UNTAPPED LEADERS:
FACULTY AND THE CHALLENGE OF STUDENT COMPLETION

A Report on the Faculty Voices Project
League for Innovation in the Community College

NOVEMBER 2018

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Please reference this report as follows:

League for Innovation in the Community College. (2018). *Untapped Leaders: Faculty and the Challenge of Student Completion*. Chandler, AZ: Author.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Since the launch of the Faculty Voices Project in 2014, numerous individuals and organizations have been involved in helping the League for Innovation engage community college faculty in the national conversation about student completion. The acknowledgements that follow are a small token of much greater thanks to the many educators, partners, and colleagues who contributed so much to the success of this project.

First and foremost, our deepest gratitude goes to the hundreds of faculty members who participated in Faculty Voices Project surveys, focus groups, discussion groups, and workshops; who shared their voices through video and blog posts; and who offered feedback on findings during and after presentations. Thank you for your honesty, your courage, your passion, and your commitment to the students whose lives you help change.

Thanks, also, to the community colleges that hosted site visits for discussion groups and workshops, and to the staff members at those colleges who assisted with recruitment and logistics.

Thank you to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for supporting this work, and to our partners in the project, Public Agenda and the National Center for Inquiry & Improvement (NCII), for their involvement. To Matt Leighninger, Nicole Cabral, David Schleifer, and the team at Public Agenda, and to Rob Johnstone and his team at NCII, many thanks for working with us to create tools for engaging faculty in this important national conversation and for helping with the analysis of what faculty told us.

Many thanks to the facilitators, consultants, advisors, and League Representatives whose experience, participation, and feedback enriched the project at every step along the way: Arleen Arnsparger, Allatia Harris, Marcia Pfeiffer, Louise Yarnall, Ron Baker, Mary Jane Robins, Ernest Lara, Terry O'Banion, Jean Conway, William Lamb, Edward Bonahue, Amy Bosley, Stephanie Bulger, Kurt Buttleman, Marcia Conston, Charles Cook, Reva Curry, Dawn DeWolf, Brad Donaldson, Christina Espinosa-Pieb, Karla Fisher, Michael Gavin, Lloyd Holmes, Judy Korb, Karen Miller, Mary Ellen O'Keeffe, Laurie Rancourt, Normah Salleh-Barone, Randy Weber, and Lori Zakel.

The League offers a special acknowledgement to Cynthia Wilson and Louise Yarnall, the writing team for this report.

Finally, a big thank you to the League staff for their support and assistance throughout the project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has been nearly a decade since research and policy reports called on the nation's open access colleges to increase the number of Americans completing college certificates and degrees. This national emphasis on completion was supported by research revealing that community college remedial courses were dead ends for many students (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010), and by critiques of college credentialing requirements that were characterized as convoluted and lacking a clear connection to gainful employment (Martorell & McFarlin, 2011). Subsequently, policymakers redesigned funding formulas to spur community colleges to improve their students' performance in completing programs, degrees, and credentials. Through private and government grants, institutions were encouraged to experiment with a wide array of programs to ensure that more students completed college (Weiss, Visher, & Wathington, 2010; Zachry Rutschow et al., 2011).

The completion movement represents a response to dramatic shifts in the nation's cultural demographics, rapid changes in employment options due to new technology, and persistent challenges in the K-12 educational system. In the early 21st century, community colleges have become the go-to sector of public education to address all these issues, and the national focus on completion is emblematic of the system's pivotal role. However, the college system is navigating its own challenges at the same time: declining state funding (Mitchell, Leachman, & Masterson, 2017; Seltzer, 2018); skyrocketing employee benefits costs (Desrochers & Kirshstein, 2014); expenses for postsecondary academic remediation exceeding $1.3 billion (Jimenez, Saragrad, Morales, & Thompson, 2016); and a startling number of students who live on the edge of survival (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017). Faculty are in a unique position to see how the collision between policy prescriptions and increasing demands on scarce public resources affects the morale of the community college organization and its students. They also are in the position to see a positive path forward and, with proper support, to lead the way.

In this report, the League for Innovation in the Community College (League), with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, presents the perspectives of the faculty who have been charged with implementing this ambitious nationwide improvement in college completion rates. The goal of this effort—called the Faculty Voices Project—is to cast a broad light on how community college faculty have experienced the completion movement and to present their insights about how to improve its implementation. Throughout this report, faculty describe how the focus on completion has changed both their institutions and their instructional roles, and how and why it continues to fall short at their colleges. And they express what can be done to improve the overall enterprise.

This report—based on 81 group discussions with 698 community college faculty members and two national surveys, in 2015 and 2017, respectively, of between 1,000 and 1,500 community college faculty each—encapsulates the key insights from the League's Faculty Voices Project. The findings from the discussion groups and surveys are summarized here as three faculty viewpoints, with the aim of bringing renewed focus and energy to the effort, particularly for the community college faculty, advisors, student services staff, and administrators doing the work. The three key faculty viewpoints covered in this report are as follows:

1. Faculty question the validity of completion data and the definition of completion, and show inconsistent awareness of institutional data on completion. Without better faculty engagement with such data and definitions, efforts to build an organizational strategy for improving student completion will lack a solid foundation. This study found conflicting views among faculty about the severity of the completion problem. In surveys, and particularly in the 2017 survey, faculty endorsed the need for greater effort around completion; in discussion groups, faculty questioned that need, saying students have a mix of learning goals, from taking a few courses for targeted enrichment to pursuing a credential over the long term. Ultimately, faculty want to ensure that the strong emphasis on student completion does not close off options for those, such as working adults, who come to the college specifically for focused, self-guided learning that does not include earning a certificate or degree.

2. Faculty find it challenging to manage student completion initiatives within the constraints of current college budgets and staffing models; these challenges become even more daunting due to the dearth of communication and collaboration in the college organizational culture. Faculty are aware that the faculty role is changing, with adjunct faculty teaching 58 percent of community college courses (CCCSE, 2014b). Nonetheless, they seek greater input into the redesign of the faculty job description—its expectations, the venues and technologies for professional development, and any new professional accountability measures. Faculty reported that the silos on their campuses—created by departmental divisions and different roles—have led to isolation, misunderstandings, misinformation, duplication of effort, and inefficient use of resources. To address such problems, they seek more inclusion and cross-department collaboration.

3. Faculty support integration of the three programmatic approaches presented in the Choicework Discussion Starter* to foster student completion, but criticize the lack of resources for developing professional implementation strategies, and they raise caution about cookie-cutter solutions.

- **Approach A. *Increase student accountability:*** Faculty believe holding students accountable for their own learning is a critical factor in student completion, but advocate for more services and coaching to help students manage their studies, finances, and lives. Believing students need to take more responsibility for planning their education, faculty called for better methods to help students develop practical strategies for understanding and exercising the level of commitment needed to persist in higher education.

- **Approach B. *Support instructional improvement:*** Faculty recognize that they need to teach in more engaging ways to foster student completion, but say institutional support for professional development needs to be expanded from current levels to improve instruction. Faculty need to adjust their instruction to support the diverse students they teach, but they described many organizational barriers to doing this, such as lack of funding and program structures for innovative instruction, team teaching, and peer support. Such organizational barriers have a deflating effect on faculty morale.

- **Approach C. *Implement guided pathways*:** Faculty agree that colleges can support student completion by offering guided pathways to graduation and careers through clearer websites, course requirements, support strategies, and job opportunities, but they caution against cookie-cutter approaches. They note that programs need to find ways to support students' early career exploration activities better, so that students are choosing paths that reflect their own interests and talents as well as local job market demands.

*These three approaches are featured in the Choicework Discussion Starter developed for the project by Public Agenda for use in project discussion groups with faculty. They are not exclusive, but are used in the process to launch a broader conversation. See page 12 for a description of the Choicework process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on faculty survey results and discussion group findings, the League developed a set of recommendations for community college leaders, policymakers and other influencers, and community college faculty. Making decisions in community college management is challenging in an era of rising costs and decreasing funding, but these recommendations provide insight into the choices that will sustain faculty commitment to the college completion effort. The feedback from faculty indicates that they think it is time for community college leaders and policymakers to revise their approach from primarily focusing on budget management to reinventing the organizational culture. From the faculty perspective, organizational reinvention would be better facilitated by allocating more resources toward organizational collaboration and communication processes. These processes can improve organizational efficiency by drawing on the creativity and expertise of faculty.

Community College Leaders

- ***Use data as a catalyst for discussions about student success and completion.*** Be transparent with the data about student retention and completion rates, and share it with the college so it may be explored at the course, department, program, and campus levels. Engage the entire college in an ongoing conversation with a goal to understand completion across the institution, to identify gaps and challenges the data reveal, and to design solutions to any problems that are identified.

- ***Use communication and collaboration intentionally and often to engage faculty in research, planning, and decision making around programming and resource allocation in teaching and learning.*** Establish a practice of regular, frequent, collegewide conversations, and use these dialogues to break down silos and create a culture of inclusion. Create a communications plan around the college's big ideas, such as completion, that uses a variety of media, tracks ongoing progress, retains consistent messaging, and helps individuals see the big picture.

- ***Develop and implement processes that support faculty efforts to improve teaching, learning, and student success***. For all faculty—both full-time and part-time—budget for and provide relevant and sustainable professional development and resources to implement newly learned strategies, and tie professional development to college goals and student success data. These

supportive processes must include adjunct faculty, who are responsible for teaching most community college courses. This means finding creative ways to allocate more adjunct faculty time to professional development rather than only to classroom teaching.

Policymakers and Other Influencers

- ***Consider the behaviors that policies incentivize.*** Spend time understanding the implications of the choices and decisions under study. For example, policies that incentivize completion may lead to faculty concerns over the possible degradation of academic standards. When making decisions about federal financial support, consider the kinds of assistance students need beyond paying for tuition, fees, and books—particularly students who live with housing and food insecurity.

- ***Consider the consequences of unfunded mandates.*** The national emphasis on completion has been implemented at a time when state funding is declining for community colleges. An increasing number of states are shifting to performance-based funding formulas that require colleges to improve completion, and these formulas need to be designed with an understanding of the ongoing costs of completion programs—programs that require investment. Otherwise, as student enrollments decline and programming costs increase, administrators may feel they are forced to balance their budgets by hiring fewer full-time faculty, cutting professional development, and increasing workloads. It is important to question whether these are the best options for student success and completion.

- ***Support cross-sector partnerships.*** Supporting efforts that help ease transitions between secondary schools and community colleges, and between community colleges and four-year institutions or jobs, can ensure that students are well prepared at each point on the continuum. A decreased need for college-level academic remediation will lead to significant cost savings for students and taxpayers.

- ***Support professional development as an organizational improvement strategy.*** Developing instructional resources to the fullest potential is a wise investment in the organization. Policies that support professional development can help the college improve employee productivity and satisfaction, achieve its strategic goals, and fulfill its mission. This is challenging, but continued investment in professional development will contribute to engaging faculty commitment to the completion agenda.

Faculty

- ***Learn about course, department, and college completion data.*** Improving awareness of the completion challenge should be the first step toward any faculty member's understanding of what needs to change in a college and its organizational culture to increase completion rates. But this is only a first step. Analyze and evaluate the data for use in informing decisions about teaching and learning, courses and programs, and college services to support students, and learn from the story told by the data over time.

- ***Participate in campuswide dialogues, expressing personal and professional opinions, and describing experiences*** while listening to and learning from the diversity of opinions and experiences in the conversations. Use processes, such as the Choicework discussion structure, to hold cross-department dialogues. Effect change from inside the department and college. Break down silos by connecting intentionally with colleagues in other disciplines and departments. Partner with leadership, and be a leader.

- ***Find new ways to take ownership of personal professional development by investing in self-directed study and experimentation with new teaching techniques***. Community college faculty must remain current in their content discipline while keeping up with the latest research in effective teaching and learning practices. Learn about new instructional methods and strategies, and engage students in the process of experimentation with and evaluation and revision of them.

UNTAPPED LEADERS: Faculty and the Challenge of Student Completion

In the early 2000s, research and policy reports focused attention on the need to increase the number of Americans completing college credentials and degrees to obtain good jobs in the changing global economy. Attention zeroed in on the nation's open-access colleges, which educate almost half of America's undergraduates.

