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This chapter explores various theories of change for community colleges and examines how external agencies and funders have sought to support reforms that improve success for diverse groups of students. The author provides a preliminary scan of how successful institutionalization attempts have been, including national and regional examples, and suggests ways that community colleges can sustain reforms over time.

Sustaining Changes That Support Student Success in Community College

Pamela Burdman

Recent efforts to improve student success at community colleges around the country have been driven in part by the investments of numerous private foundations. Investing large amounts of money in community colleges is a relatively new philanthropic endeavor. Until recently, more attention was given to four-year institutions. Some of these foundations operate nationally and fund projects around the country. The largest single project is probably Achieving the Dream, a national initiative launched by Lumina Foundation and seventeen other funders. With several partners, including the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin, the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, and the American Association of Community Colleges, the project now reaches out to eighty-two colleges in fifteen states. So far, four cohorts of colleges have joined the endeavor, which entails a five-year commitment to improving outcomes of disadvantaged students, aided by the Achieving the Dream partners and about \$100,000 a year. Lumina and the other funders together have invested nearly \$100 million in the project.

Another national project, the Ford Foundation's Bridges to Opportunity, has worked with community college systems in six states to integrate the academic and workforce missions of colleges in order to help low-income and nontraditional students meet their goals. Since 2002, Ford has invested more than \$10 million in the Bridges project (C. Driver, personal communication, December 10, 2007).

Many more foundations focus their efforts on particular regions, whether in a single state, a group of states in the same region, or a specific urban or rural area within a state. For example, the Joyce Foundation concentrates its investments in the Great Lakes, the Mott Foundation has a particular emphasis on the state of Michigan, and the James Irvine Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation are supporting efforts to improve opportunities for students at community colleges in California.

Because of the increasingly prominent role of foundations in supporting improved opportunities for community college students, it may be helpful to understand how foundations set priorities and make decisions. Some foundations engage in responsive grant making, whereby they outline priority areas and then respond to proposals received from the field, approving those they judge to be the best. Increasingly, though, large U.S. foundations pursue strategic grant making, whereby they specify not just priorities but also specific goals and strategies for pursuing them. Engaging in strategic grant making typically causes foundations to become more explicit about the theory of change that drives their strategy (Brest, 2003).

A theory of change entails a causal analysis of the underlying problem, the leverage points for addressing it, and the strategies and approaches it deems most likely to effect change. Thus, it provides a framework for explicitly distinguishing among activities and their effectiveness in addressing the underlying problem. It is imaginable, even likely, that a funded activity may produce its intended output using the available resources within the allotted time without a noticeable impact on the problem that is being addressed. Such instances may be explained by dosage or duration, that is, the activity requires a broader reach or longer time frame. But they also may reflect a break in the causal chain, or theory of change. Thus, the theory of change can be a valuable tool to assist foundations in clarifying their goals and assumptions and working with grantees to assess not just their specific accomplishments but ultimately their impact. “The theory of change is a powerful driver of change,” noted Ralph Smith, vice president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, in a recent address. “It forces us to see whether what we’re doing can work” (Smith, 2007).

When foundations choose to invest in work to improve education generally or community colleges specifically, this decision often evolves from a high-level foundation-wide theory of change. In turn, the theory of change that drives the investments in the community college area is derived from that higher-level theory. To illustrate how this works in practice, this chapter uses the example of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, a private foundation based in Menlo Park, California, which engages in strategic grant making on an international level. After situating the foundation’s community college grant making within a foundation-wide theory of change, it looks at the specific theory of change that is driving the foundation’s investments in community colleges.

Situating Grant Making Within a Theory of Change

In its vision statement, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation says that it “makes grants to address the most serious social and environmental problems facing society, where risk capital, responsibly invested, may make a difference over time. The Foundation places a high value on sustaining and improving institutions that make positive contributions to society” (Brest, n.d.). As ways of addressing the most serious social and environmental problems facing society, the foundation has chosen two missions: promote a sustainable environment and promote human well-being. As part of its goal to promote human well-being, it has selected the broad goals of improving the well-being of the world’s poorest people and the well-being of U.S., California, and Bay Area residents (Brest, n.d.). The goal of improving outcomes for community college students falls under the latter goal.

