

**REAUTHORIZING THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT:  
OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE STUDENT SUCCESS**

---

---

**HEARING**  
OF THE  
**COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
LABOR, AND PENSIONS**  
**UNITED STATES SENATE**  
**ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS**

FIRST SESSION

ON

EXAMINING REAUTHORIZING THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT, FOCUSING  
ON OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE STUDENT SUCCESS

—————  
AUGUST 5, 2015  
—————

Printed for the use of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

95-849 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2017

---

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Publishing Office  
Internet: [bookstore.gpo.gov](http://bookstore.gpo.gov) Phone: toll free (866) 512-1800; DC area (202) 512-1800  
Fax: (202) 512-2104 Mail: Stop IDCC, Washington, DC 20402-0001

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

LAMAR ALEXANDER, Tennessee, *Chairman*

MICHAEL B. ENZI, Wyoming  
RICHARD BURR, North Carolina  
JOHNNY ISAKSON, Georgia  
RAND PAUL, Kentucky  
SUSAN COLLINS, Maine  
LISA MURKOWSKI, Alaska  
MARK KIRK, Illinois  
TIM SCOTT, South Carolina  
ORRIN G. HATCH, Utah  
PAT ROBERTS, Kansas  
BILL CASSIDY, M.D., Louisiana

PATTY MURRAY, Washington  
BARBARA A. MIKULSKI, Maryland  
BERNARD SANDERS (I), Vermont  
ROBERT P. CASEY, JR., Pennsylvania  
AL FRANKEN, Minnesota  
MICHAEL F. BENNET, Colorado  
SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, Rhode Island  
TAMMY BALDWIN, Wisconsin  
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY, Connecticut  
ELIZABETH WARREN, Massachusetts

DAVID P. CLEARY, *Republican Staff Director*  
EVAN SCHATZ, *Minority Staff Director*  
JOHN RIGHTER, *Minority Deputy Staff Director*

# C O N T E N T S

## STATEMENTS

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5, 2015

Page

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Alexander, Hon. Lamar, Chairman, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, opening statement .....	1
Prepared statement .....	3
Murray, Hon. Patty, a U.S. Senator from the State of Washington, opening statement .....	5
Isakson, Hon. Johnny, a U.S. Senator from the State of Georgia .....	18
Collins, Hon. Susan M., a U.S. Senator from the State of Maine .....	39
Murphy, Hon. Christopher, a U.S. Senator from the State of Connecticut .....	42
Cassidy, Hon. Bill, a U.S. Senator from the State of Louisiana .....	43
Baldwin, Hon. Tammy, a U.S. Senator from the State of Wisconsin .....	45
Bennet, Hon. Michael F., a U.S. Senator from the State of Colorado .....	47
Warren, Hon. Elizabeth, a U.S. Senator from the State of Massachusetts .....	49

### WITNESSES

Jones, Stan, President, Complete College America, Indianapolis, IN .....	8
Prepared statement .....	10
Ralls, R. Scott, President, North Carolina Community College System, Ra- leigh, NC .....	14
Prepared statement .....	16
Renick, Timothy, Ph.D., M.A., Vice Provost and Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA ..	19
Prepared statement .....	21
Richburg-Hayes, Lashawn, Ph.D., President, Young Adults and Postsecondary Education, MDRC, New York, NY .....	23
Prepared statement .....	25

### ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

Statements, articles, publications, letters, etc.:	
Response by Stan Jones to questions of:	
Senator Alexander .....	53
Senator Cassidy .....	54
Senator Collins .....	55
Senator Enzi .....	55
Senator Murray .....	56
Senator Warren .....	56
Response by R. Scott Ralls to questions of:	
Senator Alexander .....	57
Senator Cassidy .....	58
Senator Collins .....	59
Senator Enzi .....	59
Senator Murray .....	60
Senator Warren .....	61
Senator Scott .....	62

Response by Timothy M. Renick to questions of:	
Senator Alexander .....	62
Senator Cassidy .....	64
Senator Collins .....	65
Senator Enzi .....	66
Senator Murray .....	67
Senator Warren .....	68
Senator Scott .....	69
Response by Lashawn Richburg-Hayes to questions of:	
Senator Alexander .....	75
Senator Cassidy .....	79
Senator Collins .....	80
Senator Enzi .....	81
Senator Murray .....	81
Senator Warren .....	83

# REAUTHORIZING THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT: OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE STU- DENT SUCCESS

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5, 2015

U.S. SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m., in room SD-430, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Lamar Alexander, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Alexander, Isakson, Collins, Cassidy, Enzi, Murray, Murphy, Baldwin, Bennet, Warren, and Franken.

## OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR ALEXANDER

The CHAIRMAN. The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions will please come to order. This is our eighth hearing during this Congress on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Senator Murray and I will each have an opening statement. Then we'll introduce our panel of witnesses. After our witnesses' testimony, Senators will have 5 minutes of questions each.

We expect to have a vote at 10:30. We won't be deterred by that. We'll take turns with the gavel, so as long as Senators are here, we'll continue the line of questions so we don't slow things down.

Today's hearing is really about finding out if there is a way the Federal Government can help more students finish college. Few students can afford to be stuck with debt and no degree, but that is what's happening to far too many college students. Federal aid programs are designed to help people working to earn a degree or a certificate in 1-, 2-, or 4-year programs.

According to the National Student Clearinghouse, only 55 percent of any students complete a degree or certificate within 6 years. The problem is even worse for low-income students: 8.6 million low-income students received Pell Grants from the Federal Government last year. Department of Education data says that only 45 percent of these students achieve a degree or certificate within 6 years.

There are 7 million borrowers in default on their Federal student loans, and the Department of Education says that borrowers are three times more likely to be in this situation if they did not finish any degree or credential.

We know that students who do not finish their program are less likely to benefit with a better job or salary.

I'd like to briefly address today: Why are so many American college students leaving before they graduate? What role can the Federal Government play in, No. 1, encouraging students, particularly those receiving Pell Grants and other Federal financial aid, to finish what they've started; and, No. 2, encouraging colleges and universities to help their students make progress and graduate?

I'm going to submit my entire statement to the record, but let me summarize what it says.

Why students aren't graduating seems to focus on these things:

*Part-time enrollment and slow progress.* Students with a full-time course load, meaning 15 credits per semester, who consistently enroll full-time are most likely to graduate. However, a 2013 survey of institutions showed the majority of so-called full-time college students aren't taking the credits needed to finish a 4-year degree for a bachelor's or in 2 years for an associate degree.

*Inadequate high school education.* According to the Community College Research Center, most remedial students never get past remediation.

*Financial difficulties.* Students from low-income backgrounds face pressures, making them more likely to drop out.

What can the government do? Senator Bennet and I have offered a proposal to simplify the student aid application form, the FAFSA. Testimony before our committee said that it discourages as many as 2 million students from applying for Federal financial aid. Many students continue working or have to get a job while they're in school.

Two years ago, Austin Peay State University in Clarksville testified at this committee about the success it has had with remedial education. Half of Austin Peay students need to take remedial courses once they're enrolled. The university redesigned its remedial education so that students who lack some skills in math, reading, or writing enroll in credit-bearing college courses with additional required workshops to help them catch up.

Before using this approach, only 10 percent of the remedial math students ever completed a college-level math class. Seventy percent do now.

A maximum Pell is often awarded to a student who is really not attending full-time. That's one reason. Federal aid does not encourage students to complete their degree as quickly as they can.

Second—and your testimony reflects this—Federal aid progress requirements seem to lack teeth.

Third, Federal aid today can be used to subsidize studies unfocused toward the degree. A student can use the Pell grant to take 90 credits, as many as 90, for a 60-credit associate's degree. The longer a student takes, the less likely they are to finish. Taking classes that get students off course from their goal could be detrimental to completion.

Federal policy has emphasized access rather than completion. We are looking to see whether we need to find ways to encourage over 6,000 higher education institutions to prioritize and encourage student success without throwing a big, wet blanket of a Federal mandate that smothers universities, that might work at Austin Peay but might not work at the University of Maryland, that might be good at Yeshiva but might not be good at Harvard.

We look forward to the testimony of the witnesses, and we thank you for coming.