Studies revealed how community college remedial courses led to dead ends for many students, and how too many students were swirling aimlessly through college without a clear path into better jobs (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Martorell & McFarlin, 2011). Colleges were encouraged to take a good look at how many of their students were completing programs, degrees, and credentials, often to sobering effect. Based on this research, foundations and advocacy groups mounted a wide array of programs aimed at community colleges to ensure more students complete college (Weiss, Visher, & Wathington, 2010; Zachry Rutschow et al., 2011).

However, from the first days that this policy agenda splashed onto the pages of research reports and foundation manifestos, the League for Innovation in the Community College (League) noticed that although politicians, foundation officers, association directors, and community college presidents were actively involved in this robust national completion conversation, other voices, particularly those of faculty, were missing.

The completion movement represents a response to dramatic shifts in the nation's cultural demographics, rapid changes in employment options due to new technology, and persistent challenges in the K-12 educational system. In the early 21st century, community colleges have become the go-to sector of public education to address all these issues, and the national focus on completion is emblematic of the system's pivotal role. However, the college system is navigating its own challenges at the same time: declining state funding (Mitchell, Leachman, & Masterson, 2017; Seltzer, 2018); rising employee benefits costs (Desrochers & Kirshstein, 2014); expenses for postsecondary academic remediation exceeding $1.3 billion (Jimenez, Saragrad, Morales, & Thompson, 2016); and a startling number of students who live on the edge of survival (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017). Faculty are well positioned to see how the collision between policy prescriptions and increasing demands on scarce public resources affects the morale of the community college organization and its students. They also are in the position to see a positive path forward and, with proper support, to lead the way.

Believing it was time to take stock of the faculty perspective if this important work were to succeed, the League, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, launched the Faculty Voices Project in 2014. The project's goals were to engage community college faculty in the national completion conversation and to hear from faculty their perspectives of what works in the classroom and across the college to facilitate student success and completion. The project team found that faculty have keen perceptions of the national focus on completion and its manifestation at their colleges as they shared insights on what it would take for this effort to make a difference in the lives of students and the life of the college. In this report, faculty describe how the focus on completion has changed both their institutions and their instructional roles. They discuss how completion as a national priority continues to fall short at their institutions and why. And they express what can be done to improve the overall enterprise.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct this inquiry, the League assembled a team that conducted two national community college faculty surveys, one in 2015 (1,000 respondents) and a second in 2017 (1,573 respondents), and 81 discussion groups with 698 community college faculty members from 2015 through 2017.

Surveys

Sample and recruitment procedures. All respondents to both surveys were drawn from an opt-in list of 31,731 community college faculty, which was purchased from Dun and Bradstreet in 2014. Emails including a survey link were sent to all the names on the list. The 2015 questionnaire was administered over three weeks in fall 2015. The 2015 survey was closed after the first 1,000 faculty responded (3 percent response rate); respondents represented 46 states and 1 territory (see Table 1 for detailed demographics and background characteristics). The 2017 questionnaire was administered over four weeks in fall 2017. The 2017 survey drew 1,573 respondents (5 percent response rate), but after removing incomplete or contradictory responses, the final sample was 1,179. Respondents to the 2017 survey represented 46 states.

Protocol. The two different surveys, one in 2015 and one in 2017, were designed for the project in partnership with Public Agenda, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that conducts public opinion research and engagement. Both surveys collected data on faculty demographics, experience, and full-time or part-time status (see Table 1). The 28-item 2015 questionnaire gathered information about faculty perceptions of the completion

TABLE 1

CHARACTERISTICS of Faculty Respondents

		2015	2017
FACULTY	FULL TIME	(678) 68%	(782) 66%
	PART TIME	(322) 32%	(397) 34%
AGE	50+	65%	68%
	UNDER 50	32%	28%
	DECLINE TO STATE	3%	4%
TEACHING (current college)	> 10 YEARS	59%	69%
	6-10 YEARS	24%	24%
	3-5 YEARS	15%	7%
	1-2 YEARS	2%	—
	< 1 YEAR	1%	—
ETHNICITY	WHITE/ASIAN	80%	78%
	URP*	12%	13%
	DECLINE TO STATE	8%	10%
GENDER	MALE	36%	39%
	FEMALE	59%	51%
	OTHER	—	1%
	DECLINE TO STATE	5%	10%

* URP = Underrepresented populations: non-White or non-Asian. The majority of respondents indicated White (78% in 2015 and 75% in 2017); 2% of faculty indicated Asian in 2015 and 3% indicated Asian in 2017. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

rates at their colleges, the levels of use and effectiveness of completion-focused strategies and initiatives, professional development support for completion-focused teaching, and level of personal participation in collegewide completion efforts. The 28-item 2017 questionnaire asked faculty about their perceptions of the importance of and challenges related to student completion, the degree of respect given to faculty members' ideas, the efficacy of college leaders in engaging faculty in completion efforts, the processes for faculty engagement, the level of faculty engagement in completion efforts, and the strategies faculty favor for supporting college completion.

Analysis. Summary descriptive statistics were tabulated for both surveys. This report does not reference all survey items; however, summary tables are available for both surveys at www.league.org/projects-facultyvoices.

Discussion Groups

Sample and recruitment procedures. Email, telephone, and face-to-face outreach to college administrators and professional development leaders at League member and non-member colleges took place on a rolling basis from April 2015 to August 2017. Ultimately, 23 colleges in 14 states (see Table 2) agreed to participate, with sessions scheduled at different points in the academic year according to college needs or convenience; some were offered as an activity during convocation days or faculty professional development days, and others were offered as faculty activities during the academic term. In addition, the League publicized sessions to be held at three of its national conferences in 2015, the Innovations Conference held in Boston, Massachusetts, and the Learning Summit and STEM*tech* Conference, both held in Phoenix, Arizona. Together, these recruitment activities led to a sample of convenience of 698 community college faculty members; most participants were full-time faculty.

TABLE 2

DISCUSSION GROUP COLLEGE SITES BY STATE

Protocol. Public Agenda designed a discussion group process for the project based on its Choicework discussion methodology. This approach guides facilitators in drawing out the different perspectives of small groups (typically 10-15) of people on a public issue by presenting three different approaches to addressing the issue and taking a soft vote on which of the three approaches most resonates with session participants. The facilitator then engages each member of the group in discussing the reasons for supporting one or more of the approaches, or for introducing other approaches. During the final 30 minutes of the two-hour conversation, participants jointly summarize the discussion in four areas: (1) common ground; (2) concerns and disagreements; (3) outstanding questions; and (4) next steps. The facilitator documents these summary points made by participants. For this study, Public Agenda developed the Choicework Discussion Starter, *Expanding Opportunity for All: How Can We Improve Community*

College Student Completion? (Public Agenda, 2015a) which presents three approaches identified from the literature (Public Agenda, 2015b) as promising for improving student completion in community colleges:

> APPROACH A
> "Empower students and hold them accountable for completing their degrees."
> (Public Agenda, 2015a, p. 3)
>
> APPROACH B
> "Begin by improving teaching and learning, and completion will follow."
> (Public Agenda, 2015a, p. 4)
>
> APPROACH C
> "Create clear pathways to guide students to completion."
> (Public Agenda, 2015a, p. 5)

For convenience, the three approaches are shortened in this report to Student Accountability, Instructional Improvement, and Guided Pathways, respectively. (See www.league.org/node/17479 to view or download *Expanding Opportunity for All* and a toolkit for its use.)

In the Choicework process used in this project, these three approaches were not presented as exclusive, but as a way to start the conversation; participants were encouraged to introduce other approaches into the discussion. Other approaches that frequently emerged are included in the findings. A team of five experienced facilitators participated in a workshop on the Choicework discussion group method and then dispatched from April 2015 to October 2017 to conduct the Faculty Voices discussion groups. At the conclusion of each session, the facilitator sent the discussion summaries to the League's project director.

Analysis. The project director initially synthesized themes from all the summaries and then reviewed these themes with the other four facilitation team members using an iterative, thematic review approach (Stake, 1995). To check these interpretations, a researcher from SRI Education entered data from the focus group summaries into Dedoose qualitative coding software. The researcher defined five high-level codes (see Table 3).

TABLE 3

High-Level Codes

1. Faculty knowledge of completion data
2. Faculty views of institutional supports for the three completion strategies (student accountability, instructional improvement, and guided pathways)
3. Faculty views of institutional barriers to any or all of the three completion strategies
4. Faculty reasons for endorsing any or all of the three completion strategies
5. Faculty suggestions for college system improvement

FINDINGS

The project sought to engage community college faculty in the national conversation about completion, and to uncover faculty perspectives about what works in the classroom and across the college to facilitate student success and completion. To present the identified faculty perspectives, project findings are summarized as the three primary faculty viewpoints of the community college completion movement that emerged through analysis of both the survey and discussion group data. Each faculty viewpoint includes (1) an overall statement of findings; (2) a summary of available supporting evidence of faculty viewpoints from the surveys and discussion groups; and (3) recommended implementation strategies and techniques.

FACULTY VIEWPOINT 1

Faculty question the validity of completion data and the definition of completion, and show inconsistent awareness of institutional data on completion.

Summary Statement of Findings

In the 2015 survey, most faculty, both full-time and adjunct, estimated that about half of their students "earned a certificate or degree or transferred." While this estimate is notably higher than some studies of college completion, it is consistent with other studies (see box on page 15). The two surveys queried faculty views differently about the urgency to improve completion; therefore, direct comparison of responses is not possible. Responses indicate that perceptions of the need to improve the completion rate were mixed in the 2015 survey, and were strongly positive in the 2017 survey. In discussion groups, faculty raised questions about the prominent policy emphasis on completion in community colleges. They pressed for clear definitions of completion and related terms, such as success and retention, and they questioned whether these definitions were relevant to their students. In discussion group summaries, faculty characterized their awareness of completion data as low and provided their perspectives on the institutional barriers to, and supports for, faculty being better informed about completion data. In addition to expressing skepticism about the definition of completion in discussion groups, faculty reported not having access to completion data. They were skeptical of data they had seen and wanted to learn more about it. They wanted to know how their college data compared to community colleges with a similar profile. They raised specific questions, such as what percentage of underprepared students don't complete and what reasons are given for leaving community colleges by both prepared and underprepared students.

Summary of Supporting Evidence

Survey. In the 2015 survey, 57 percent of all community college faculty surveyed for this report said they believed that about half or more of the students at their college completed a degree or credential or transferred (see Figure 1). This estimate is consistent with some studies but not others (see box).

Faculty views of the adequacy of current student completion rates were queried differently in the two surveys. In the 2015 survey, faculty were asked to estimate how many of their students who wanted to earn a certificate or degree or transfer achieved that goal. Only 43 percent of all faculty (full-time and part-time combined) reported that they felt "too few" students completed, 37 percent reported "about the right number" completed, and 19 percent reported not knowing (see Figure 2). Differences between full-time faculty and part-time faculty responses were noteworthy. Many more full-time faculty (49 percent) than part-time faculty (29 percent) reported that too few students earned a degree or certificate or transferred. Twenty-nine percent of part-time faculty as compared to only 14 percent of full-time faculty reported "not knowing" student completion rates. However, in the 2017 survey, faculty were asked to rate the importance of improving

Faculty Perceptions and Completion Rate Studies

Faculty estimate is too high: Shapiro et al. (2016) report that the six-year completion rate of students who start and finish their studies at the same campus is 39 percent—a figure lower than faculty estimates in this project. Further, a study comparing the "same campus" six-year completion rates of different demographic groups found significant differences, with 45.1 percent of White students and 43.8 percent of Asian students completing programs compared to only 33 percent of Hispanic students and 25.8 percent of Black students (Shapiro et al., 2017). Research reports low overall six-year success rates among community college transfer students, too, with only 16 percent completing a degree at a four-year institution within six years (Shapiro et al., 2016). Such data have been cited to focus attention on the need to provide additional support for student completion, particularly for low-income, underrepresented minority students.

Faculty estimate is accurate: However, when researchers analyzed the completion data to focus on students who started their studies at one college but finished at another college, the six-year completion rate rose to 55 percent (Shapiro et al., 2016)—a figure more consistent with faculty perceptions in this project. (Note: Researchers could not disaggregate these data by race and ethnicity because of the lack of consistency in how demographic data have been collected over time.) Also, consistent with faculty perceptions that a subset of their students are not degree-seeking, the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study estimated that 8 percent of entering community college students during the 2007-2008 academic year had already completed their bachelor's degrees (Koeppel, 2012).