An implicit theory of change is rooted in the notion that improving educational outcomes is necessary to improving the well-being of California residents. Before discussing the specific theory of change for community colleges, an explanation for the focus on community colleges is in order. The goal derives from numerous analyses that have highlighted the need to raise the education level within the state. Studies by the Public Policy Institute of California and others reveal that the needs of the twenty-first-century California economy for an increasing number of college-educated individuals will not be met if the state continues to educate residents at the current pace. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, California will face a shortage of college-educated workers in the year 2020 and will have twice as many high school dropouts as the state will be able to employ (Hanak and Baldassare, 2005). Failure to increase overall education levels could have dire consequences for the state: economic stagnation, increased need for social services and prisons, decreasing civic participation, and growing inequality. Although the dilemma is a nationwide one, California’s demographics suggest that an uneducated workforce could cost the state more in per capita income than any other state, according to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (Jones, 2006). Based on data that both reveal the educational pipeline problems in California and indicate that those problems will worsen over time if changes are not made, the foundation developed its strategy. In a memo on its education strategy, the foundation states:

The ultimate goal for our work on Improving Educational Outcomes in California is to improve success for students in California to enable them to contribute effectively to their families, their communities, and to a robust California economy. Though ultimately we seek to improve opportunities for all students to succeed at the highest levels, including bachelor’s degrees and beyond, we focus our investments on the students who face the greatest barriers to reaching those goals: those attending California’s public schools and

community colleges. In particular, to keep pace with demographic shifts, we seek to improve educational outcomes for low-income students, Latino and African American students, and English language learners.

Currently California falls behind most other states in students' chance of attending college by the age of nineteen, reflecting both low high school graduation rates and low rates of college enrollment directly from high school (National Center for Higher Management Education Systems, n.d.). While Hewlett's investments in K–12 education reform seek to improve outcomes for students in the state's public schools, strengthening opportunities for students to attend and complete college is also an essential component in meeting the long-term goal.

In California the majority of students pursuing postsecondary education attend one of the California community colleges. The state's master plan for education directs that the majority of high school graduates have only one option for attending a public higher education institution: one of the state's 109 community colleges. In fact, the colleges enroll nearly 75 percent of all students in public higher education in California, well above the national average, making the two-year institutions indispensable to meeting the goal of increasing educational attainment in California (Shulock and Moore, 2007).

The analysis that improving outcomes for community college students would be necessary to the broader goal of improving educational outcomes generally explains the initial decision of the Hewlett Foundation in 2002 to explore work to improve outcomes for community college students. Another California foundation, the James Irvine Foundation, also has a focus on California community college students. However, Irvine came to this emphasis from a somewhat different direction. Historically, Irvine makes grants only in California, and one of its focus areas is youth, with an emphasis on multiple pathways to college and career.

Community Colleges in California

The theory of change begins with an analysis of the underlying problem—the barriers that inhibit greater student success. Although California has one of the best-funded public research university systems in the country, its community colleges are chronically among the worst funded, leaving the two-year institutions ill-prepared to address many of the challenges they face (Zumeta and Frankle, 2007). At the same time, many students in California are also less well equipped for the demands of college. Besides the large number of students with poor K–12 preparation and the large percentage of very low income students, students in California often delay entry into college (Hill, 2008).

As it stands, California ranks forty-eighth in direct entry into college from high school, and California's community college students attend part

time at greater rates than students in other states. At 29.4 percent, the CCC share of full-time students was substantially below the national community college figure of 41.6 percent (Zumeta and Frankle, 2007). This array of barriers facing both institutions and students inhibits degree completion, certificate completion, and transfer to four-year institutions. While precise completion rates vary depending on the choice of denominator, Shulock and Moore (2007) found that only 26 percent of community college students who are seeking a degree, credential, or transfer achieve one of those outcomes within six years. The Public Policy Institute of California (Zumeta and Frankle, 2007) found that 24 percent of students seeking to transfer do so within six years, and the National Center for Higher Management Education Systems states that only 9.6 percent of community college students enrolled in 2005 earned a credential, compared to a national average of 14 percent (Shulock and Moore, 2007; Sengupta and Jepsen, 2006).