[The prepared statement of Senator Alexander follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR ALEXANDER

DRAFT TALKERS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION HEARING ON COMPLETION

The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions will please come to order. This is our eighth hearing during this Congress on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. Ranking Member Murray and I will each have an opening statement, then we will introduce our panel of witnesses. After our witnesses' testimony, Senators will each have 5 minutes of questions.

Today's hearing is really about finding out if there is a way for the Federal Government to help more students finish college. Few can afford to be stuck with debt and no degree, but this is what's happening to far too many college students.

Federal aid programs are designed to help people working to earn a degree or a certificate in 1-, 2-, or 4-year programs.

According to the National Student Clearinghouse, only 55 percent of these students complete a degree or certificate within 6 years. The problem is even worse for low-income students.

8.6 million low-income students received Pell Grants from the Federal Government last year.<sup>1</sup>

Department of Education data finds only 45 percent of these students achieve a degree or certificate within 6 years.<sup>2</sup>

There are 7 million borrowers in default on their Federal student loans, and the Department of Education says that borrowers are three times more likely to be in this situation if they did not finish any degree or credential.

We know that students who do not finish their program are less likely to benefit with a better job or salary. So, I'd like to briefly address today:

- Why are so many American college students leaving before they graduate?
- What role can the Federal Government play in:
  - Encouraging students—particularly those receiving Pell Grants and other Federal financial aid—to finish what they've started?
  - Encouraging colleges and universities to help their students make progress and graduate?

1. WHY STUDENTS AREN'T GRADUATING

What seems to make students successful and what indicators suggest why they are more likely to dropout?

• **Part-time enrollment and slow progress:** Research shows that students with a full-time course load, meaning 15 credits per semester, who consistently enroll full-time are most likely to grad-

<sup>1</sup>Department of Education, Pell End of year report, 2013–14.

<sup>2</sup>Brookings Institution: Hamilton Project, October 2013, Redesigning the Pell Grant Program for the Twenty-First Century, Policy Brief 2013–14.

uate.<sup>3</sup> However, a 2013 survey of institutions showed, the majority of so-called full-time college students are not taking the credits needed to finish in 4 years for a bachelor's degree or in 2 years for an associates degree.

- For students who are going full- or part-time, not taking a break from school increases the likelihood of completion by 43 percent.
- **Inadequate high school education:** Students who need to take remedial courses to catch up to their peers in college face one of the biggest barriers to timely graduation. According to the Community College Research Center at Columbia University Teachers College, most remedial students never even get past remediation.
- **Financial difficulties:** Students from low-income backgrounds face financial pressures during college that make them more likely to drop out.

## 2. WHAT ROLE CAN THE GOVERNMENT PLAY IN ENCOURAGING GRADUATION?

Senator Bennet and I have a proposal to simplify the dreaded 108-question FAFSA to a simple postcard of about two questions. We understand that this will remove an obstacle that each year discourages about 2 million students from applying for Federal financial aid. And for some, it discourages reapplying for aid to continue in their studies.

Many or even most of the students who are eligible but not applying and enrolling in college are low-income students who would be the first in their family to attend college.

Some are adults already in the workforce.

Many of the students may continue working or have to get a job while they attend school.

Some institutions, including some of the ones we have represented here today, have found ways to provide students with needed support to progress through their classes and reach their ultimate goal—a degree or credential.

Two years ago, Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, TN, testified in front of this committee about success it has had with remedial education.

Half of Austin Peay students need to take remedial courses once they are enrolled.

The university redesigned their remedial education so that students who lack some skills in mathematics, writing, or reading enroll in credit-bearing college courses, with additional required workshops to help them catch up.

Before using this approach, only 10 percent of their remedial math students ever completed a college-level math class—now 70 percent do. Those students could never get their degree without passing that college-level math.

Despite the good work of some institutions, today Federal aid does not encourage students to complete their degree as quickly as they can, which ideally is on time.

---

<sup>3</sup>Klempin, S. 2014. Redefining Full-Time. Community College Research Center: Columbia University.



**First**, maximum Pell is often awarded to a student who's really not attending full-time: For example, a student gets their full Pell grant amount if they take 24 credits in a year, but a student generally must take 30 credits a year to graduate on-time.

**Second**, Federal aid progress requirements seem to lack teeth: Students must meet a "satisfactory academic progress" standard to remain eligible. This definition is set by institutions with broad requirements from Federal regulations, including a minimum grade point average and passing a minimum percentage of credits successfully.

These requirements may not require enough focused progression through a degree or certificate program and the timing of the evaluation of progress can be too late for students to change course.

**Third**, Federal aid today can be used to subsidize studies unfocused toward the degree: For example, a student can use their Pell grant to take 90 credits for a 60-credit associates degree.

The longer a student takes, the less likely they are to finish, taking classes that get students off-course from their goal could be detrimental to completion.

Of course, some students may want to take courses that don't help them meet requirements for graduation—but whether Federal aid should be allowed to be used for that is a question before the committee.

#### CONCLUSION

Federal policy has emphasized access rather than completion, and we recognize that college students are adults who have the autonomy and responsibility for making decisions for themselves.

I think we need to find a way to encourage our over 6,000 institutions to prioritize and encourage student success without throwing a big, wet blanket of a Federal mandate—that smothers universities—that might work at Austin Peay but might not work at the University of Maryland, that might be good at Yeshiva but not at Harvard.

I look forward to hearing a variety of successful strategies that are working or showing promise from our panel today.

I believe the solutions that we hear will note that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to improving student success.

I am particularly interested in hearing how Federal policies may hinder creative solutions or could better promote student progression toward on-time completion, saving the student money and allowing them to graduate with less debt.

Senator Murray.

#### OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR MURRAY

Senator MURRAY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Higher education is really critical to ensuring the economic strength of our middle class, and I believe it is a critical part of building an economy that works for all of our families, not just the wealthiest few.

Let's remember that in the years ahead, more and more jobs will actually require education beyond high school. We have an economic stake in helping as many students as possible go to college and complete their degrees. That is how we will remain competitive in the 21st century global economy.

As we work together on this committee to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, there are a few principles I'm going to focus on to make sure that more students can pursue their degree. I'm going to continue to look for ways to make college more affordable and reduce the crushing burden of student debt. As we talked about last week, I will be especially focused on making sure students have access to a safe learning environment.

More students from all walks of life should have strong, clear pathways into and through higher education. Creating pathways for student success is what we'll be focused on today, and it's clear there is lots of room for improvement.

Federal data show that just 60 percent of first-time students who attend full-time complete their 4-year degrees within 6 years. Even fewer students complete their degrees on time. Many of the other 40 percent of students likely dropped out without the advantages of a college degree, while oftentimes trying to pay off student debt. Many students at community colleges struggle to make it to graduation or successfully transfer to a 4-year program.

While college completion rates for students from more affluent backgrounds have increased over the past 40 years, the same is not true for students from low-income backgrounds. Just 9 percent of people from the lowest-income bracket graduated with a college degree by the time they reached age 24. That's only up from 6 percent in 1970.

Students today face many barriers to completing their degrees and credentials. There are several policies we can pursue to improve those completion rates. For one, in high school, we need to make sure that they graduate college- and career-ready. I'm glad that earlier this month, the Senate voted to pass a bipartisan bill from Chairman Alexander and I that would be a strong step in the right direction to do just that.

Today, many students drop out because they worry about mounting student debt or they have family or work responsibilities that make it impossible for them to continue earning their degree. We also need to provide adequate financial aid and lower costs to help improve student success. We also need better data on student outcomes from colleges and universities if we're going to help students effectively.

It is hard to believe, but higher education data ignores part-time students, transfer students, adults who are returning to school, students in remediation, and Pell grant recipients. We should know how these students are doing to make sure we're making effective policy decisions based on solid evidence.

I'm very concerned that some of my colleagues have suggested penalizing financial aid recipients and students from low-income backgrounds by tightening eligibility and other requirements in a misguided effort to try to motivate their success. Recent research suggests the exact opposite. Students don't succeed when financial aid policies only serve to punish rather than reward and support.

For first generation college students, for students from low-income backgrounds, and for students who are struggling in college, we need to incentivize institutions of higher education to have support systems in place. That includes structured pathways toward earning a degree so students see a clear route to graduation.