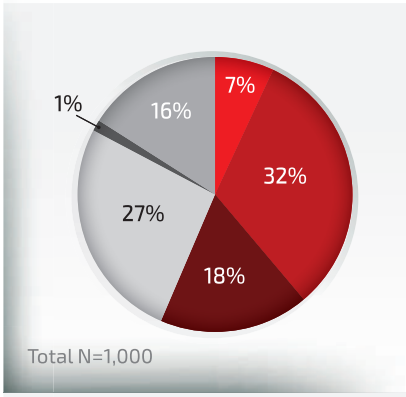
1. Faculty Perceptions of Student Completion at Their College

As far as you know, how many of the students at your college earn a certificate or degree or transfer?

(2015 Survey, Q4)

- All or nearly all
- More than half
- About half
- Less than half
- Hardly any or none
- Don't know

FIGURE 1



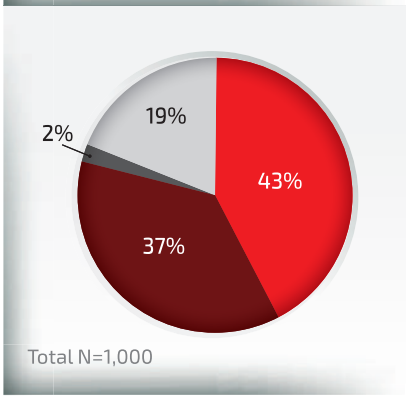
2. Faculty Perceptions of Their Students' Completion

Thinking of your students who wanted to earn a certificate or degree or transfer, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

(2015 Survey, Q5)

- Too few of them earned a certificate or degree or transferred.
- About the right number of them earned a certificate or degree or transferred.
- Too many of them earned a certificate or degree or transferred.
- Don't Know

FIGURE 2



Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

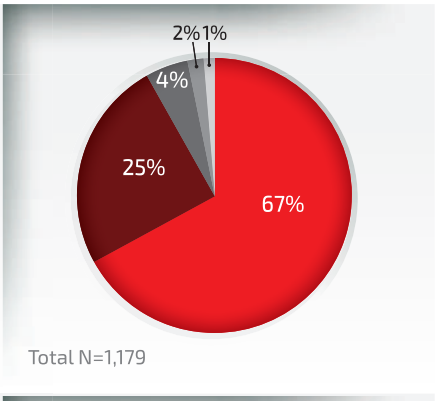
3. Importance to Faculty of Increasing Student Completion

How important is it to you for your college to increase the percentage of students who earn a certificate or degree or who transfer?

(2017 Survey, QE1)

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not too important
- Not important at all
- Don't know

FIGURE 3



4. Faculty Interest in Completion Initiatives

Which of the following statements comes closest to your views? If I heard my college is planning to implement an initiative to increase the percentage of students who earn a certificate or degree or transfer,...

(2017 Survey, QE2)

- I would be excited for a new opportunity to help students.
- It would be hard for me to be excited because I've seen too many initiatives come and go without follow through.
- Don't know

FIGURE 4

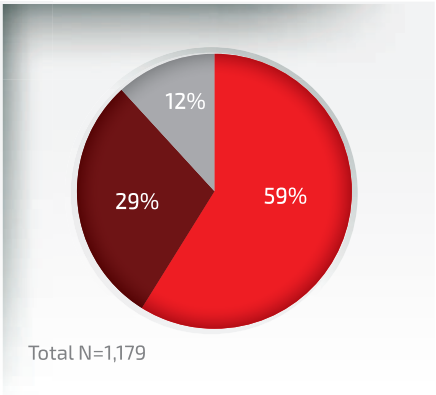


Figure 4: In survey administration, Items were randomized to reduce response bias by presentation order; "Don't know" was always last. Each respondent responded to all items.

completion rates. In response, 67 percent of all faculty rated improving completion rates of degree, credential, or transfer as "very important" (see Figure 3) and 59 percent reported they would be "excited" to support completion initiatives to help students (see Figure 4).

Discussion groups. In discussion groups, faculty raised questions about how completion was defined and how it related to the mission of the community college. They also discussed their lack of access to completion data at their colleges.

Who is defining completion?

"What is completion? What does it mean?... What is success?"

Discussion facilitators heard from faculty that, in order for the national completion movement to be embraced at open-access institutions, an appropriate definition of completion that is consistent with the institutional mission is needed. Faculty questioned not only how completion is defined but also who is defining it. Within the college, they considered how their colleagues look at completion from different perspectives: A faculty member might think of completion at the course level while a department chair or director focuses on completion at the program level; an academic or workforce vice president examines reports on collegewide completion of credentials and transfer rates, while an advisor thinks in terms of students completing personal goals. The perplexity in defining completion is exemplified by one faculty member's repeated, earnest questions: "What is completion? What does it mean?... What is completion? What is success?"

How does the completion focus align with the goals of community college students?

Students' notions of completion can also vary, as faculty pointed out the difference between, "I'm here to get my associate's degree, then transfer to the university" and "I'm just here to get my basics." They rejected a narrow definition of credential completion with comments like, "Many of our students come to us not wanting a degree" and "Many of our students just want to take one or two classes." Some called for community college definitions of completion that allow for the noncompletion goals of students. Given that many community college students have work, family, and other life responsibilities that can impede their progress toward a credential or transfer, faculty suggested the need for what one described as "a new definition of success" that includes realistic expectations about time to completion.

How does the prioritization of completion relate to the historic community college mission?

Faculty sought clear answers from their state, district, and college administrators on how community colleges' historic commitment to access for all is shifting to emphasize completion and program retention, asking questions such as, "What is the overall, actual

"Are we more interested in completion or enrollment?"

mission of the college?" and "Are we more interested in completion or enrollment?" One faculty member explained that, "Education at the community college has a two-fold intent—preparing for personal [life] and preparing for professional life." Faculty also raised questions about the negative tone in media and policy discourse, which they believe appears to ignore the positive societal achievements of community colleges toward college completion, workforce preparation, and other goals. They asked, "Can we ever correct the national perception of what community colleges do?" and "Why not hear good news regularly?"

What is driving the completion movement? How do faculty learn about completion data?

"Is there a tool that can be put in place to allow faculty to access data about student outcomes?"

In discussion groups, a frequent refrain was, "We hear the completion statistics once a year at convocation, then they are not mentioned again." Further discussion revealed that faculty often don't know where to find the completion rates for the college or for their own classes. A major theme emerging from the qualitative analysis characterized faculty awareness of completion data as low and reflected their perspectives on the institutional barriers to, and supports for, faculty developing greater knowledge of completion data. Faculty desired improvements in access to completion data, asking questions such as, "Is there a tool that can be put in place to allow faculty to access data about student outcomes?" Some faculty comments addressed poor communication of completion data by college leaders, such as, "They are afraid to share data as it will make us look bad or isn't consistent" and "Our college has completion rates and retention rates. We do not have data sharing."

Faculty Recommendations

Concerned that the national completion agenda was established by external agents outside the community college context, faculty requested a definition of completion tailored for community colleges and, more specifically, for their local community college. Along with this, they called for creating a clear, local definition of student success that considers student goals.

"Where's the data and other information about student progress and programs?"

They emphasized the need for increased faculty access to and awareness of student completion data, asking questions such as: "Where's the data and other information about student progress and programs?" "Should we look at individual programs differently from one another?" "What percentage of underprepared students don't complete?" and "Why don't students complete? Are we asking them? Do we know?"

Faculty stressed their need for more information about program completion data and the college's student completion initiatives, and wondered what plans are in place to address issues revealed through data analysis as well as how changes based on data can be best achieved with available resources. Faculty asked for system improvements to promote transparency, communication, and collaboration around data, requesting clarity on "what's behind the statistics and data," the types of support services students use, and the ways student success is measured.

TABLE 4

Faculty Suggestions for Next Steps:
Defining Completion

- Define completion and student success in the community college context, and be transparent about who is creating these definitions.
- Increase faculty awareness of the college's completion goals and of initiatives to support achieving those goals.
- Identify and overcome barriers to faculty awareness of and access to data.
- Support faculty access to and knowledge of data on student completion and on the status of the college's completion initiatives.
- Act on data the college has, such as courses with high failure rates.
- Facilitate faculty collaboration with academic advisors and others to support completion initiatives.
- Clarify how completion relates to college mission.

FACULTY VIEWPOINT 2

Faculty find it challenging to manage student completion initiatives within the constraints of current college budgets and staffing models; these challenges become even more daunting due to the dearth of communication and collaboration in the college organizational culture.

Summary Statement of Findings

Faculty sought more campuswide collaboration around completion initiatives, and indicated they have addressed completion issues at the student and classroom levels more than through participation in large-scale, collegewide efforts. In the 2017 survey, 63 percent of respondents reported participating in instructional reforms focused on active learning, nearly a third reported that they participated in initiatives that help students connect to the college community, and 19 percent reported that they were involved with initiatives that help students

with nonacademic supports such as child care, food, housing, and transportation. In the 2015 survey, only 15 percent of faculty reported participating in collegewide completion initiatives. Faculty cited both a lack of information and a lack of time as factors limiting their involvement in such completion efforts. Beyond that, faculty indicated that problems of communication along with a lack of support within their colleges and with other levels of education were factors inhibiting their participation.

In discussion group summaries, faculty often made comments related to system improvements, particularly those that support communication, collaboration, inclusion, and transparency. Community college faculty expressed a desire for more ways to communicate about issues across college departments and different levels of the education system in their region (such as with K-12 schools and four-year colleges). They said they wanted to see more consistent, clear leadership and college management around completion. They described their work settings as a collection of silos: faculty in different academic disciplines rarely talking with each other, and faculty and advisors rarely communicating with one another. Believing that completion represents a large and collaborative effort, they noted that more campus coordination is needed. Faculty also said that demands on faculty time are increasing, particularly as the numbers and proportion of full-time faculty decrease. They explained that budget cuts mean fewer full-time faculty share the workload, and fewer advisors meet with students. A recurring refrain in discussion groups was, "We are trying to do more with less." Faculty said the increasing demands make the work they deem important more difficult: conversations with students and colleagues, reflection, growth, and change.

Summary of Supporting Evidence

Survey. In the 2017 survey, 91 percent of all participating faculty reported that full-time faculty should have significant influence on deciding the best ways to increase student completion—a rate higher than that faculty gave department chairs (72 percent) and deans (68 percent) (see Figure 5). In the 2015 survey, only 15 percent of faculty reported participating in a collegewide success committee (see Figure 6), and, in the 2017 survey, only 11 percent reported being involved in comprehensive completion initiatives that blend both academic supports for instructional reform and advising and nonacademic supports, such as childcare, housing, and transportation (see Figure 7). Although these results suggest many faculty feel disengaged from larger institutional completion initiatives, they reported working toward completion at the individual classroom level. In the 2017 survey, 63 percent of faculty reported engaging in classroom-based teaching reforms and 49 percent reported involvement in providing students with academic support outside the classroom, such as tutoring or mentoring (see Figure 7). Faculty indicated they support nonacademic efforts, too. Nineteen percent reported participating in initiatives to help students with nonacademic supports (e.g., child care, food, housing, transportation), and 32 percent reported participating in initiatives, such as student organizations, that help students connect to the college community (see Figure 7). Of those who said they had not participated in any completion initiatives, 49 percent reported not hearing of any opportunities to participate and 31 percent reported lacking sufficient time to participate (see Figure 8).

FIGURE 5

Total N=1,179

Increasing Completion: Who Influencers Should Be

At your college, who SHOULD have significant influence on deciding the best ways to increase the percentage of students who earn a certificate or degree or transfer? Please select all that apply.

(2017 Survey, QE17)

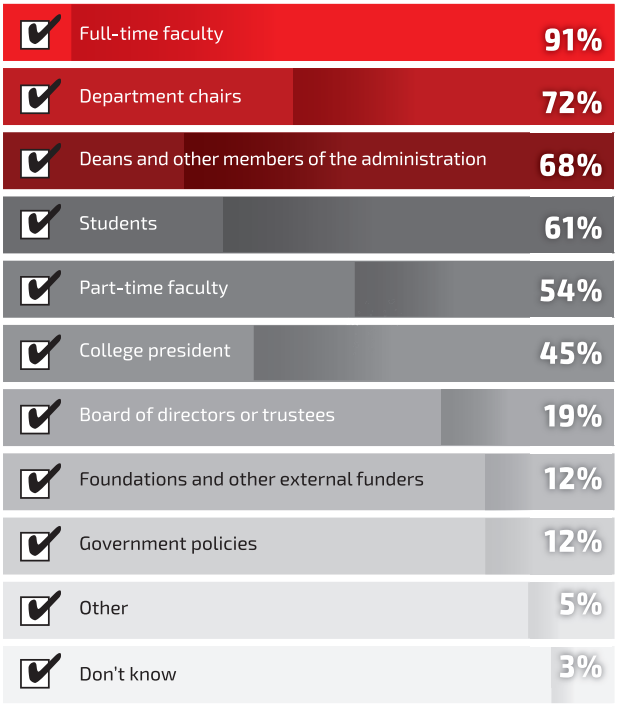


FIGURE 6

Faculty Membership on Collegewide Completion Committees

Total N=1,000

Are you a member of a collegewide steering committee that is focused on helping students earn a certificate or degree or transfer?