Open door policies, including the lowest fees in the nation, have given many students a chance to attempt college in California (Zumeta and Frankle, 2007). Indeed, college participation rates in California are high—about 10.6 percent of Californians age eighteen to sixty-four are enrolled in college, making California the eleventh-ranked state in this measure. These low completion rates reveal a fundamental dilemma for higher education policy in California: community colleges' open door policies, including some of the lowest fees in the nation, have given many students a chance to attend college in California (Zumeta and Frankle, 2007). However, that access to college has not translated into college success for enough students. For that reason, the Hewlett Foundation has chosen to focus its efforts on ensuring that more students can succeed in a program of study leading to further education or career path employment. In particular, while recognizing the need to preserve broad access to higher education, it seeks to make investments that will help ensure that more students have the opportunity to reach outcomes including degree completion, certificate completion, and transfer.

Using the Theory of Change to Improve Outcomes

Insufficient preparation for college is one of the major barriers preventing students from succeeding at community colleges. Because lack of preparation is such a significant barrier for students in succeeding at community colleges, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has chosen to place particular emphasis on improving opportunities for underprepared students. This emphasis complements the foundation's extensive work to improve outcomes in K–12 schools through an emphasis on informing policy change.

The foundation's theory assumes that in order to improve outcomes for students at the community college level, several changes are required: changes in practice at the college level (including improved instruction, increased access to student services and financial aid, and increased ability

to track student progress) and changes at the policy level that facilitate changes at the college level (including more resources for colleges, resources better targeted toward student success, and more financial aid resources for students). However, simply outlining what needs to change is not an effective approach. The foundation's theory assumes that colleges and policies without will not be transformed without significant momentum from within and heightened external expectations.

In accordance with that theory, Hewlett's strategy for strengthening community colleges as avenues for lifting postsecondary attainment operates on multiple levels. First, the foundation seeks to help strengthen colleges' capacity to increase student success by replicating effective instructional programs and building capacity for colleges to track student performance in order to improve instruction and support services. One premise of the theory is that changes and innovation must be locally developed or locally embraced in order to have ultimate traction statewide. California has a strong tradition of local governance and college professionals; faculty especially play a prominent role in the shared governance system.

As colleges deepen their efforts to improve student success and a valuable knowledge base is developed and shared across colleges, the need emerges for a second type of change: systemic improvements at the college, system, and state levels. That is, changes in individual classroom practices or the addition of programs that serve groups of students are not sufficient to achieve necessary improvements. Barriers that prevent such improvements from reaching more students or being scaled up at the college need to be addressed; these range from bureaucratic structures, insufficient funding, and restrictive regulations to the lack of time for faculty and counselors to meet with each other. Together these policies have an impact on the availability of counseling, financial aid advising, and the ability of faculty and counselors to strengthen their professional practices. Ultimately the resources and regulations needed to support systemic change depend on state policy as a lever. Therefore, the foundation places a significant and increasing emphasis on informing state policy decisions through research, dissemination, and public engagement.

Operating on multiple levels, the theory assumes that change will not happen without good data well analyzed, research in the hands of practitioners and policymakers, and capacity building to help colleges learn from the research and make changes that best help students. Therefore, the strategy is supported by three types of investments: (1) research and analysis to deepen understanding of the problems faced by colleges and potential solutions to those problems, (2) advocacy and awareness building among stakeholders inside and outside the system to build shared knowledge and momentum for change, and (3) technical assistance, capacity building, and tool development for practitioners and policymakers. Below are descriptions of the theory behind each of these areas as well as examples of grantees working in each. In practice, many of the grantees work in more than one area.

