on what works on their campuses; for example, leveraging the early exposure and confidence building of dual-

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enrollment programs, providing targeted academic support to their students through early alert systems, and configuring the campus-wide practices of TRIO programs such as Student Support Services,” said Chandra Taylor Smith, Ph.D., director, The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. “The way they bring these practices together to create effective transfer cultures may contribute to why these particular community colleges achieve higher than expected transfer rates among low-income and first-generation students.”

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS FOR SUCCESSFUL TRANSFER STRATEGIES

The report identifies the following three common themes—each consisting of institutional programs and policies—that contribute to higher than expected transfer rates at the six Texas community colleges:

1. **A Structured Academic Pathway.** A range of programmatic efforts that may include institutional articulation agreements, dual enrollment, developmental coursework initiatives, and active learning.
2. **A Student-Centered Culture.** A culture that offers change, access, and availability which include a customer service focus, TRIO Student Support Services, specialized advising, learning centers/tutoring labs, flexible schedules, first-year seminars, learning communities, and student engagement in campus life.
3. **A Culturally-Sensitive Leadership.** Policy changes at the institutional level, which include staff and faculty role modeling, collecting demographic data that informs their practice and decision making, strategic planning, and outreach.

The study makes specific recommendations for replicating the three common core practices to create a culture of transfer, and some of these tactics include collaborative campus programming, structuring administrative offices as support and service centers, making data-driven decision, engaging faculty, rewarding staff and faculty who value students, and developing a performance and accountability culture.

A complete copy of the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education’s latest report, *Bridging the Gaps to Success: Promising Practices for Promoting Transfer among Low-Income and First-Generation Students*, is available to be downloaded free at www.pellinstitute.org.

Bridging the Gaps to Success: Promising Practices for Promoting Transfer among Low-Income and First-Generation Students provides a glimpse of how community colleges statewide are successfully addressing the “Closing the Gap” initiative in Texas, which was adopted in October 2000 by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to increase the number of Texas students completing bachelor’s degrees to

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100,000 by 2010, and to 112,500 by 2015. Support for the report was provide by TG, a public, nonprofit corporation that helps create access to higher education for millions of families and students through its role as an administrator of the federal family education loan program (FFELP).

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The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education conducts and disseminates research and policy analysis to encourage policymakers, educators, and the public to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for low-income, first-generation, and disabled college students.