(2015 Survey, Q18b)

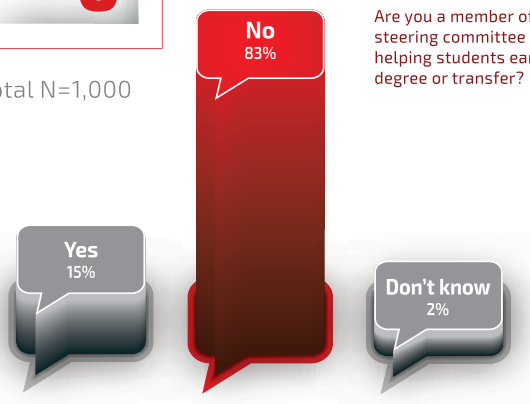
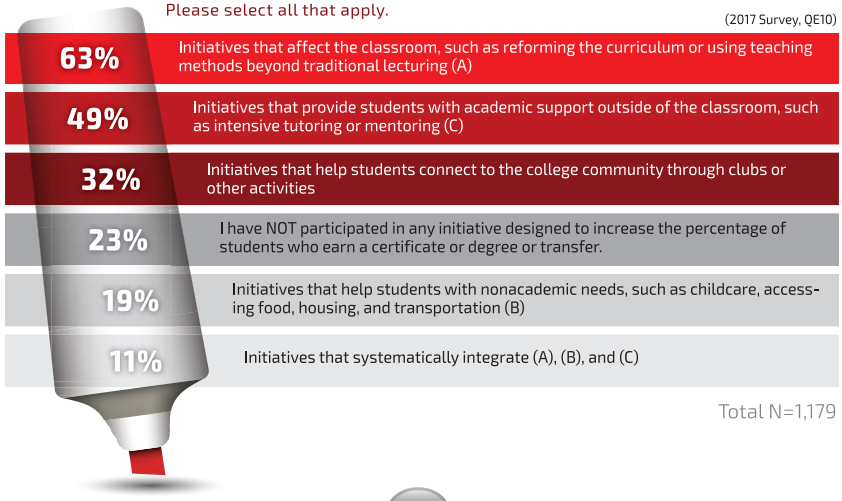


FIGURE 7

Faculty Involvement in Certain Types of Completion Initiatives

Have you ever been involved in any of the following types of initiatives designed to increase the percentage of students who earn a certificate or degree or transfer? Please select all that apply.

(2017 Survey, QE10)



Total N=1,179

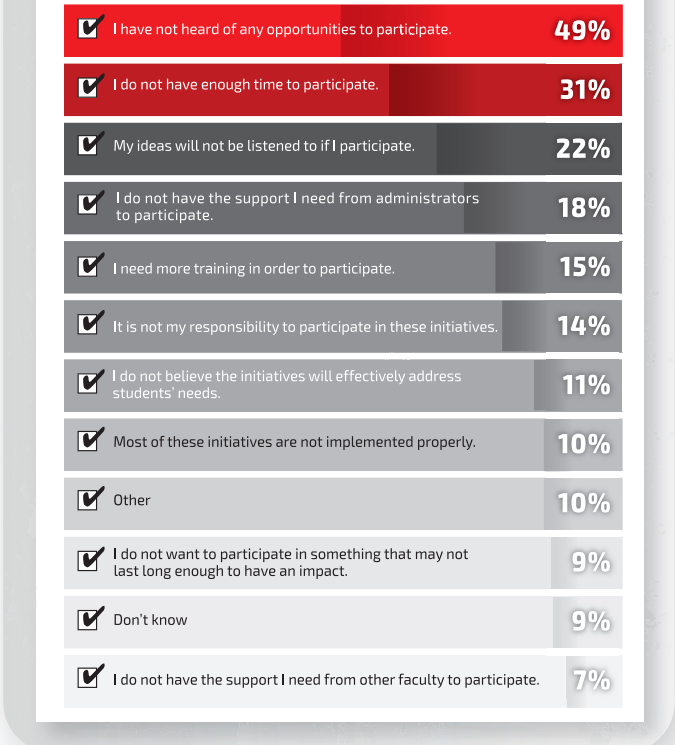
FIGURE 8

Total N=268

Faculty Reasons for Not Participating in Completion Initiatives

Please indicate which, if any, of the following describes why you have not participated in an initiative to increase the percentage of students who earn a certificate or degree or transfer. Please select all that apply.

(2017 Survey, QE15)



Discussion groups. In discussion groups, faculty noted several key systemic challenges and barriers to coordination and collaboration.

> "Clear and consistent articulation agreements would be a wonderful thing."

Large institutional systems have poor organizational coordination that results in gaps in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable students. Faculty described the systems in which they do their work as large, impersonal, and resource-constrained. They described gaps in support for their most vulnerable students. For example, faculty linked tuition increases with more students working outside of school, with resulting negative effects on class attendance and homework completion. They described students who struggle with basic necessities with statements such as, "Students are not succeeding because of many out-of-class issues."

Faculty see various gaps in the ways colleges and other levels of the educational system fail to support student success. For example, they cited problems with cross-institutional agreements, such as when students graduate from K-12 districts unprepared to do college-level work, or when community college graduates go on to four-year institutions that decline to accept transfer credits. As one faculty member said, "Clear and consistent articulation agreements would be a wonderful thing."

Faculty report disconnections between departments, between faculty and administration, between faculty and advising staff, and between advising staff and students. For example, faculty noted that many of their least prepared students were unaware of supplemental services at colleges. Faculty also admitted their own detachment from the college departments that provide such services, with one acknowledging, "Student services is foreign to me." They described campuses of siloed departments that duplicate efforts. One faculty member explained that at her college, "The bigger we've gotten, the more evident the silos are. Within the academic branch, it's 'CTE' and 'transfer' and also 'continuing education,' as opposed to thinking of this whole umbrella of positive services we provide to the community that supports us." Faculty noted that the silos also "blur the big picture" in ways that inhibit transparency and lead to confusion, misunderstanding, and disconnection.

> "The bigger we've gotten, the more evident the silos are. Within the academic branch, it's 'CTE' and 'transfer' and also 'continuing education,' as opposed to thinking of this whole umbrella of positive services we provide to the community that supports us."

Reform takes place in a top-down, piecemeal manner without adequate faculty input on design. Faculty said they wanted to be involved in decisions that help students learn and succeed; however, they reported that many of these decisions are made in a "top-down" manner. They said that although administrators ask for their input, the underlying message is, "We really don't want to hear from you; we're just checking faculty off the list." Often, faculty said, decisions have already been made before their input is sought, and their concerns and opinions are not heard or valued. As one faculty member

"The college keeps changing programs and approaches. We can't expect persistence from students if we don't show it ourselves."

explained, "We need a greater sense of trust, respect, and openness at the college." Faculty perceived new initiatives and activities happening informally rather than strategically, describing efforts as "piecemeal" or "happening a little here and a little there." As faculty described their colleges, they saw in college decisions and practices "nothing coherent" and "no string pulling it all together." Faculty viewed their colleges and college leaders as having "no sense of being strategic at all," an observation reflected again and again in comments about "flavor-of-the-month syndrome" and "initiative fatigue."

One discussion group participant noted the impact that such a lack of strategic commitment can have on students: "The college keeps changing programs and approaches. We can't expect persistence from students if we don't show it ourselves." Faculty expressed a sense of lost opportunity when describing promising initiatives launched with great fanfare and excitement, but abandoned well before full implementation. One faculty member said, "We don't think far enough ahead. We may have to suck it up for a year or two" before seeing results. Another said, "We go through another trend each and every year. … It's always another rabbit chase. Give it another year so we can make it work. We're always reactive." They were frustrated not only by the number of pilot programs, projects, and initiatives they could list that fell into this category, but also by a perception of wasted resources that could have been used more effectively to support student success.

A mechanistic view of faculty predominates: Administrative emphasis on data and reliance on adjunct faculty reflect the problem. Faculty perceived the administrative view of their role as a reductionist one: "a warm body in a classroom." Their skepticism of a push for "data" in decision making stemmed from this perspective, with comments such as, "Faculty don't see data about student success or what's working at the college" and "The data we see doesn't relate to us." They described data as reflecting "too much focus on easier things to measure." They also pointed to administrative reliance on adjunct faculty and the lack of thoughtful onboarding, with adjunct faculty often hired less than a week before classes begin, giving them little time or opportunity to prepare. One faculty member said, "We used to have three full-time people and we each mentored adjuncts. Now I have ten adjuncts and there's no one there to mentor them." Another said of adjunct faculty, "They come, teach, and then leave. Even if there are opportunities, the adjuncts don't have time for them, and this deprives students of the benefits they would have gotten had [the adjunct faculty] been able to participate." In discussion groups, faculty described adjunct faculty as isolated because of policies that limit their engagement in department, college, and professional

"We used to have three full-time people and we each mentored adjuncts. Now I have ten adjuncts and there's no one there to mentor them."

development activities. Faculty said it is not unusual for adjunct faculty to teach at multiple campuses just to earn enough to live under current rules limiting their work time. They noted that this leads to a mechanistic, inhumane approach to the front-line professionals that does not serve students well. One discussion group participant talked about the rootless quality of adjunct faculty work as an "everywhere life."

Faculty Recommendations

Noting that everyone at the college is involved in the work of helping students succeed, with no single group solely responsible for student retention and completion, faculty called for greater organizational connection and dialogue at all levels. They asked for more opportunities for faculty to connect beyond the one-day convocations and infrequent professional development sessions each term. They called for better connections among advisors, faculty, and students to bring a more personalized approach to supporting the most vulnerable students. Faculty also expressed a greater desire for college leadership to engage them in decision-making around how to implement completion as a priority. They support opportunities to "customize" and "localize" the national completion movement at their colleges. They said a more unified approach at the college or campus level would lead to more efficient progress and more creative and effective solutions. They recommended forums for "closing the loop" on new reform initiatives by setting a schedule for reporting data on the results and status of various initiatives around completion and other college priorities. Faculty also sought more settings through which they can express concerns, ask questions, and offer suggestions, which included meetings of the faculty senate, professional development advisory council, department and division, and faculty union. Faculty favored greater coordination with student services and adding specific methods and tools for faculty-to-student communication around student support resources.

TABLE 5

Faculty Suggestions for Next Steps:
System Improvements

- Increase opportunities for dialogue.
- Improve communication between administration and faculty.
- Offer opportunities for interdisciplinary and cross-college collaboration.
- Support faculty ability to connect students to academic and nonacademic resources.
- Provide opportunities for faculty to raise concerns, offer suggestions, or ask questions.
- Share data about initiative results.

FACULTY VIEWPOINT 3

Faculty support the three programmatic approaches presented in the Choicework Discussion Starter to foster student completion, but criticize the lack of resources for developing professional implementation strategies and raise caution about cookie-cutter solutions.

Summary Statement of Findings

When considering the faculty participants' perspectives on the three approaches to improving student completion, it first helps to understand what they said about the contributing causes of noncompletion. In surveys, faculty attributed poor student completion rates to students' lack of time-management skills and academic preparedness, and to students' challenges with life and work responsibilities. Notably fewer attributed lack of completion to students not having a goal of seeking a degree. However, in discussion groups they questioned the data about completion and noted that many students do not seek to follow a traditional sequence of courses to completion, but to meet more focused personal learning goals. Ultimately, faculty supported all three approaches to improving student completion that were used to launch the discussion groups, seeing them as complementary and urging an integration of components of each. In the 2017 survey, the top three strategies faculty indicated as having "a lot" of impact on student completion were: (a) providing academic support outside the classroom (62 percent); (b) improving student orientation (61 percent); and (c) offering more nonacademic supports (52 percent). In discussion groups, faculty spoke of the need for continuing orientation for students to help them set goals, track their progress, and find support services. They expressed support for continual professional development to improve instruction, but noted the lack of time and resources for such efforts. While acknowledging the benefits of clear pathways for students, faculty also posed questions about the current guided pathways approach, particularly pathway designs that limit students' opportunities to explore different areas before specializing.