Research and Analysis. Research and data analysis must occur on an ongoing basis to continually provide evidence that can be used to improve both practices and policy, according to Hewlett's analysis. Quantitative and qualitative data about students and institutions should be central to discussions about change, whether at the classroom, college, system, or state level. Therefore, this research needs to occur locally at colleges, by the college system itself, and by independent researchers who are well positioned to reach key audiences inside and outside of the system. Examples of two Hewlett-funded projects in this area follow:

- The Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy at California State University, Sacramento, conducts research on community college policy based on California community college data, state policies, interviews with community colleges insiders, research literature on student success, and other resources. Three reports issued by the institute in 2007, with funding from the Hewlett and Irvine Foundations, played a large role in shaping policy discussions within the community college system and in Sacramento.
- The California Benchmarking Project at the University of Southern California's Center for Urban Education (CUE) works directly with colleges to help them analyze student outcomes data in order to uncover equity gaps in outcomes such as transfer. CUE then works with colleges to help facilitate a research process to discover underlying causes of equity gaps and surface approaches for addressing them. The research is also used to inform other colleges, the college system, and policymakers about best ways of serving minority students at community colleges.

Ensuring the quality and availability of relevant data for use from the classroom to the state capitol is an essential piece of this strategy. So are feedback loops in which the data analysis—for example, on students' mastery of material—informs decisions in the classroom. In the spirit of continuous improvement, feedback loops ensure that the data and research findings can regularly be updated and used to track progress and inform decisions, whether about how to teach math or about how the state should distribute financial aid most effectively. Indeed, data analysis and research findings form the basis of the other two investment areas.

Advocacy and Awareness Building. Advocacy and awareness building among stakeholders inside and outside the system is another key element of Hewlett's strategy. This is based on the assumption that institutional change and policy change are unlikely to occur without both internal momentum and external pressure. The strategy is predicated on the assumption that engaging practitioners in focusing on student success will provide needed support for the policy changes that are ultimately necessary to significantly improve student outcomes. Although this theory has yet to be proved, it is undoubtedly true that policy changes that are opposed by practitioners, even if adopted into law, are unlikely to achieve their desired effect.

At the same time, significant change is unlikely to occur without the support of external stakeholders such as advocacy groups interested in improving opportunities for underserved students. Within Hewlett's strategy, these stakeholders have a dual role: they advocate at the state level on behalf of more attention to and resources for community colleges, while also expecting colleges to improve their practices so that more students can succeed, especially populations that have historically not been well served by the state's education system. This external support and pressure can support college faculty and leaders in changing the status quo in ways that best improve student outcomes. Although their agendas are not identical, a degree of collaboration among internal and external stakeholders is essential to ensuring that community colleges can play the central role in higher education policy that they were assigned under California's master plan.

The Hewlett Foundation has made grants to organizations including the Campaign for College Opportunity, a coalition-building effort to build support for more funding and better policies for higher education; California Tomorrow, a project to advocate for policies to help improve outcomes for minority and immigrant students; the California EDGE campaign, a coalition of labor, workforce, industry, and community colleges working to enhance access to postsecondary education and training in California; and the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation, a new effort to unite California businesses to prioritize increased funding and improved policies within the community colleges.

Technical Assistance, Capacity Building, and Tool Development. Technical assistance, capacity building, and tool development support colleges in making improvements in student success, even within the constraints of existing policies and resources. The professionals who work with students on a daily basis are the front lines in supporting students' progress. Therefore, according to Hewlett's analysis, a strategy to improve student outcomes must marshal the strengths of those practitioners, in particular providing opportunities for the most dedicated and creative faculty to examine evidence of student learning, use it to improve their teaching, and engage in inquiry with their colleagues. The same is true of other practitioners, such as counselors. This work relies less on specific best practices than it does on the principle of using data of various kinds to build knowledge and spark improvement at each level: classroom, department, college, district, system, and state.

Structures such as faculty inquiry groups, professional learning councils (which involve high school teachers together with community college instructors), and multicollge learning networks are central to this work. One example is the Strengthening Pre-Collegiate Education in Community Colleges (SPECC) network, a project with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching that involves eleven colleges in using faculty inquiry approaches to strengthen classroom practice. CalPASS, the California Partnership for Achieving Student Success, facilitates professional learning councils that bring high school and com-

munity college instructors together in their disciplines to eliminate curricular disjunctures.