It includes programs for college mentoring and advising so students stay on track. It includes individualized counseling for students who need extra help.

When students have access to a support system, evidence shows that they are much more likely to complete their degrees. I'm looking forward to hearing from Dr. Richburg-Hayes on how increasing access to student services can help students, including the highly regarded CUNY ASAP program.

To me, improving outcomes at colleges and universities is an important piece of our work to grow our economy from the middle out. The success of students today will help guarantee that our Nation will be able to compete and lead the world in the years to come. I look forward to hearing testimony from all of you today. I really appreciate you being here.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Murray.

The vote was changed to 2 o'clock. So we won't have that interruption this morning due to the vote on the Senate floor.

Our first witness today is Stan Jones, president and founder of Complete College America. His organization partners with States with a goal of substantially increasing the number of Americans with a postsecondary credential. Prior to founding Complete College America, he served 16 years in the Indiana legislature, was a senior advisor to Governor Bayh, and was Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education for a decade.

Dr. Scott Ralls, president of North Carolina Community College System, is our next witness. This system serves almost 830,000 people annually. During the last 10 years, over 40 percent of North Carolina's wage earners have been students at one of the State's 58 community colleges. Next month, Dr. Ralls will assume the presidency of Northern Virginia Community College System.

Our next witness is Dr. Timothy Renick, vice provost, professor, and vice president for Enrollment Management and Student Success at Georgia State University. Over the past decade, Georgia State has doubled the number of at-risk students enrolled, but, more importantly, improved graduation rates by 22 percentage points and closed achievement gaps based on race and income.

Both Senator Burr and Senator Isakson had hoped to be here and may still be here. They're in a Finance Committee meeting and wanted me to say that to both of you.

Our final witness is Dr. Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, director for Young Adults and Postsecondary Education at MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy research organization in New York City. Dr. Richburg-Hayes focuses her work on academic achievement and persistence for low-income students at community colleges and less selected 4-year colleges. She has overseen some of the most rigorous experiments on how financial aid can be provided to students in ways that cause them to change their behaviors in order to succeed in school.

I look forward to everyone's testimony. If each of you would summarize your comments in about 5 minutes, that'll leave more time for us to have a conversation with you in our questioning.

Why don't we start with you, Mr. Jones, and go right down the line.

**STATEMENT OF STAN JONES, PRESIDENT, COMPLETE  
COLLEGE AMERICA, INDIANAPOLIS, IN**

Mr. JONES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senator Murray, and other members of the committee. Many of the remarks that you both made highlight my testimony.

Complete College America is an alliance of States. We work with 35 States across the country. We primarily work with States, Governors, legislators, and key higher education officials. We're entirely funded by foundations, like the Gates Foundation, Lumina, Carnegie, and Kellogg.

Just to highlight some of the points you made, I thought it was interesting that during the peak of the recession, when the most people were out of work, we had record breaking enrollment across this country at our colleges. At most colleges, it was record breaking, especially the community colleges.

It really points out that people are willing to go to college, are desperate to go to college, in order to better themselves. I have a handout here that I'm not going to go through, but I'm just going to refer to it from time to time.

Even given the huge amount of effort that we've made in access, the bottom quartile, income-wise—only 10 percent of those students get a 4-year college degree. From the second income quartile, only 15 percent get a 4-year college degree, and from the third income quartile, only about 34 percent of those students get a 4-year college degree.

College really only works for those in the upper quartile, and that's a combination of factors. For so many students, it's the structure of our colleges and universities that have failed them.

As both Senators have pointed out, we don't graduate students in any sector except the flagships and the private sector. Community college graduation rates can range from 15 percent to 25 percent. Four-year, non-flagship rates can range about 40 percent, and virtually nobody graduates on time.

We put out a report about 6 months ago called Four-Year Myth. Hardly anybody graduates in 4 years. Even at the flagships, less than half of those students graduate in 4 years. We found in our report that out of 580 public, 4-year universities, only 50 graduated 50 percent of their students within 4 years.

Students take longer, obviously, to get a degree than they used to—3.6 years at a 2-year college and 4.9 years at many 4-year colleges. Not surprisingly, the fifth year, the sixth year, costs more money, but it's also lost wages in the workforce.

Two studies by two different universities, the University of Texas and Temple University, indicate that student debt really spikes after the fourth year. Students have run out of traditional resources. A 70 percent increase in student debt occurs after that fourth year.

We have focused on what we call our game changers, things that significantly make a difference. There's only five of them that we recommend. Senator Alexander has referred to several.

One is transparency of information. Many colleges and many States are completely unaware of the remediation crisis, for example, that we have, the lack of completion that we have, how long it takes students. This is not data that the Federal Government

collects. We don't collect at the Federal level graduation rates for Pell students, for example.

The billions of dollars we spend on Pell—we don't know whether those students graduate or not. I know it's been back and forth, back and forth, about whether we even know whether the veterans graduate or not. There's some core—not many, but some core things that the Federal Government could collect in terms of transparency around these key issues.

It's hard for policymakers at your level, at the State level, to make these decisions without having graduation rates for Pell students, graduation rates for veterans, graduation rates for transfer students, remediation rates. This information simply doesn't exist.

Senator Alexander mentioned remediation. Sixty percent of all students at community colleges start in remediation. Very few finish. As he pointed out, Austin Peay has a great model. They're taking it statewide. Similar models like that are being taken statewide in about a half a dozen States. This could be done—right now, you allow 30 credit hours of Pell. Some of that money could be used to support students in credit-bearing classes.

Just a couple of other things in the seconds that I have remaining. Structure is hugely important. Again, in Tennessee, you have the Tennessee tech centers, Senator, and their graduation rate is about 75 percent to 80 percent. The placement rate is about 80 percent. That's about five times the rate in terms of graduation as typical community colleges with similar programs.

It really is all about structure. These programs, where they've been duplicated, have shown significant success.

The last one I want to mention, which you referenced, is 15 credit hours. The Pell program does not incent students to take more than 12. *De facto*, most students in the country full-time take 12 credit hours or less, so they're already on the 5-year plan. We would propose thinking about providing incentives for students to take 15 credit hours.

There are some examples here where States and institutions that have done that have doubled in 1 year the numbers of students that are taking 15 credit hours or more. They're more likely to graduate and, clearly, more likely to graduate on time.

These things can be done. It's not a problem with the students. It's not a problem with faculty. It's a problem with how we've structured these institutions. By providing more structure, like the Tennessee tech centers, which is very simple—you mentioned the SAP program in New York City—also very simple. Students go in the morning, Monday through Friday, 8 to 12. It's a block schedule. Or they go in the afternoon and it's a block schedule. Tennessee tech centers—the same way.

Tennessee tech centers take attendance, an underappreciated strategy. That's why they can get 75 percent to 80 percent completion rates.

A lot of these issues can be addressed—

The CHAIRMAN. We need to wind down and go to the next witness when you're finished.

Mr. JONES. Sure. In conclusion, what we recommend are only four or five game changers that provide substantial success—per-

formance funding is another one—and have provided success as these have been implemented across colleges and States.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Jones follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF STAN JONES

SUMMARY

For the last 6 years, Complete College America has worked closely with 33 States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands with a single mission in mind: increase the number of Americans with a college degree or credential of value, and close persistent attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations.

This critical work has been driven by the reality that despite decades of work in the access agenda, America faces a college completion crisis. A failure to act decisively on these issues would perpetuate an ongoing skills gap that threatens our economic future and degrades our intellectual leadership around the world.

The strategies outlined below are instrumental in achieving those successes. The Game Changers are designed to give States and campuses the greatest return on investment. These strategies, which we are working to implement every day, are achieving transformational results around the country—gains in student success that are 20, 30 or 40 percentage points greater than current practices.

- **Corequisite Remediation**—Default many more unprepared students into college-level gateway courses with mandatory, just-in-time instructional support parallel to high structured coursework.

- **Fifteen to Finish**—Inform and incentivize students to attend full-time and ensure that full-time means 15 credits per semester or 30 credits per year. Use banded tuition so that 15 credits per semester cost students no more than 12 credits.