Summary of Supporting Evidence

Survey. *Causes of noncompletion.* The 2015 survey examined faculty beliefs about the factors that contribute to noncompletion and faculty estimates of the proportion of students affected by these issues. The set of contributing factors presented in the survey was consistent with theory and research (e.g., Conley, 2007; Public Agenda, 2012). In the analysis, the faculty responses were organized into the following four contributing factors: Academic Obstacles, Nonacademic Obstacles, Success Skills, and Noncompletion Goals (see Figures 9a-d).

The findings show that faculty attributed poor student completion to students lacking the success skill of knowing "how to manage their time well" (see Figure 9c); facing challenges in their lives outside school, such as having "financial issues [that] got in the way" or "work responsibilities [that] got in the way" (see Figure 9b); and lacking academic preparedness (see Figure 9a). Notably fewer attributed lack of completion to students not having a goal of seeking a credential (see Figure 9d).

Figure 9 (a-d). Perceived Reasons for Noncompletion (2015 Survey, Q6)

FIGURE 9a Academic Obstacles

- At least half (%)
- Less than half (%)
- Don't know (%)

Of your students who DID NOT earn a certificate or degree or transfer, how many of those students were characterized by each of the following?

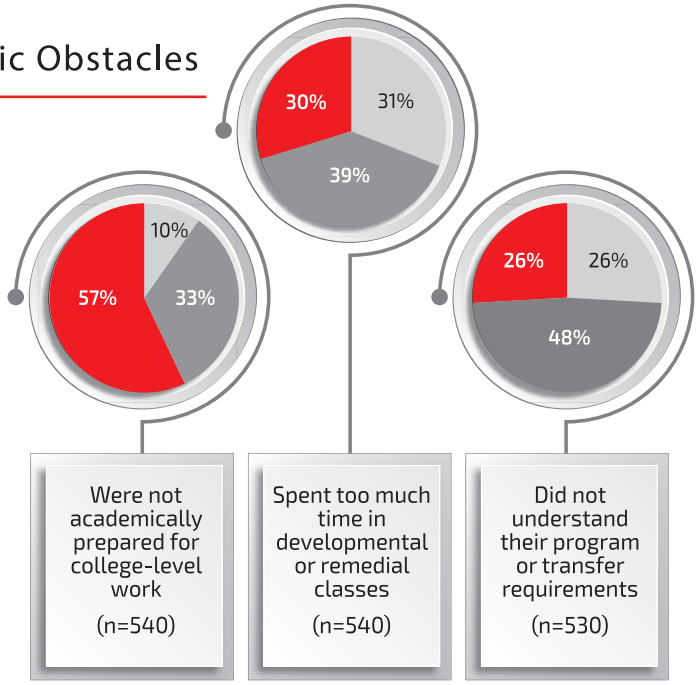
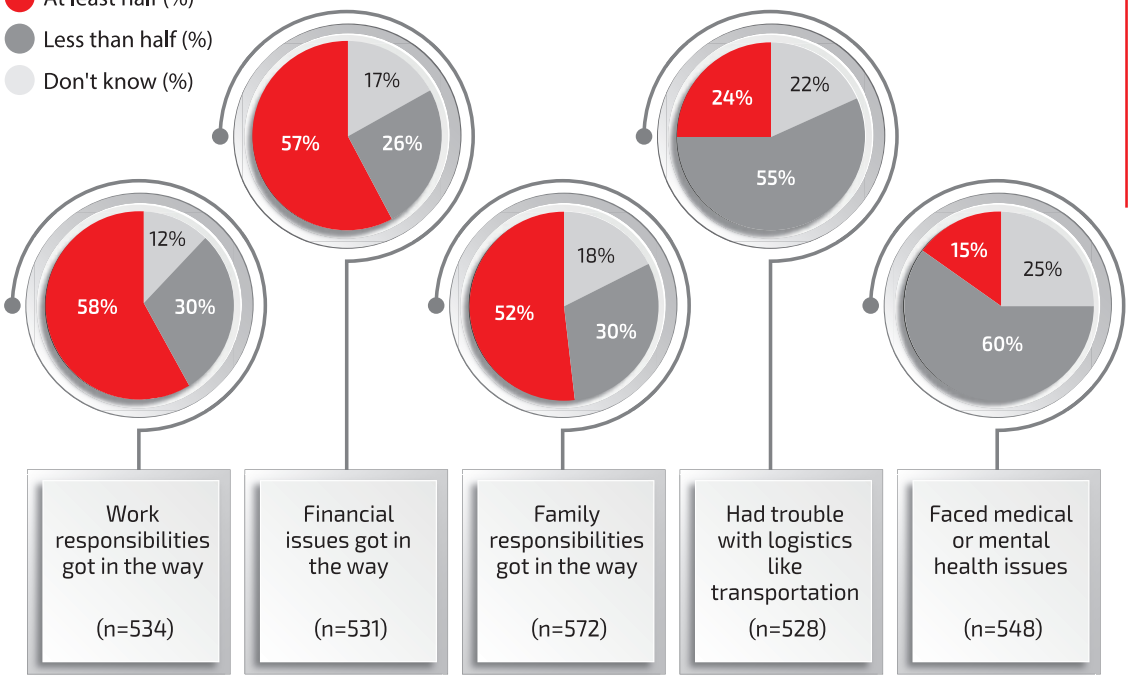


FIGURE 9b Nonacademic Obstacles

Of your students who DID NOT earn a certificate or degree or transfer, how many of those students were characterized by each of the following?

- At least half (%)
- Less than half (%)
- Don't know (%)



Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

FIGURE 9c Success Skills

- At least half (%)
- Less than half (%)
- Don't know (%)

Of your students who DID NOT earn a certificate or degree or transfer, how many of those students were characterized by each of the following?

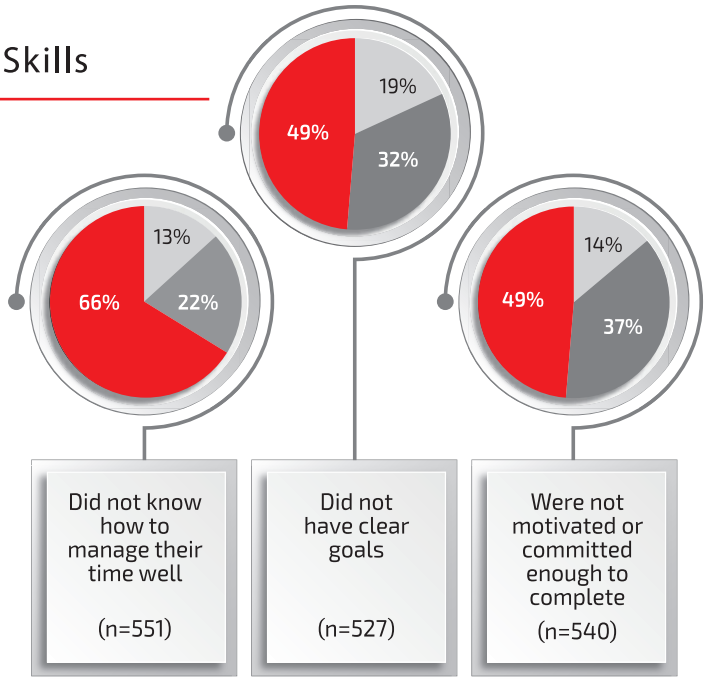
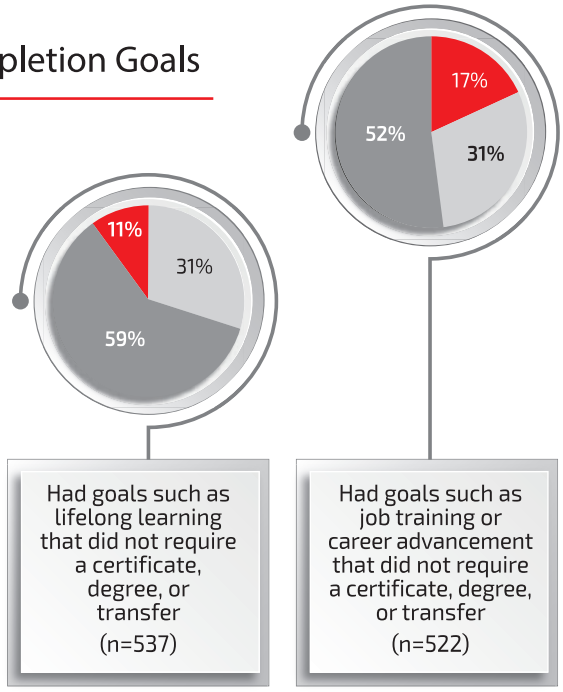


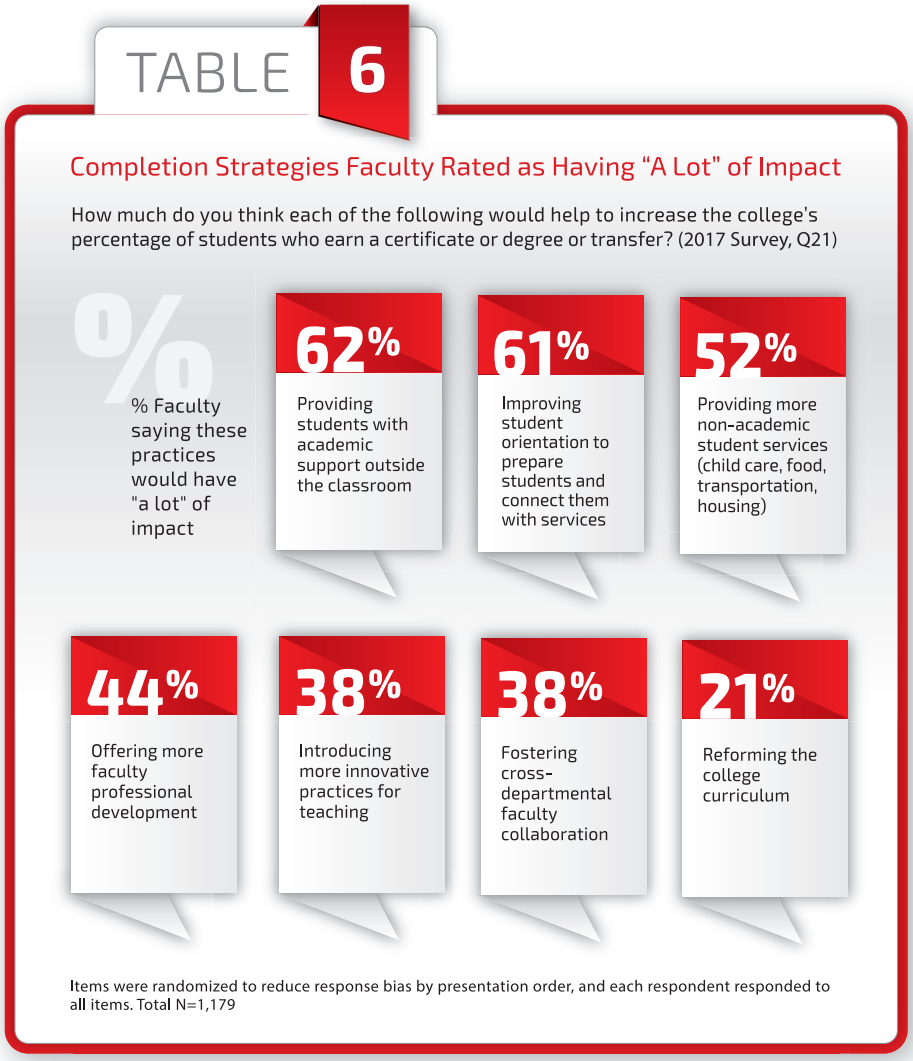
FIGURE 9d Noncompletion Goals

- At least half (%)
- Less than half (%)
- Don't know (%)

Of your students who DID NOT earn a certificate or degree or transfer, how many of those students were characterized by each of the following?



Percentages my not equal 100% due to rounding.



Approaches to improve completion. In the 2017 survey, the top three strategies faculty indicated as having "a lot" of impact on student completion were: (a) providing academic support outside the classroom (62 percent); (b) improving student orientation (61 percent); and (c) offering more nonacademic supports (52 percent) (see Table 6).