Other learning opportunities include training sessions offered by Cabrillo College's Digital Bridge Academy to enable faculty at other colleges to replicate the curriculum. In addition, several tools are being developed to aid colleges in their work to improve student outcomes. Multimedia Windows on Learning in the SPECC project offer online resources and exemplars of good instructional practices, and a Web-based data tool helps assist colleges in analyzing cohort data.

Though building capacity and developing resources can have an impact on student success at the college level, large-scale improvement based on expanded professional learning and increased availability of services for students may require policy changes or additional investment. Many decisions about deploying resources, though made at the local level, are constrained by state laws and regulations. For example, state laws and regulations provide dedicated streams of funding (categoricals) for certain priorities but not others and dictate things like the ratio of classroom instruction to non-instruction in the college payroll. Sometimes such state policies are outmoded, serving as barriers to approaches that might better serve students. Changes in policy, then, may be necessary to maximize colleges' ability to help students succeed.

Although foundation dollars can directly support changes in programs or practices at individual colleges, they cannot legally be directed toward influencing legislation. Foundations can support work to inform state policy decisions, but ultimately such changes occur outside the direct scope of foundation investments. Capacity building at the policy level involves disseminating research through briefings, media coverage, policy briefings, and other avenues to inform state policymakers about the barriers to student success and ways of removing them. This work includes educating those who develop policy so that they grasp the central role of community colleges in providing postsecondary opportunity in California. Because of term limits affecting state lawmakers as well as high turnover among college leadership, capacity to analyze information, identify problems, and propose solutions is quite limited. An evaluation conducted for the foundation identified providing timely and effective technical assistance for policymakers as an important role the foundation can fill (William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 2007). In addition, Hewlett grantees' work with colleges across the state to strengthen student success, if successful, will ultimately provide the most useful information for policymakers about needed changes in policy.

Conclusion

Where there was once a vacuum of knowledge about community college policy issues in California and nationally, a series of research reports generated by Hewlett grantees and others in the field are helping to fill this void.

Because Hewlett is one of only two foundations in California with a statewide emphasis on community colleges, this research would be less likely to be conducted absent Hewlett's investment. In addition, a series of projects at colleges across the state, while helping individual students succeed, are also building the knowledge base and capacity to improve outcomes for larger numbers of students.

The Hewlett Foundation seeks to "address the most serious social and environmental problems facing society, where risk capital, responsibly invested, may make a difference over time." It also seeks to use its funds to leverage existing strengths and expose existing weaknesses along with solutions for minimizing them. Hewlett seeks to supplement, not replace, state investment. By the end of 2008, the foundation had invested close to \$30 million in efforts to strengthen community colleges.

Although the strategy operates at multiple levels, including the level of institutions and state policy, the nexus between policy change and institutional change may provide the most fertile ground in which dynamic improvement can occur. One example may help to illustrate this possibility. California's community colleges have embarked on a strategic plan that includes improving access and success among its goals. One initiative that has emerged from the plan, the statewide Basic Skills Initiative, is a systemwide priority supported in the state's budget. Similar to the Hewlett Foundation's goal of improving outcomes for underprepared students, the initiative seeks to improve the success of students who enroll in basic skills courses.

State policy created the Basic Skills Initiative with a system proposal and a state-level budget decision. But it cannot succeed without leveraging the resources locally. Resources are only part of the picture however. As part of the Basic Skills Initiative, the college system commissioned research on effective practices. The research has been distributed to colleges. Colleges then receive technical assistance or professional development through a state-funded effort. The initiative, if successful, can be a powerful tool for awareness building related to the important role of community colleges as avenues for improving the prospects of Californians who have not been previously well served by the education system. Investments by the foundation to research barriers to the success of underprepared students, raise awareness and understanding of the community colleges' important role, strengthen instruction for underprepared students, and improve colleges' ability to use data to improve student success all have the potential to leverage the investments of the Basic Skills Initiative.

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PAMELA BURDMAN is a program officer with the Education Program at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.



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