- **Guided Pathways to Success (GPS)**—Enabled by technology, default students into highly structured degree plans, not individual courses. Start students in a limited number of meta-majors, which narrow into majors. Map out every semester of study for the entire program, and guarantee that milestone courses will be available when needed. Use built-in early warning systems to alert advisers when students fall behind.

- **Structured Schedules**—Help working students balance jobs and school by using structured scheduling of classes to add predictability to their busy lives—doing so enables many more students to attend college full-time, shortening their time to completion and reducing costs of attendance.

- **Performance Funding**—Pay for performance, not just enrollment. Use the CCA/NGA metrics to tie State funding to student progression and completion.

There are any number of innovations we can employ to move the needle on college completion, but the magnitude of these challenges requires that our reforms be structural and systemic. The Game Changers are proven strategies that lead to real and lasting results. When it comes to college completion, our Nation cannot afford to wait any longer. We must take action now.

INTRODUCTION

Since our founding in 2009, Complete College America has worked closely with 33 States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands with a single mission in mind: increase the number of Americans with a college degree or credential of value, and close persistent attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations.

This critical work has been driven by the reality that America faces a college completion crisis, and a failure to act decisively on these issues would perpetuate an ongoing skills gap that threatens our economic future and degrades our intellectual leadership around the world.

A look at the data shows just how serious this challenge is for our country: only 4 percent of full-time students complete an associate degree on time, that is, within 2 academic years. At non-flagship, 4-year institutions, only 19 percent complete their degree on time. Even given 3 years for an associate degree and 6 years for a bachelor's degree, these numbers inch up only slightly to 13 percent and 45 percent respectively. For part-time students, the results are even more discouraging.

These consistently low completion rates come at a great cost to students and their families. In our 2014 report, *Four-Year Myth*, we outlined that each additional year

of college costs 2-year students over \$50,000 in tuition, fees, lost wages, and other expenses and close to \$70,000 for 4-year students. Further, data taken from Temple University and University of Texas-Austin show that 2 extra years at their campuses increase debt by nearly 70 percent among students who borrow. Add it all up, and everyone loses. The public invests in college studies that—for too many students—often lead nowhere. Students defer earning income, and they and their families take on massive amounts of debt to earn degrees that could be much less time consuming and costly.

Additionally, while we have experienced great success in the college access agenda, a closer look at graduation day reveals that those who do eventually earn degrees are not representative of the rich diversity that defines this Nation. The hopes raised by nearly equitable enrollments in the freshman class for students of color, low-income students, and first generation students are crushed by gaps in achievement and completion.

Taken together, this crisis costs our Nation and the States billions of dollars, contributes to the more than \$1 trillion in student loan debt, and stifles our economic growth.

There is no doubt that the mission to boost college completion and success is a difficult one, but this work is critical. Complete College America's Alliance of States, now at 35 members, is ensuring that both colleges and higher education policymakers value access and success equally. We are working together to identify and enact powerful reforms that help students succeed. New laws are being forged. New policies are being implemented. And students are beginning to enjoy the rewards of a reinvented system of American higher education.

The strategies outlined below are instrumental in achieving those successes. The Game Changers are designed to give States and campuses the greatest return on investment. These strategies, which we are working to implement every day, are achieving transformational results around the country—gains in student success that are 20, 30 or 40 percentage points greater than current practices. The success of these efforts are the result of tackling systemic problems head on, ensuring that many more Americans earn a degree or other credentials of value. Now, our challenge is to see that these powerful ideas are taken to scale around the country.

#### COREQUISITE REMEDIATION

For far too many students in the United States, college begins—and often ends—in remediation. Of the 1.7 million students assigned to this broken system each year, only about 1 in 10 will graduate. Seventy percent of students placed into remedial math fail to enroll in the college-level gateway course within 2 academic years.

Efforts around the country have shown that the best way to support students who are currently placed into remedial education is to put them directly into college-level courses with additional academic support. By providing remediation as a corequisite—not as a prerequisite sequence that sets students back—we eliminate the all too frequent problem of remedial students never making it to a college-level course. Institutions that have adopted corequisite approaches have reduced attrition and seen dramatic increases in student success.

Corequisite remediation is implemented in a number of ways: as an additional class period alongside the college-level course, a required lab with mentors, or 5 weeks of remediation followed by 10 weeks of the regular course. The overarching goal is to free students from long remedial sequences that do not count toward a degree and that create more points at which students are likely to drop out.

In States and institutions where corequisite remediation is being utilized, the results have been astounding. In places like Colorado, Indiana, Tennessee and West Virginia, data shows that students enrolled in single-semester, corequisite English typically succeed at twice the rate of students enrolled in traditional prerequisite English courses. Students enrolled in corequisite gateway math courses saw results five to six times the success rates of traditional remedial math sequences.

- West Virginia: Under the leadership of Chancellor Jim Skidmore, the Community and Technical College System of West Virginia scaled corequisite remediation across its campuses. Under the corequisite model, 68 percent of students completed gateway English within one semester, up from 37 percent within 2 years under the traditional model. In mathematics, success rates increased from 14 percent under the traditional model to 62 percent under corequisite remediation.

- Tennessee: The Tennessee Board of Regents reports that under corequisite remediation, gateway course success rates increased from 12 percent to 63 percent in math and from 31 percent to 74 percent in English. Additionally, Tennessee's data shows that students at every level of academic preparedness (based on ACT sub-scores) did better under the new model.

Seven States have committed to scaling corequisite remediation by 2015. Twenty-two States and the District of Columbia have committed to transforming remediation to dramatically increase the percentage of students who complete college-level gateway courses in math and English within 1 academic year.

#### FIFTEEN TO FINISH

As mentioned above, the vast majority of American college students, and almost no one at community colleges, graduates on time, costing families billions.

One frustratingly simple reason for late completion is that most college students are not taking enough credits (at least 30) each academic year to finish within 2 or 4 years—an unintended consequence of flawed Federal policy and misguided conceptions about what is in the best interest of students.

Research has shown that when students take at least 30 credits in their first year, they earn better grades, they are more likely to be retained from 1 year to the next, and they graduate at a higher rate—regardless of their level of academic preparation.

Fifteen to Finish campaigns—which originated at the University of Hawaii System, have been launched across the country, both on campuses and statewide, to encourage more students to take at least 15 credits per semester or 30 credits per year. Citing information on college affordability and time to degree, these campaigns—ranging from print advertisements on campus to creative infomercials—urge students to take the credits necessary to complete on time.

Additionally, States are implementing policy changes to encourage greater enrollment intensity, including banded tuition, in which students are charged the same amount of tuition regardless of whether they take 15 credits or the customary 12. The incentive for students to make use of this opportunity is that enrolling in a heavier course load not only reduces the cost they pay per credit but saves all the other expenses associated with an extra semester or year on campus. At the city colleges of Chicago, students are offered two free summer courses if they enroll in 15 credits for both the fall and spring semesters.

- Indiana: At Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, more than half of students are now enrolling in enough credits to graduate on time, up from 28 percent the year before. Purdue University-Calumet increased the number of students taking 15 credits from 40 percent in 2013 to 66 percent in 2014.

- Ohio: At the University of Akron, Fifteen to Finish efforts led to a 28 percent increase in the number of full-time freshmen taking at least 15 credit hours per semester.

Twenty-four States have either statewide or campus-based Fifteen to Finish initiatives to encourage more students to take at least 15 credits per semester or 30 credits per year.

#### GUIDED PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS (GPS)

One of the most important hindrances to timely college completion is that students often have no clear path to graduation. They are faced with hundreds of majors, countless course offerings, and far too few academic advisors. Take together, these things result in students having too many choices and not nearly enough guidance.

The result: students wander through the curriculum, taking courses that do not count toward their degrees and exhausting their financial aid. The courses they do need are often unavailable. At 2-year institutions, students rack up 81 credits rather than the standard 60 credits and take 3.6 years to complete. At 4-year, non-flagship institutions, students take 134 credits rather than 120 and take close to 5 years to complete. College ends up taking too long and costing too much, and too few complete.