The 2015 survey queried faculty about the use of effective approaches on their campuses. The approaches presented in the survey drew on literature on high-impact practices (Kuh, 2008; Crisp & Taggart, 2013; Jenkins & Cho, 2013; Linderman & Kolenovic, 2013). In the analysis, the faculty responses were organized into the three completion approaches featured in the Choicework Discussion Starter: student accountability, instructional improvement, and guided pathways.

Figure 10 (a-c). Faculty Perception of Depth of College Practices (2015 Survey, Q9)

FIGURE **10a** Guided Pathways

How much is the following practice being used at your college?

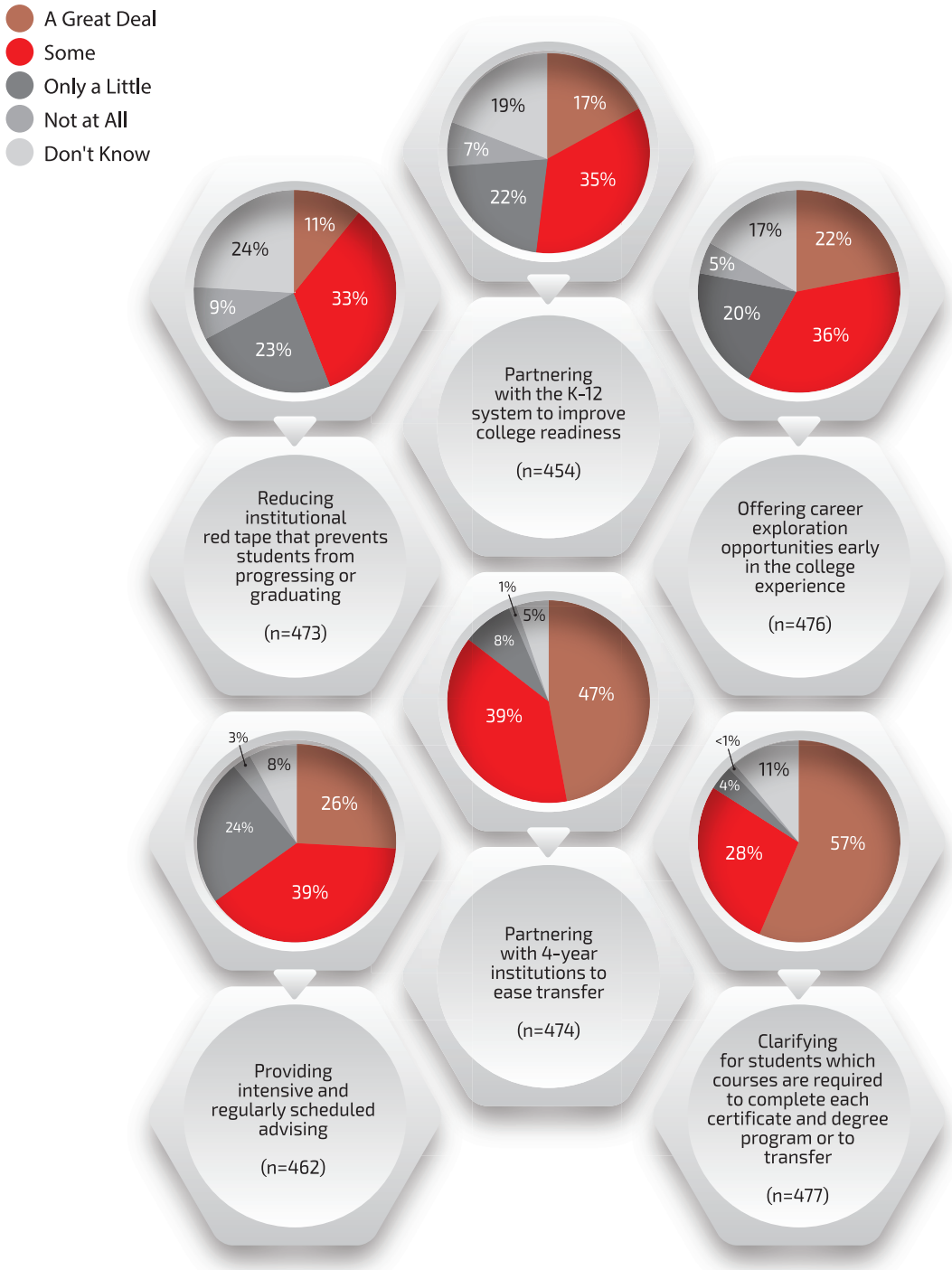
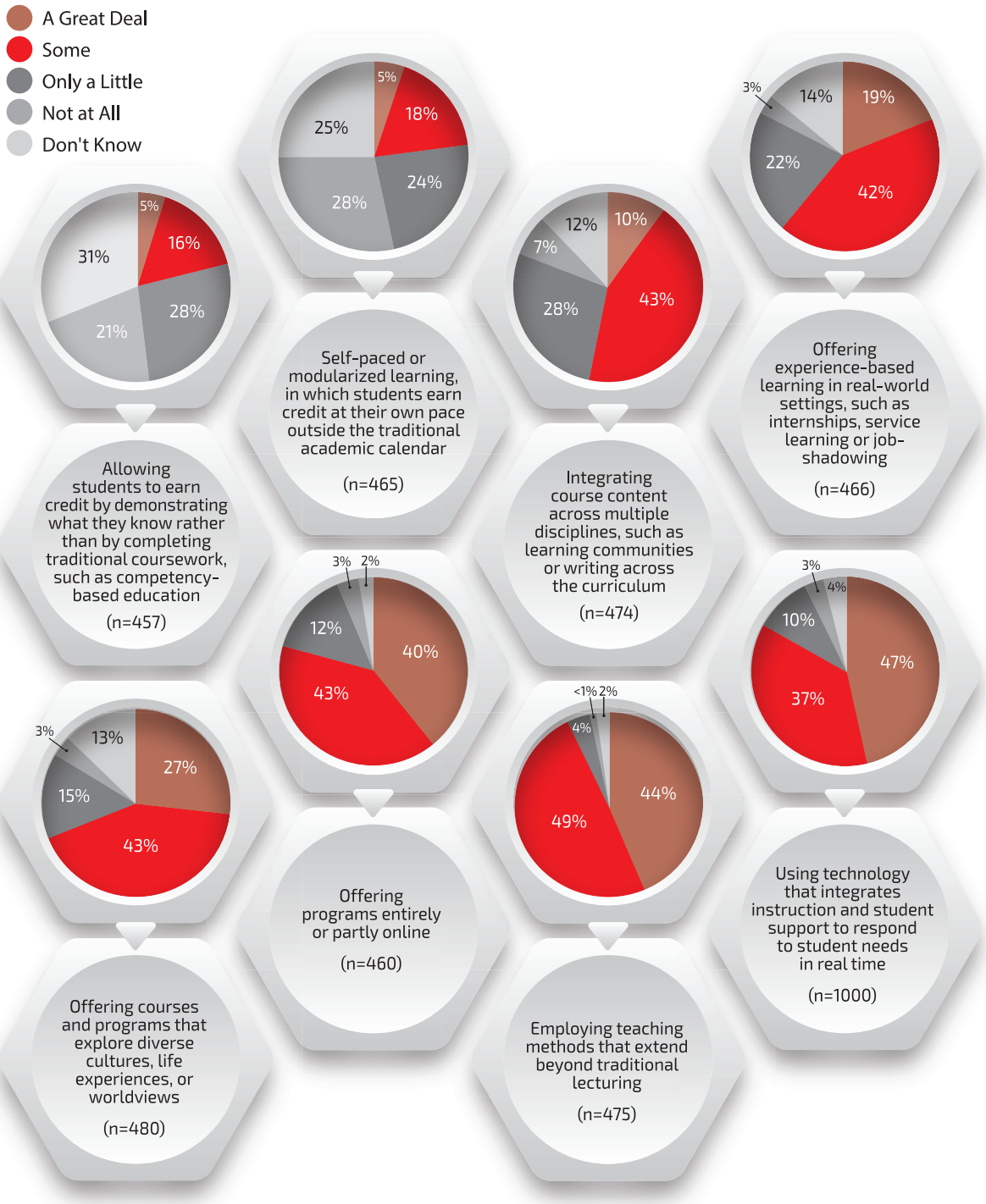


FIGURE 10b Instructional Improvement

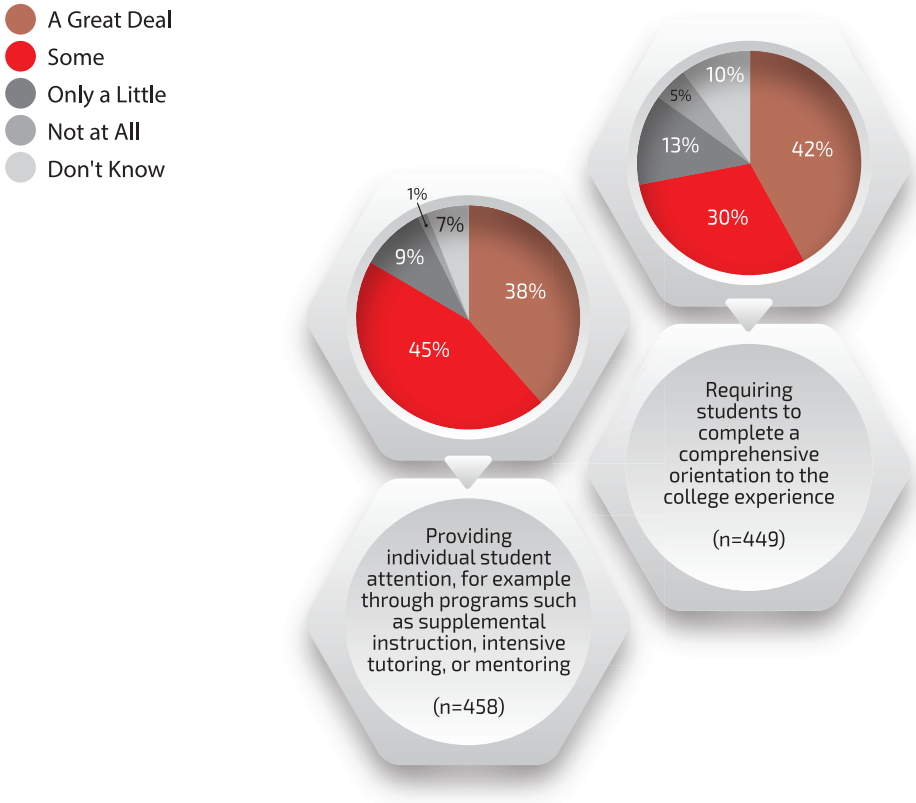
How much is the following practice being used at your college?



Percentages in 10a and 10b may not equal 100% due to rounding.

FIGURE 10c Student Accountability

How much is the following practice being used at your college?



Faculty responses indicated that at least one feature of each of the three approaches—student accountability, improved instruction, and guided pathways—was used "a great deal" (see Figures 10a-c). Responses also revealed some mixed understanding of the guided pathways approach. Although 85 percent of faculty reported that their colleges invested "a great deal" or "some" effort into the guided pathways strategy that clarifies for students the courses required to transfer or to complete certificates and degrees—a finding that directly contrasts with research findings (O'Banion, 2011; Jenkins & Cho, 2013)—only 65 percent of faculty reported a similar level of use of the key component of guided pathways, "intensive and regularly scheduled advising" (see Figure 10a).

Discussion groups. In discussions around the three different Choicework approaches for supporting student completion, faculty reinforced the need for improving student accountability, often linking this strategy closely to a guided pathways approach. They also elaborated on the types of professional development they would find useful to support student completion through improved instruction.

"Students who want it, figure it out and will finish. How do we help them all want it?"

Faculty defined the core elements of each completion approach, along with refinements they determined as necessary; this analysis is presented below.

APPROACH A. Increase student accountability. Faculty believe the completion strategy of holding students accountable for their own learning is a critical factor in student success, but advocate for more services and coaching to help students manage their studies, finances, and lives.

