Symposium Justification

Symposium Title:

Enhancing Credit Accumulation and Graduation at the City University of New York: Results of Recent Rigorous Research

Recent years have seen multiple calls for increases in the number and percentage of people in the United States obtaining associate and baccalaureate college degrees. The need for employees with higher education credentials is growing faster than is the supply ([http://cew.georgetown.edu/undereducated](http://cew.georgetown.edu/undereducated)). One way to increase the number of degrees obtained is to increase the number of college students who stay in college and who graduate. Nationally, only about 59% of full-time students who begin bachelor’s degree programs receive any sort of degree within six years, and the comparable value for associate-degree students is 31% within three years ([http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=40](http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=40)). In urban, public, community colleges, where the majority of students must complete remedial work prior to engaging in college-level credit-bearing courses, that value is only 15%. Clearly much time and money is being spent on students who never, or only after a great many years, complete their college education.

The City University of New York (CUNY) illustrates many of these points. CUNY has approximately 240,000 undergraduate students attending its 19 college campuses, most of which are in urban settings. At CUNY, 30% of students who start at one of CUNY’s community colleges receive either an associate’s or a bachelor’s degree at CUNY within six years, and only 65% of CUNY’s community college freshmen are retained at CUNY after their first year.

The purpose of this symposium is to report recent rigorous tests at CUNY of several successful methods for significantly increasing community college students’ credit accumulation and retention and graduation rates. The methods reported concern: (1) mainstreaming remedial mathematics students in introductory, college-level, credit-bearing statistics with extra support, (2) financial incentives to change early enrollment behavior, and (3) students participating in a comprehensive program of support services (known as Accelerated Study in Associate Programs: ASAP).

Using randomized controlled trials we report evidence supporting the use of each of these methods, some of which increase credit accumulation and graduation rates by substantial amounts (e.g., ASAP more than doubles associate-degree three-year graduation rates).

Although excellent evidence now exists supporting the use of each of these methods, challenges remain in terms of scaling up and even gaining acceptance of these methods. These challenges, as well as the findings themselves, will be reviewed and explored by the symposium’s discussant.