Guided Pathways to Success (GPS) addresses these issues directly. By building highly structured degree plans as default pathways to on-time graduation, States can place every college student on a road to success. Rather than being considered “unclassified,” students can select meta-majors and are given semester-by-semester plans that lay out a clear path to completion.

- Florida: At Florida State University, degree maps combined with other GPS strategies increased on-time graduation rates from 44 percent to 61 percent. Additionally, attainment gaps have narrowed. African American, Hispanic and first-generation Pell students graduate from FSU at significantly higher rates than the national average.

- Arizona: The use of GPS strategies in Arizona State University’s eAdvisor system increased on-time graduation rates by nearly 16 percentage points.



- Georgia: The use of GPS, specifically intrusive advising, at Georgia State University has wiped out attainment gaps entirely: African American and Hispanic students now graduate at higher rates than the overall student body.

Four States are working to take GPS to scale, and five States are implementing GPS in STEM. Seven cities around the country are working to implement GPS through our Community Partnerships for Attainment.

#### STRUCTURED SCHEDULES

Seventy-five percent of today's college students are commuters, often juggling families, jobs and school. But even in the face of this "new majority," much of American higher education has gone unchanged.

Most students begin college with the expectation of attending full-time and completing within 2 or 4 years. But quickly the cold realities hit them. Remedial classes block their entrance into programs of study. The courses necessary to stay on track are not available. Bit by bit, full-time becomes part time and, all too often, students become 1 of the 30 million who have some college credit but no degree.

While there will always be those who insist on or need to go to college part time, we must look for ways to help more students attend full-time. Structured schedules—for example, going to school every day from 8 to noon or from 1 to 5—provide daily certainty that allows for easier scheduling. Students can predict their course requirements and arrange schedule with employers and childcare providers without the complications of day-to-day and semester-by-semester alterations.

Under this Game Changer, many more students are able to manage a full-time load and completion becomes twice as likely. Additionally, structured schedules for part-time students can help them increase credit accumulation toward successful completion. States should redirect the good intentions that led to limitless part-time enrollment and make the necessary changes to deploy structured schedules across their campuses.

- Tennessee: Structured schedules have regularly produced graduation rates of 75 percent or higher for career certificates at the Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology.

- New York: Structured schedules through the CUNY ASAP program have led to graduation rates double that of peers in traditional schedules.

Seven States have programs within them that currently utilize structured schedules.

#### PERFORMANCE FUNDING

In the past, taxpayers in most States have supported higher education based on the number of students enrolled on or around the 12th day of the semester. Consequently, colleges and universities have had few financial incentives to prioritize student success.

Under performance funding, institutions receive State dollars based on factors such as credit accumulation, remedial student success in gateway courses, and degree completion. While institutions are still rewarded for enrollment and access, progress and success are equally valued.

To date, 26 States have implemented or are in the process of implementing performance funding. While this strategy cannot guarantee more college graduates, it can help ensure that campuses are motivated to adopt successful reforms. Simply put, money focuses minds.

#### ACTIONS CONGRESS CAN TAKE

- Address gaps in the integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The current data collection system does not fully capture the needs of today's students. Data is currently unavailable regarding part-time students, transfer students, students aged 25 or older, gateway course success for remedial students, credit accumulation, time to degree, courses completion, and most importantly, the system does not track Pell students. Ultimately, IPEDS data does a very poor job of counting all students.

- Incentivize students to take 15 credits per semester. Based on a recent survey commissioned by Complete College America, most "full-time" students are not taking the credits needed to graduate on time. Federal and State policies should encourage students to take at least 15 credits per semester or 30 credits per year. For example, reinstate year-round Pell grant funding that enables students to accumulate the credits necessary to graduate on time, including allowing students to receive Pell Grant resources through 15 credits, rather than the current 12 credit limit.

- Encourage Pell grants to provide students the opportunity to complete remediation and a college-level course within their first academic year.
- Consider a Pell bonus for institutions that enroll high numbers of Pell students to help colleges do more to become high quality institutions.
- For legislation such as America's College Promise, do more to support and incentivize colleges to implement Game Changer strategies to create "high quality institutions" as referenced in the original proposal.

There are any number of innovations we can employ to move the needle on college completion, but the magnitude of these challenges requires that our reforms be structural and systemic. The Game Changers are proven strategies that lead to real and lasting results. When it comes to college completion, our Nation cannot afford to wait any longer. We must take action now.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.  
Mr. Ralls.

**STATEMENT OF R. SCOTT RALLS, PRESIDENT, NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM, RALEIGH, NC**

Mr. RALLS. Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity.

In October 2009, State and local community college leaders met in Fayetteville, NC, and declared student success the strategic focus of North Carolina's community colleges. Designed to be more a dynamic than a strategic plan, the effort, billed as SuccessNC, began as a 9-month listening-and-learning tour across all 58 of our colleges.

It culminated in what some outside observers have referred to as a culture shift in our system. Almost 6 years later, SuccessNC resulted in a series of statewide programmatic reforms and initiatives designed to impact student success at scale across 58 community colleges.

Some of these programmatic reforms included redesign of statewide dual enrollment programs, where high school students enroll free of charge in pathways rather than courses; complete overhaul of developmental education, or what some refer to as remedial education, accelerating more students into college-level math and English courses; restructuring of 89 technical programs to enable the on-ramps and off-ramps of competency-based programs that tie in industry certification, and math redesign to contextualize with workplace requirements; overhaul of our statewide university articulation agreements with community colleges, enabling guaranteed course transfers for all community college students to colleges in the UNC System and soon most of the private universities in our State, as well as new reverse transfer opportunities, and new cross-sector engineering and nursing pathways; and statewide performance outcome measures and funding tied to key student success metrics, as well as new data systems, advanced analytics, and professional development across colleges, all focused on student success.

The combined implementation of these efforts is still relatively new, and the outcomes are yet to be evaluated—a few years down the road, once we get a little further down the road with the combined implementation. While we've changed many programs with good intentions, we've certainly not yet reached educational nirvana or figured everything out.

However, a number of lessons and principles have emerged in the 6-year journey, ways in which our thinking has been greatly in-

fluenced, and lessons that perhaps may contribute to ideas to you as you approach the very important work of reauthorizing the Higher Education Act.

First, we know students are more likely to find success when they continuously progress along coherent curriculum pathways. That's a key reason in our State why we're pushing—and our Governor has endorsed—key legislators for year-round funding for community colleges. It's also why year-round Pell grants would be key to impacting student success across our Nation.

Students are more likely to find success when they start with the end in mind and have outcome milestones along the way. That's why your emphasis on outcome milestones is so important in the Higher Education Act, but it's vital to pay more attention to the measures that appropriately measure institutional impact on student success.

Less than one-third of the students enrolling in degree programs at North Carolina community colleges are in the current IPEDS cohort. Those many students who leave us without an academic credential leave with recognized industry certification that often leads to a job, or they move on to a university and gain a 4-year degree. They're not counted as successes according to current metrics.

Third, and relatedly, we know the success goal for many of our students—the one that they pursue—is a skill and a job. Their incomes and their family responsibilities require that they quickly improve their job standing, which is why we have gone to such great lengths in North Carolina to integrate and articulate short-term training opportunities leading to valued industry certifications into the structure of our applied associate degrees, what some refer to as stackable certification.

This means that students can gain valuable industry certification in high-demand areas, like information technology, welding, health care, and machining, take those certifications into the workplace, but then bring back and continue uninterrupted along academic pathways that lead to academic degrees. Authorizing institutions to include short-term training programs in their Pell grant eligible portfolio would be an important step to both closing the skills gap and recognizing the breadth of student success in higher ed.

Fourth, we know that most of our student pathways to success run through institutions. They don't begin and end there, and students' personal pathways, their educational pathways, aren't typically confined to single institutions. We have to be willing to embrace the reality that is student swirl and be diligent in creating more coherent pathways that cut across institutions.

Community colleges are uniquely positioned in this regard, as what I often refer to as the seam in seamless education. Wherever possible, I believe that Federal policy should incentivize and encourage dual enrollment programs with high schools that are tightly coordinated with community colleges, as well as statewide articulation agreements between community colleges and universities. Creation of a Federal student unit record system for title IV eligible institutions would move us forward in accounting for the reality of students moving across multiple institutions.