Faculty like an accountability approach that specifies the success skills students need in order to learn. Faculty acknowledged the value of clearly defining the skills that help students learn to succeed. They sought ways to help students develop effective strategies for self-advocacy and help-seeking, positive mindsets about school, and strategies for managing time and prioritizing responsibilities. "College needs to reinforce 'learning how to learn' skills," one faculty member said. Another suggested requiring "some form of self-exploration class." Still another explained that, "Students who want it, figure it out and will finish," and then asked, "How do we help them all want it?" They recognized that grades alone fail to motivate some students. They described the collection of accountability skills as useful not only for school, but also for career: showing up regularly and on time; completing assignments by the due date; asking for help; developing and revising learning goals; addressing course problems early; and tracking overall college progress in terms of credits accumulated and coursework completed toward a certificate, degree, or transfer. Too many of their students lacked what faculty called "the big picture" to become effectively accountable. One faculty member suggested that processes should be in place to, "help students see their own progress in reaching their goals." Another recommended "using student mentors [to] help new students understand the college and big picture."

Faculty like an accountability approach that meets students where they are in their personal development. Although faculty frequently commented about the need for students to be accountable for their own learning, they also recognized that many students need support from the college in order to learn how to take that responsibility. Comments like, "students need realistic goals" and "need

"College needs to reinforce 'learning how to learn' skills."

> "We don't do enough to empower [and] train students to be accountable."

to know they have time for college" were tempered by recognition that student success can be hindered by responsibilities with family and work, and by a lack of technology, transportation, and basic needs such as adequate housing and food. Student motivation was also a concern. In some groups, faculty members made comments like, "We can change teaching, but we can't control learning" and "Students need to be engaged. If a student doesn't have vested interest, no matter what we do, what tools or services we provide, the student won't succeed." Other faculty members responded that college faculty have a responsibility to "help students learn how to become accountable" and that "taking note of students' strengths and not just their deficiencies is a major step toward empowerment." The discussions led to agreement that faculty and students, as well as the entire college, share responsibility and are jointly accountable for student learning.

Faculty like an accountability approach supported by improved student orientation and services. Faculty emphasized the importance of prohibiting late registration and requiring college orientation. One faculty member explained that, "We don't do enough to empower [and] train students to be accountable." Faculty recommended more extended orientation approaches, such as dedicated classes, a weeklong workshop series, first-year experience courses, and modules that faculty in any course could integrate into their classes to familiarize students with the pace and expectations of college (e.g., "what a week in this class will feel like"). They asked for more tutors and free tablets to support classroom study, and they asked how they can better flag at-risk students and recognize those making effective progress.

Faculty like an accountability approach that includes more frequent and targeted advising. In discussion groups, whether or not faculty themselves served as advisors, faculty described advising as "important" and "critical" in helping students at entry and throughout their time at the college. They supported a "one-on-one relationship between the student and the academic/career advisor." Others expressed this value as a student advisor being the "point person" who helps students, especially those for whom college is "a new universe" and those who "don't know what they don't know." Faculty expressed great respect for advisors and their role in student success, but were concerned that their large caseloads limit advising's scope. Faculty perceived the advisor-student relationship being undermined by administrative and technological obstacles that keep advisors from getting real-time updates to course and program requirements, resulting in students receiving incorrect information. Faculty identified problems with self-advising, noting that it leads to students taking classes they don't need, draining financial aid resources, and incurring unnecessary debt. In addition, as one faculty member said, "Without advising, they end up with a transcript that is a mess."

> "Without advising, they end up with a transcript that is a mess."

Faculty like an accountability approach that enables faculty to guide students to services and advising. Often the main point of contact for students, faculty members welcomed opportunities to guide their students. However, they wanted to see better ways to connect students to the services and support they need, so they could "make students aware of resources before they're drowning." They focused on the faculty role and tools for helping students: "How do we communicate about students in distress?" They had questions about students' mindsets and lack of confidence that prevented them from success: "Are students comfortable asking for help?" "How can we get better communication going?" "How do we teach accountability for students, especially in a culture that does not promote self-responsibility?" "How can we help students understand their past and then how to move forward—for example, a student who has struggled with math?" and "What [do we] do about the 20 percent of students with no direction, students not ready for college but here?"

"How do we communicate about students in distress?"

TABLE 7

Faculty Suggestions for Next Steps:
Student Accountability

- Expand services available to support students, including progress-tracking services, cocurricular transcripts, online degree checks, student mentors, and dedicated social workers.
- Require orientation and offer career counseling, first-year experience, student success, or foundations seminar.
- Facilitate faculty use of student support information in their courses, e.g., develop "success modules" that faculty can incorporate into any course; provide early alert data to faculty on their students.
- Ensure that curricular programs support student success, e.g., offer accelerated developmental education and adhere to required course prerequisites.
- Support student accountability through practices such as online self-serve degree checking services; student-prepared goal statements; ongoing college orientation support; periodic check-ins for students to see how they're progressing; and flexible course options, such as traditional academic terms and compressed academic terms.

> "Clearly include teaching and learning as [the] primary responsibility of the faculty. Currently [there are] wide-ranging responsibilities and expectations."

APPROACH B. Support instructional improvement. Faculty recognize that they need to teach in more engaging ways to foster student completion, but say institutional support for professional development needs to be expanded from current levels. Notably, discussions around instructional improvement were often intertwined with faculty acknowledgement that they do not always know how best to facilitate student learning and success. Some of their discussion points were about fundamental principles of teaching and learning, but faculty also sought help with *student accountability*—asking questions focused on how they could make students more accountable, more motivated, more self-directed, and more aware of the commitment being a college student requires—and help with *guided pathways*—asking questions focused on how they could help students access support services, well-designed orientation programs, timely advising, study skills workshops, and opportunities to explore different guided pathways.

Faculty seek a more professional instructional culture, which they see as a prerequisite to instructional improvement and innovation. Faculty raised concerns about the lack of respect for their professional status from students, administrators, and society at large. They said that repeated budget cuts fragment full-time faculty between preparing for multiple classes and sitting on a growing number of administrative committees. One faculty member said the college should, "Clearly include teaching and learning as [the] primary responsibility of the faculty. Currently [there are] wide-ranging responsibilities and expectations." However, faculty also acknowledged limitations in their capacity to teach underprepared students and to deliver effective developmental education courses. They raised questions about the will of all faculty members to define and implement the kinds of instructional improvements that appear to be required. From the faculty point of view, the college community—from administrators and staff to faculty and students—needs to celebrate faculty professionalism in positive, proactive ways. This includes finding ways to reinforce the acts and attitudes of professionalism, such as honoring innovative efforts to meet collegewide goals, take risks, and show openness to change, and establishing an organizational culture that builds faculty comfort with accountability and feedback. In addition, and importantly, colleges need to find ways to include adjunct faculty more deeply in the professional culture.

> "Active learning is important. We, as faculty, are not necessarily trained in teaching. We're trained in content. We need help."

Faculty are eager to learn new and effective instructional strategies. Faculty were remarkably open about their lack of training in teaching and learning. They admitted they were content specialists and not consistently up to date on education theory and research, and they sought targeted methods to appeal to students and connect with career pathways. One talked about the need to be "continually learning, not just a content expert," and another said, "We need to be innovative in teaching to try to connect with students." Another said, "Active learning is important. We, as faculty, are not necessarily trained in teaching. We're trained in content. We need help. We fail and try again." And another said, "We know so much more about how the brain learns. Teaching hasn't kept up. Students have changed but we're teaching them like their parents and grandparents [were taught]." They readily acknowledged that they were hired for their expertise in their disciplines, and that they had gaps in their knowledge about teaching and learning. As one faculty member remarked, "We say students don't prepare or take responsibility, well, what about us? We need to take responsibility."

"We know so much more about how the brain learns. Teaching hasn't kept up. Students have changed but we're teaching them like their parents and grandparents [were taught]."

Faculty also said they were eager to learn, to try new techniques, and to be more creative and innovative in their own teaching practice in ways that help advance student achievement, but they lack the resources—including time and professional development—to do this adequately. One faculty member described how trying new approaches requires more than prescriptions, but also time to apply the instructional concepts in the classroom and to observe the impacts on student success. Another faculty member described trying "something different by accident. Students started responding to things I did differently, like group work, so I continue[d]. I know data shows this is true, but I had to experience the change in students." To support completion, faculty said they need help to design and deliver student-oriented instruction and to improve connections between their curriculum and employer needs and career paths. They wanted to see more incentives and supports for faculty innovation, such as more professional development options and incentive pay for course development.

"We say students don't prepare or take responsibility, well, what about us? We need to take responsibility."

Faculty seek more strategic and creative support for professional development, which they see as another prerequisite for instructional innovation. Faculty professional development came up in almost every discussion group, and faculty comments provided some insight into the types of professional development opportunities their colleges

> "Faculty development should not be random, but should be aligned with college goals."

provide. Specifically, and frequently, project facilitators heard that professional development focusing on teaching and learning was typically provided in one-time workshops, while ongoing professional development focused on administrative processes such as taking attendance. One faculty member noted that the "one-shot" approach to professional development often "is not about teaching; it's about administration … bureaucratic wheel-greasing." Faculty said they are interested in ongoing, sustained professional development related to teaching and learning. They explained that offering a one-time workshop on a teaching strategy with the expectation that it be fully implemented in the current or following academic term is unrealistic, and sought "more support for the entire process of education." They also acknowledged the value of strategic professional development, put by one faculty member as, "Faculty development should not be random, but should be aligned with college goals."

TABLE 8

Faculty Suggestions for Next Steps:
Instructional Improvement

- Different ways faculty can be supported
  - Grants for professional development funding
  - Incentive pay and teaching chairs for instructional innovation
  - Online technologies and resources to support adjunct faculty professional development
  - Expanded teaching preparation time
- Strategies faculty can use to find more time to focus on instruction
  - Reduction of faculty tasks not related directly to instruction
  - Options for students to complete a course when "life gets in the way"
- Topics faculty need to learn more about to innovate
  - Contextualized course content more relevant to student interests and to industry hiring needs in the region
  - Embedded workplace soft-skills instruction
  - Techniques for recognizing students' prior learning and learning styles, and for improving students' critical thinking skills
  - Use of assessment to improve teaching and learning
- Support for program changes
  - A Center for Teaching and Learning to support faculty professional development
  - Guidelines and templates for streamlining courses and course sequences
  - An accelerated timeline for developmental education
  - Regular online updates of programs of study and course sequence numbers
  - Programming to support student reflection and planning for students who fail a course
  - Student assessment in the classroom

APPROACH C. Implement guided pathways. Faculty agree that colleges can support student completion by offering guided pathways to graduation and careers through clearer websites, course requirements, support strategies, and job opportunities, but they caution against cookie-cutter approaches.

> "First-time college students don't understand what is needed to be successful. We need to break down the process into manageable chunks."

Faculty support pathways that include individualized guidance in goal-setting for first-time, undecided, and first-generation students. Faculty perceived that many community college students appear to need considerable help around completion from the moment they first enter college. They called for greater focus "on the front door," and favored helping students to set goals and learn to adjust their expectations as they go through the academic program. One faculty member said, "First-time college students don't understand what is needed to be successful. We need to break down the process into manageable chunks." Focusing on first-generation students, one faculty member said, "First-generation students don't know what to expect. We need to do a better job explaining that. They need to be given a clear path." Faculty made suggestions such as, "Before students begin in their classes, they should go through a goal-setting plan to get help in seeing the big picture of their education," and that college personnel should "continue to strengthen relationships with students before and upon entry." One example they provided is that without solid planning, it can be challenging to ensure that students can enroll in required courses in a timely fashion and to minimize the delays associated with courses that fill up quickly or have long waiting lists. To deliver guided pathways to students, faculty called for a renewed focus on the point when students enter college, introducing students to the range of pathways and the methods for flexibly navigating them. They stressed the importance of this kind of orientation, particularly for students who are initially undecided about their educational goals. Faculty expressed concern about pathways being designed for only some college tracks, such as the career-technical track, but not others. They were concerned about creating pathways for students who are undecided, immature, or unprepared for college, and one recommendation was to, "Showcase programs and careers to help students learn, to help them figure out which pathway is for them; students do not have enough info to choose a pathway." Faculty questioned designs of guided pathways that have the feel of a linear game, and they expressed support for pathways that include opportunities for off-the-path exploration to help students set goals and revise them as they obtain more information. While some faculty said program guides and course catalogues provide students with the information they need, others noted that although this information is available in these resources, first-time students, who are just beginning to learn how to navigate college, can find it difficult to access or understand.

> "Showcase programs and careers to help students learn, to help them figure out which pathway is for them; students do not have enough info to choose a pathway."

"...help students understand what they are putting into their education relative to what they are getting in results."