And, finally, we know that what is important in the end is the number of successes we create, not just the percentages within our

institutions. Success must be attained through widely available opportunity, which is why both simplification and access are so vital to any focus on student success.

Over two-thirds of community college students come from the bottom half of the income brackets. We know the harsh realities of their struggles with both complexity and affordability. That is why an increased call for simplifying and improving student financial aid is so important to student success. It is why our sector also applauds the goals of the America's College Promise Act, because it importantly makes the bold point that accessible postsecondary education beyond high school is today a necessity for family sustaining incomes.

In conclusion, we know that America's community colleges today have to be more than just a gateway to the American dream. We have to build clearer, more direct pathways to those American dreams. Consideration of these points—and I look forward to discussing them more with you as this hearing continues. Consideration of these points as you continue this important pursuit of the Higher Education Act will clear many obstacles for students in their pathways to opportunity.

Thank you for this opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Ralls follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF R. SCOTT RALLS

SUMMARY

In 2009, the North Carolina Community College System, comprising 58 colleges serving more than 830,000 students annually, began a comprehensive focus on student success that resulted in multiple programmatic reforms at scale implemented across the State. These included dual enrollment pathways where students choose structured pathways in high school and take free college classes, overhaul of developmental education accelerating more students forward to college level math and English classes, restructuring of technical education curriculum to enable opportunities for stackable certification, and redesign of statewide university articulation agreements to provide course guarantees for students transferring between community colleges and universities.

These statewide programmatic efforts provide lessons into opportunities for enhancing student success on a scaled basis, and insight into potential areas of attention in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act:

- **Students more likely to find success when they continuously progress along coherent pathways.** This is the key reason why North Carolina has put emphasis on year-round funding of community colleges, and why Higher Education Act should allow for year-round Pell grant opportunities.

- **Students more likely to find success when they start with the end in mind, and have outcome mile markers along the way.** Outcomes and accountability are important, but that importance requires metrics capturing true breadth of student success, and infrastructure that eases institutional reporting requirements.

- **Success goal many students pursue is skill leading to a job.** Higher Education Act should support short-term training that leads students to valued third-party industry credentials, and when that training is further articulated into academic curriculum.

- **Student pathways to success run through and across institutions, and are not typically confined to a single institution.** Federal legislation should encourage and incentivize tight dual enrollment partnerships with public schools, and strong statewide articulation agreements between community colleges and universities.

- **Number of successes produced is what is most important, not just percentages within institutions.** Maintaining strong access, particularly for low-income students, is key. Financial aid simplification is badly needed, and increasing the financial support for students to foster a true K-14 pathway is important.

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and members of the committee, my name is Scott Ralls and I am president of the North Carolina Community College System, transitioning in 1 month to become president of Northern Virginia Community College.

In October 2009, State and local community college leaders met in Fayetteville, NC and declared student success the strategic focus of the North Carolina Community College System. Designed to be more dynamic than a strategic plan, the effort, billed as *SuccessNC*, began as a 9-month listening-and-learning tour to all 58 community colleges in the State and led to what some outside observers labeled as a culture shift in our system. Five years later, *SuccessNC* resulted in a series of statewide programmatic reforms and initiatives that impact student success at scales across 58 community colleges.

These programmatic reforms included:

- Redesign of statewide dual enrollment programs where students enroll in pathways rather than courses;
- Adult basic education programs integrated with developmental education and occupational skills certification;
- Overhaul of developmental education accelerating more students into college-level math and English courses;
- Restructuring 89 technical programs to enable the on-ramps and off-ramps of competency-based, stackable certifications, and math redesign to contextualize with workplace requirements;
- Complete overhaul of our statewide university articulation agreements enabling guaranteed course transfers for all community college transfers to the UNC System and most private universities in our State, reverse transfer opportunities, and new cross-sector engineering and nursing pathways; and
- Statewide performance outcome measures and funding tied to key student success metrics, and new data systems, advanced analytic tools, and professional development across community colleges.

The combined implementation of these efforts is still relatively new and the outcomes yet to be evaluated once we are a few more years down the road, and while we have changed many programs with good intentions, we certainly haven't found educational nirvana nor figured out everything yet.

However, a number of lessons and principles have emerged during this 6-year journey—ways in which our thinking has been influenced—and lessons that perhaps may contribute to ideas as you approach the important reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

*First, we know students are more likely to find success when they continuously progress along coherent curriculum pathways.* This is a key reason for our current push for year-round State funding in North Carolina, an effort that has been championed by Governor Pat McCrory and key legislative leaders, and one where we have already obtained partial success. Community college students eager to move into or progress in the workforce, or on to a university, are not looking to take a summer vacation. Their forward movement often needs to be accelerated, not slowed, and that is why we believe the provision of year-round Pell grants is so fundamental to accelerating student success.

*Second, we know students are more likely to find success when they start with the end in mind, and have outcome milestones along the way.* That is why the emphasis on outcomes and accountability is so important in the Higher Education Act reauthorization. However, it is vital that more attention be given to measures that appropriately measure institutional impact on student success. Less than one-third of the students enrolling in our North Carolina Community colleges are included in the current IPEDS graduation cohort. Those many students who leave us without an academic credential, but with valued industry credentials leading to a job, or successful transfer to a university leading to a bachelor's degree, are currently not considered as successes based on the Federal definition.

Where possible, the Higher Education Act should provide resources, funding and technical assistance to respond to performance-based funding systems, create the facilitating infrastructure that facilitates measuring and tracking of student success, and streamline other institutional reporting requirements.

*Third and relatedly, we know the success goal many of our students pursue is a skill and a job.* Their incomes and family responsibilities require them to quickly improve their job standing, which is why we have gone to such great lengths in North Carolina to integrate and articulate short-term training opportunities leading to valued industry certifications into the structure of our applied associate degrees—what is often referred to as stackable certification. This means students can gain highly valued industry credentials in demand areas such as information technology,

welding, health care and machining and enter the workplace with a higher paying job, while continuing their pursuit of a postsecondary credential with credit for their previous short-term training.

Authorizing institutions to include short-term training programs in their Pell Grant-eligible portfolio would be an important step to both closing the skills gap and fully recognizing the breadth of postsecondary student success.

*Fourth, we know that most of our student pathways to success run **through** our institutions, they don't begin and end there, and students' personal pathways aren't typically confined to single institutions.* We have to be willing to embrace the reality of "student swirl", but be diligent in creating more coherent pathways across institutions and educational sectors, which is why tight, structured collaborations across educational partners are so important.

Community colleges are uniquely positioned, in this regard, as what I like to refer to as the "seam in seamless education." Wherever possible, I believe, Federal policy and legislation should encourage and incentivize implementation of dual enrollment pathways tightly connected with public schools, and strong statewide articulation agreements between community colleges and universities. Creation of a Federal unit record system for title IV eligible institutions would move us forward accounting for the reality of students moving across multiple institutions.

*Finally, we know that what is important in the end is the number of successes we collectively help produce, not just the percentages within our individual institutions.* Success must be attained through widely available opportunity, which is why both simplification and access are so vital to any focus on student success. Over two-thirds of community college students today come from the bottom half of the income brackets. We know the harsh realities of their struggles with both complexity and affordability. That is why the increased call for simplifying and improving student financial aid is so important, and if made a reality, will play an important role in furthering student success.

It is also why our sector applauds the goals of the America's College Promise Act, which notes not only the unique role of America's community colleges, but more importantly makes the bold point that accessible postsecondary education beyond high school is today a necessity for family sustaining incomes.

In conclusion, we know that America's community colleges today have to be more than just a gateway to the American dream, we have to build clearer, more direct pathways to those dreams. Your consideration of these points in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act will help clear some obstacles from those pathways of opportunity.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Ralls.

Senator Isakson, I already introduced Dr. Renick. Would you like to say some words about him?

Senator ISAKSON. I want to brag about him, because—

The CHAIRMAN. You've done that before.

#### STATEMENT OF SENATOR ISAKSON

Senator ISAKSON. I've done that. Two years ago, I bragged about Georgia State University and, in particular, the Panther Grant Program, which was an innovation of the university and which Dr. Renick uses today to see to it that students almost on the verge of dropping out because of a minimal financial problem get a minimal financial need met so they can stay in school and graduate.

It's interesting to note that other than Panther grants, they've also developed a student tracking system that tracks over 30,000 students at the university and measures them against 800 unique identifiers which indicate pitfalls they could actually have toward graduation. Georgia State is doing a remarkable job. Most notably of all, they now grant more bachelor degrees to African American graduates than any university in the United States of America.

I'm very proud to have Dr. Renick here today, and I'm very proud of Georgia State University.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Isakson.

Dr. Renick.

**STATEMENT OF TIMOTHY RENICK, Ph.D., M.A., VICE PROVOST  
AND VICE PRESIDENT FOR ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT  
AND STUDENT SUCCESS, GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY, AT-  
LANTA, GA**

Mr. RENICK. Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and the committee members, thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

Senator Isakson, a particular thanks for your leadership and support of higher education in Georgia.

A decade ago, the odds that Georgia State University would some day be invited to testify at a hearing on student success seemed very remote. Georgia State's institutional graduation rate stood at 32 percent, and underserved populations were foundering. Graduate rates were 22 percent for Hispanics, 29 percent for blacks, and 18 percent for black males.

As Atlanta and Georgia were being hit hard by the recession, the challenges intensified. Georgia State lost tens of millions of dollars in State appropriations while simultaneously doubling the number of at-risk students that it enrolls.

Today, our 32,000 students are 63 percent non-white and 59 percent Pell eligible. Ours is now one of the most diverse student bodies in the Nation and one of the most at-risk. These are hardly the typical ingredients for a turnaround.

Despite these odds, under the leadership of President Mark Becker, we made a public commitment to develop a model that would allow students from all backgrounds to succeed at high rates. Using data proactively, we identified obstacles that trip up our students and pioneered a dozen innovative and large-scale programs to help.

For example, as recently as 2011, Georgia State was dropping more than 1,000 students every semester from their classes because the students couldn't cover all of the costs of their tuition and fees. Disproportionately low-income and first generation, many of these students were seniors, who were only a semester or two away from graduating. With balances of as little as \$300. Dropping these students was heartbreaking and made little sense.

In 2011, we created Panther Retention Grants as a response. The program awards one-time micro grants to cover the balance between what students can pay and the cost of their tuition and fees. From modest beginnings, we have now brought 5,300 students back into their classes via this program alone.

Among the senior recipients, more than 60 percent graduate within two semesters of receiving the grant. Because the funding goes exclusively to cover tuition and fees, 100 percent of the grant monies come back to the university, making the program not only the right thing to do, but financially sustainable as well.

Our GPS advising system addresses another major problem that hits at-risk students particularly hard: poor academic decision-making. Using 10 years of Georgia State data and over 2.5 million grades, we have created predictive analytics to identify when students first get off track for graduation.

We are now tracking 30,000 students every day for 800 different risk factors, ranging from students who register for classes that don't apply to their degree programs to those who underperform in prerequisite classes. When a problem is identified, an alert goes off, and the advisor assigned to that student reaches out to help, typically within 48 hours.

Last year at Georgia State, we had 43,000 one-on-one meetings between advisors and students that were prompted by alerts from our GPS advising system. Because students are making fewer mistakes, we have reduced the average time to degree, saving our students and taxpayers millions of dollars.

Such interventions are in many ways just common sense, but they make a huge difference. Georgia State University now graduates 1,700 more students annually than it did just 5 years ago and confers more bachelor's degrees to African Americans than any nonprofit college or university in the Nation. Our graduation rate has climbed 22 percentage points overall, with the biggest gains being enjoyed by student populations that once struggled the most. As a result, all achievement gaps, based on race, ethnicity, and economics have been eliminated.

The impact has been so transformational that in this coming January, we will be consolidated with the largest 2-year college in the State of Georgia with the goal of leveraging our new programs and technologies to benefit an additional 22,000 students. Even prior to consolidation, Georgia State was committed to broadly sharing the approaches that we have developed. We have hosted visiting teams from 160 campuses over the past 2 years, and we work closely to share practices with groups such as Complete College America and the Urban Serving Universities of the APLU.

We are a founding member of the University Innovation Alliance, a coalition of 11 large public research universities enrolling more than 400,000 students and dedicated to improving student outcomes, especially for low-income students. Such collaborations we are using to greatly accelerate the pace by which innovative new approaches to student success are adopted nationally.

Collaboration across institutions is perhaps the most promising path to transforming student outcomes at scale. Here we need your help. Amid the competitive, ranking-conscious world of higher education, we need to find new ways to incentivize collaboration. Federal grant programs, for instance, too often reward the efforts of a campus or two to implement the tried and true rather than supporting ambitious proposals to test and scale transformative ideas across broad groupings of universities.

We need to find more nuanced ways to determine when and how students are given access to Federal aid. We should empower campuses to use data intelligently to target Federal aid to the students who will make the best use of it, and create greater flexibility and eligibility rules for students demonstrating strong progress toward completing their degrees.

If we're truly serious about increasing completion rates for low-income students, we need to curb the predatory institutions and lenders that target them and promote meaningful literacy training so that students will use their Federal aid more wisely.



Georgia State University still has much work to do. Our story demonstrates that significant improvements in student success can be achieved through embracing inclusion rather than exclusion. It shows that, contrary to popular belief, students from all backgrounds can succeed at high rates and that dramatic gains can be made even amid the context of constrained resources.

Georgia State's story is, indeed, improbable. That's the problem. It is time we made it the norm.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Renick follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF TIMOTHY RENICK, PH.D., M.A.

SUMMARY

Despite demographic shifts that have doubled the number of at-risk students enrolled and steep cuts to its State appropriations, Georgia State University in Atlanta has transformed its student success outcomes over the past decade. Georgia State's graduation rate has climbed 22 percentage points, with the biggest gains being enjoyed by the at-risk student populations that once struggled the most. The university now graduates 1,700 more students annually than it did just 5 years ago and confers more baccalaureate degrees to African Americans than any non-profit college or university in the Nation. **Georgia State has eliminated all achievement gaps based on race, ethnicity and income level.**

Under the leadership of President Mark Becker, Georgia State made a public commitment to develop a model that would allow students from all backgrounds to succeed at high rates. Through the proactive use of data and a willingness to scale interventions so that they benefit thousands of students, the university has pioneered a series of innovative and highly impactful student success programs.

**Panther Retention Grants** fund small gaps between the costs of tuition and fees and the resources that students have. For as little as \$300, students are brought back into classes instead of being allowed to drop or stop out. From modest beginnings in 2011, the program has now restored 5,300 students to their classes. For the recipients who are seniors, more than 60 percent have graduated within two semesters of receiving their grants. Because the funding goes exclusively toward covering tuition and fees, 100 percent of the grant monies come back to the university, making the program not only the right thing to do but sustainable, as well.

**GPS Advising** is a tracking system that uses predictive analytics to identify in real time when students go off course for graduation. Using 10 years of historical data and more than 2.5 million Georgia State grades, the system tracks 30,000 students every day for more than 800 risk factors such as registering for the wrong course or underperforming in prerequisite classes. Last year, there were 43,000 one-on-one meetings between Georgia State advisors and students that were prompted by alerts from the GPS Advising system.

Georgia State's student success efforts, both as an individual institution and as part of collaborations such as the **University Innovation Alliance**, would be assisted by: (1) Identifying ways to incentivize student-success collaboration across institutions through Federal policies and grants; (2) Rethinking Satisfactory Academic Progress to empower rather than restrict campuses that are using data intelligently to allow them to award Federal aid more effectively to the students who will benefit the most; (3) Curbing predatory institutions that target low-income students and create devastating levels of transfer debt; and (4) Supporting universities in their efforts to require financial literacy training so that more students who receive Federal financial aid will be equipped to use it intelligently.

A decade ago, the chances that Georgia State University would someday be invited to provide testimony at a hearing on student success seemed very remote. Georgia State's institutional graduation rate stood at 32 percent and underserved populations were foundering. Graduation rates were 22 percent for Hispanics, 29 percent for blacks, and 18 percent for black males. Pell students were graduating at rates far below those of non-Pell students.