Faculty support richer advising and guidance services for flexible navigation throughout guided pathways. They raised questions about how well resourced current advising programs and services are, and about the capacity of faculty to take on additional advising tasks to support the guided pathway approach. They expressed concern that this lack of advising fails to help students at critical points in their college experience when they most need to make informed decisions. Faculty discussed the limitations of current advising programs, with too few service hours available to working students. They emphasized the importance of personal advising for students all along the way, and they called for faculty training to assist in providing personal pathway guidance to students. To address this gap, one faculty member recommended greater use of processes that help faculty to "help students with making connections—how to approach someone they don't know, how to begin a conversation with a faculty member. Add this human interaction requirement to courses." Also, they asked for evidence that colleges using pathways are experiencing positive completion results, which could be helpful to share with students. Another suggestion was to "create a position on campus for someone to be in touch with students who drop out to help him or her come back—social worker?" They also said they support making more easily available a wide range of services and tools for completing school, including peer mentors, personal advisors, and tutors. Faculty said they can better support pathways through early-alert technologies, online degree checks, multiple measures of student progress, and overall reinforcement of college policies that reward not only course enrollment but also course retention. They suggested tools that "help students see their own progress in reaching their goals," and "help students understand what they are putting into their education relative to what they are getting in results."

Faculty support pathways that positively frame community college. Faculty called for more communication across educational institutions, noting that K-12 partners and college faculty need to find ways to inform students about the various paths they can take into local community colleges, and to ensure that students understand the level of engagement and commitment required. Rather than framing the community college as a "fallback" or an "extension of high school," they said educators and counselors need to emphasize that community college success requires focused goals, resilience, discipline, and thoughtful decision-making all along the way. Faculty pointed out that this can involve opportunities for acceleration into the workplace as well as transfer to a four-year institution. They expressed a need for industry partners and college faculty to communicate and coordinate more effectively to offer instruction and work-based learning opportunities that clarify the pathways available to students, inspire new goals, and motivate disciplined study.

TABLE 9

Faculty Suggestions for Next Steps:
Guided Pathways

- Provide a wider array of targeted services
  - *Early support:* Strengthen relationships with students before and at college entry, engage students in a goal-setting plan at entry, develop better articulation with high schools, provide more career counseling
  - *Midpoint support:* Develop online tools for tracking progress, provide a cocurricular transcript, offer course failure interventions to foster reflection and planning next steps, provide timely feedback and intervention, create greater collaborative support between faculty and advisors/counselors to enable not only general but program-specific advising, establish one key point of contact for students, consider mandatory advising
  - *Transfer and workforce support:* Offer more career counseling, develop better articulation agreements with universities
- Support programs by providing
  - Better training for advisors
  - Course enrollment software that blocks enrollment without proper prerequisites being met
  - Alternative pathways in math and English
  - Programs and careers to raise student awareness
  - Scheduling that students can count on
- Support faculty engagement by
  - Involving faculty in advising, training them to do so and to collaborate with advisors
  - Developing a tool to help faculty learn about their students' goals and ensure correct placement
  - Encouraging faculty to promote or facilitate student peer networks that support persistence

REFLECTIONS

Nearly a decade into the college completion agenda, the community college faculty members charged with advancing student learning, retention, and completion are facing a level of scrutiny that is at once uncomfortable and refreshing, overwhelming and invigorating. A few key take-aways from this research are presented as reflections from the project team, beginning with completion and the critical role of data in completion efforts, then moving to the equally important roles of administrators, faculty, and others in making meaningful progress toward improving student success.

First, however, a note on the Choicework discussion process used in the project. This process gave the faculty members who participated an opportunity to identify and thoughtfully explore the challenges they face in their working lives and to consider various approaches for addressing them. The discussion group facilitators noted the consistent capacity of the Choicework process to foster productive dialogue characterized by respect for diverse perspectives and experiences. The faculty members who participated in the League's 81 discussion groups were professionals who clearly had given these issues considerable thought, and who not only listened to colleagues' different and at times opposing perspectives, but also engaged with those perspectives as they contributed their own ideas. Far from complaint sessions, these were deliberative discussions among groups of faculty members who were concerned about their students, their colleagues, their colleges, and their profession, and who wanted to improve themselves and their environments in ways that would foster student success and completion.

...these were deliberative discussions among groups of faculty members who were concerned about their students, their colleagues, their colleges, and their profession...

Within the Choicework discussion context, the participants could express appreciation for the spirit of the completion movement to focus on helping students achieve their educational and career goals and assess the merits of various completion approaches. At the same time, they could articulate their concerns about preserving the aspects of the historic mission of the community college to serve adult learners who already have careers, degrees, or other professional credentials, and who want to pursue lifelong learning in an individualized way.

Colleges not only need to share completion data, but also need to engage faculty in accessing this resource, using it, and interpreting its meaning to inform instructional and program design and delivery. Eighty percent of entering community college students declare an intention to earn an associate's degree (CCCSE, 2014a); however, in discussion groups, facilitators often heard faculty cite students' lack of interest in completing associates' degrees or certificates as a basis for questioning the policy focus on completion. Interestingly, in the 2015 survey, most faculty respondents attributed noncompletion to students' lack of skill around time management and financial management, and challenges students face in balancing work and school. Very few respondents indicated that short-term job training or lifelong learning goals were reasons students failed to complete degrees or certificates. This discrepancy between discussions and survey results is puzzling and difficult to explain. It may reflect the conflict faculty feel between the historical mission of open-access institutions and the completion movement's emphasis on credential attainment. It may reflect a skepticism faculty feel about policy priorities emerging from outside the college community. It may also reflect a lack of awareness and understanding among faculty about data concerning students' aspiration and completion goals.

This finding indicates that faculty need to be more engaged in using completion data of various forms, from knowing the data on student goals at college entry to understanding the rates of program retention, certificate and degree completion, and transfer. To maintain a focus on equity, faculty need to understand the retention and completion numbers for students in different demographic groups. Data discussions can occur within and across departments and can involve faculty sharing their findings with both advisors and students. In these ways, data use becomes a complementary way to understand students' experiences and needs, and to set programmatic directions. In discussion groups, when faculty considered the needs of their students who intended to earn an associate's degree, they more readily endorsed a thorough examination of what community colleges are doing to support these students' educational goals. These data conversations should also encompass other questions: Did students successfully transfer to a four-year institution? Did they continue at a different two-year institution? Did they ultimately complete a baccalaureate degree? Are graduates employed in family-wage jobs in their fields of study? Have they returned for additional education and training? If they dropped out, why did they do so and do they intend to return?

Faculty also raised an important point about the completion movement's failure to take into account the minority of community college students who do not seek a credential. These students have a variety of reasons for enrolling in community college that are distinct from the completion movement's emphasis on those whose educational goals include earning an associate's degree. They may be incumbent workers seeking to upgrade or enhance their knowledge and skills; they may be displaced or soon-to-be-displaced workers whose jobs

have become obsolete; they may hold bachelor's or even advanced degrees but have been unable to find employment in their fields, and so are preparing for other opportunities; or they may be seniors with a lifetime of credentials and experience who are planning for encore careers. These and other students have legitimate reasons for taking only a course or two to get what they need. They are adult learners who are motivated to complete courses that will demonstrably improve their lives, and faculty expressed that their experience has not been sufficiently acknowledged in completion policy discussions. This finding indicates that community college leaders need to ensure that completion data clearly differentiate students with and without the intention to earn a certificate or degree.

Transparency with student retention and completion data is critical to the process of planning and decision making about the college's mission and services. Engaging faculty with data can lead to honest questioning and reflection about what the data mean, and frequent communication of this data can engage faculty and others in an intentional, inclusive process to define completion. Making completion data available to faculty creates awareness of the completion challenge, a first step toward any faculty member's understanding of what needs to change at a college and in that college's organizational culture. Awareness of completion rates in classes, courses, and programs can lead to faculty and staff analyzing and evaluating the data to inform decisions about teaching and learning, courses and programs, and college services to support students. Ultimately, the entire college learns even more from the story the data tell over time, which can inform the design of solutions.

Transparency with student retention and completion data is critical to the process of planning and decision making about the college's mission and services.

College leaders need to hone their skills of discovering multiple opportunities for everyone to contribute to the core missions of their colleges. One of the more troubling findings of our work was the palpable sense of disconnection and the lack of community faculty described between them and their colleagues. Faculty said they wanted to be involved in meaningful conversations about the resources and strategic programming of their colleges, but did not feel they were. Creating a culture of inclusion can start by regularly involving multiple stakeholders in contributing to the core college mission through purposeful, collegewide collaborative tasks, activities, and conversations. These kinds of activities should be strengthened and promoted through updates, reports on new projects and pilots, clear messaging on how these initiatives fit into the overall strategic direction and goals of the college, and emphasis on how they impact student success. In addition, a communications

plan that includes a variety of media and retains consistent messaging can help ensure that communication is strategic, frequent, and consistent. Communication and dialogue help individuals not only see the big picture, but also see themselves and their work in that picture.

The lack of adjunct faculty voices in this project is further evidence of their isolation and limited connection to campuses. Notably, in the 2015 and 2017 surveys, adjunct faculty members were not proportionately represented. They teach 58 percent of community college courses (CCCSE, 2014b), but represented only 30 percent of the respondents. Of the adjunct faculty who participated in the surveys, more than 80 percent taught at only one college, which is inconsistent with reports of contingent faculty teaching at more than one college to earn sufficient income (CCCSE, 2014b). Funding and part-time status policies led to constraints on adjunct faculty participation in discussion groups, just as they can limit their participation in professional development and other college activities. Their availability for face-to-face meetings with students is often limited to class time. Facilitators heard in discussion groups that adjunct faculty are less familiar than full-time faculty about issues surrounding completion, in part because they are not invited into the conversations or are not on campus when the conversations happen. The reliance on adjunct faculty is a common strategy in community colleges, and it must be balanced against the need to develop a professional culture of learning and more personal connection with students. Any solution for organizational improvement in the community college must engage adjunct faculty in a meaningful way.

Every member of the college community should be encouraged to find creative ways to honor the teaching profession and recognize the core importance of learning to the life of each campus, its surrounding region, and the nation. The completion movement may have been set by researchers and policymakers from outside the community college, but it cannot happen without the full engagement of those inside the college, and particularly, the faculty in the classroom. For this reason, it was disconcerting to hear faculty discuss how little they feel supported as professionals and leaders who can shape the completion approaches on their campuses. Faculty described such approaches as driven by ambitious administrators looking for signature "programmes du jour" to "build [their] resumes." Faculty expressed fatigue with the churn of pilot programs and new techniques. Instead, they favored solutions that get results by engaging their content expertise and

commitment over time and by building their capacity to understand the needs of their students and the stakeholders beyond the campus—employers, transfer institutions, and K-12 districts.

Engaging faculty as leaders should include multiple ways to encourage and honor the initiative of community college faculty to improve teaching, learning, and student success. This should include investing in professional development and in the resources to implement strategies and techniques that connect with college goals and show results in the student data. The Faculty Voices Project revealed how much faculty seek to help lead the completion movement, if only given the chance. Younger faculty should be supported to lead and participate in campuswide dialogues that allow them to hear diverse opinions and experiences. Veteran faculty should be tapped to support and advise their younger colleagues as a way to reconnect with the idealism that initially brought them into the teaching profession.

The Faculty Voices Project revealed how much faculty seek to help lead the completion movement, if only given the chance.

During times of rising costs and diminishing resources, staying focused on the work of faculty can be difficult. However, as community colleges continue to face the challenging but critical mission of providing equitable access, not only to support lifelong learning and career readiness for all, but also to support student completion, faculty have a serious and substantive role to play. Engaging faculty voices in the completion conversation is only a first step. To achieve completion goals, faculty must be supported as campus leaders in developing and implementing initiatives to promote student learning and success.

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The League for Innovation in the Community College (League) is an international nonprofit organization with a mission to cultivate innovation in the community college environment. The League hosts conferences and institutes, develops print and digital resources, and leads projects and initiatives with almost 500 member colleges and a host of corporate partners, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations in a continuing effort to advance the community college field and make a positive difference for students and communities. Information about the League and its activities is available at www.league.org.

Contact:

Cynthia Wilson, Ed.D.
Director, Faculty Voices Project
Vice President for Learning and Chief Impact Officer
League for Innovation in the Community College
wilson@league.org

League for Innovation in the Community College
1333 South Spectrum Boulevard, Suite 210
Chandler, Arizona 85286