The demographic and economic changes of the past decade did nothing to improve the prospects for a turnaround. As Atlanta and Georgia were being hit hard by the recession, Georgia State lost tens of millions of dollars in State appropriations while simultaneously doubling the number of at-risk students that it enrolls. Our student

body of 32,000 students is now 63 percent non-white and 59 percent Pell eligible. This makes Georgia State not only one of the most diverse public research universities in the country, but also an institution at the leading edge of demographic trends that are facing our entire nation.

Under the leadership of President Mark Becker, we made a public commitment to develop a model that would allow students from all backgrounds to succeed at high rates. Using data proactively, we identify critical obstacles to our students' progress, pilot innovative interventions, and scale the approaches that prove most successful. Scale is the key. As I visit other campuses, I often hear of promising programs that benefit only a small number of students. Fifty or even a hundred more graduates will not create the results that we need as a Nation. At Georgia State, we seek to identify programs that are both cost-effective and truly transformative—programs that impact thousands and even tens of thousands of our students every semester.

Two examples will help to illustrate our approach.

Just a few years ago, Georgia State was dropping 1,000 students every semester from their classes because the students could not cover all of the costs of their tuition and fees. These were the last students that we wanted to drop. Disproportionately low-income and first-generation, many were seniors who were only a semester or two away from graduating but who had exhausted their eligibility for aid. With balances as little as \$300, dropping these students was heartbreaking—and made no sense.

In 2011, we created Panther **Retention Grants** as a response. The program awards one-time, micro grants to cover the balance between what students can pay and the costs of their tuition and fees. We use analytics to ensure that the recipients have unmet financial need and are applying themselves academically. From modest beginnings in 2011, we have now brought 5,300 students back into their classes via the program. Among the senior recipients, more than 60 percent have graduated within two semesters of receiving the grants. And because the funding goes exclusively toward tuition and fees, 100 percent of the grant monies come back to the university, making the program not only the right thing to do but financially sustainable, as well.

Our **Graduation Progression Success (GPS) Advising** system addresses another major problem that hits at-risk students particularly hard: bad academic decisions and wasted credit hours. Using 10 years of Georgia State data and over 2.5 million grades, we have created predictive analytics to identify when our students make decisions that put them off track for graduation. Similar to high-tech medical screening, the system is designed to identify individuals who are at risk when a problem first surfaces, not after it has become debilitating.

We are now tracking more than 30,000 students every day for 800 different risk factors, ranging from students who register for classes that do not apply to their degree programs to those who underperform in prerequisite courses. When a problem is identified, an alert goes off and the advisor assigned to the student reaches out to help—typically within 48 hours. Last year at Georgia State University, we had 43,000 one-on-one meetings between advisors and students that were prompted by alerts from our GPS Advising system.

In many ways, such interventions are merely common sense. Through them, we help students navigate the many complicated academic and financial decisions that graduating from college requires—decisions which low-income and first-generation students are often ill-prepared to make.

While simple in approach, these and other similar interventions have made a big difference. Georgia State University now graduates 1,700 more students annually than it did just 5 years ago and **confers more bachelor degrees to African Americans than any non-profit college or university in the Nation**. Our graduation rate has climbed 22 percentage points overall, with the biggest gains being enjoyed by the student populations that once struggled the most. Black and Latino graduation rates have improved by more than 30 points each. Rates for black males are up 40 points, and **all achievement gaps based on race, ethnicity and economics have been eliminated**.

The impact has been so transformational that, this coming January, we will be consolidated with the largest 2-year college in the State of Georgia, Georgia Perimeter College, with the goal of leveraging our new programs and technologies to benefit an additional 22,000 students.

Even prior to consolidation, Georgia State was committed to sharing the lessons that we have learned and the approaches we have developed. Georgia State has worked enthusiastically to exchange insights and practices as part of groups such as Complete College America and the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities. We are a founding member of the **University Innovation Alliance**, a coalition of 11

large public research universities dedicated to improving student outcomes, especially for low-income students. Through such collaborations, we are working with peer institutions from across the United States to accelerate the pace by which innovative best practices are adopted from one campus to the next.

This is an area where we need your help.

- First, amid the highly competitive, rankings-conscious world of higher education, **we need to find new ways to incentivize collaboration.** At times, our efforts to work across State lines and through the sharing of data are limited by the very policies that are designed to help students. Similarly, Federal grant programs are rarely set up to accommodate such alliances of universities, and the grants are too often awarded based on what is tried and true rather than what has the potential to truly transform.

- Second, we need to **find new and more nuanced ways to determine when and how students are given access to Federal aid.** The current rules surrounding satisfactory academic progress are a blunt instrument that do not reflect today's advances in student analytics. At Georgia State, we are required at times to award Federal aid to students we know are poor risks while cutting off funding to students who may be a semester or two away from graduating. We need to rethink SAP so as to empower rather than restrict campuses that are using data intelligently to target aid more effectively. I believe we also should resist proposals to limit Pell funding to eight semesters—another idea that is far too blunt and that would have devastating consequences on working students like those at Georgia State.

- Third, we need to continue to **crack down on the predatory institutions and lenders that target low-income students and their families.** Georgia State is the largest transfer recipient school in Georgia. This fall, among the 2,500 new transfer students that we will enroll, more than 600 will arrive on campus with debt of \$20,000 or more. Two students will arrive with debt over \$100,000. Such students often have little useable credit and may be still years away from attaining their bachelor degrees. If we are serious about raising completion rates for low-income students, we cannot allow such predatory practices to continue, nor can we create policies that de-incentivize more responsible universities from taking on such students and the debt that they bring with them.

- And finally, **financial counseling and financial literacy training work.** At Georgia State, we now require such training of all freshmen and all Panther Grant recipients, and we have seen significant declines in the poor financial decisions that students are making. Unfortunately, right now we must try to induce students to participate in such programs by coaxing and with little support from Federal policies, which too often grant students Federal aid without regard to their readiness to use it intelligently.

Georgia State University's story is improbable, to be sure. That is precisely why it matters. Georgia State still has much work to do, but its progress in recent years demonstrates that significant improvements in student success outcomes can come through embracing inclusion rather than exclusion, and that such gains can be made even amid a context of constrained resources. It shows that low-income and underrepresented students can succeed at the same levels as other students and that, even at large public universities, we can provide all students with personalized support at reasonable costs. It shows that we can put rankings aside and accelerate change through meaningful collaboration across institutions.

I look forward to a day when such progress is no longer labeled improbable but becomes the accepted norm for all American universities.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.  
Dr. Richburg-Hayes.

**STATEMENT OF LASHAWN RICHBURG-HAYES, Ph.D., PRESIDENT, YOUNG ADULTS AND POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, MDRC, NEW YORK, NY**

Ms. RICHBURG-HAYES. Good morning, Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify here today on what research tells us about ways to improve academic success among low-income college students.

My organization, MDRC, is known for conducting large-scale evaluations and demonstration projects to test the impacts and cost

effectiveness of education and social programs. Many of our studies use a random assignment research design, which is the most rigorous method for assessing such programs.

As was mentioned earlier today by a number of the Senators and others, our challenge really is to develop more opportunities for low-income students to both attend and succeed at institutions of higher learning. Fortunately, research is beginning to point the way toward some solutions in four primary areas: first, comprehensive and integrated reforms; second, developmental education reforms; third, structured pathways; and, fourth, innovations in financial aid.

I'll share some of the main lessons from this existing research. In terms of comprehensive and integrated programs, we've learned from the City University of New York's ASAP program, the Accelerated Study in Associates Program, that such integrated and comprehensive programs can make a sizable difference in graduation rates.

ASAP is designed to help students nearly double the rate at which they graduate within 3 years. It consists primarily of four components: requirements and messages around attending college full-time, which, in this program, is defined as 12 credits per semester; student services, which entails having advising services for students in the program, including career advisement; course enrollment or structured pathways; and financial support, including financial incentives through textbook vouchers and transportation cards.

These components resulted in very large impacts, the largest impacts among any random assignment study of a postsecondary intervention. Students in the ASAP program graduated at a rate of 18.3 percentage points higher than their control group counterparts. This is almost a doubling of the graduation rate in 3 years among community college students, all of whom were Pell eligible and most of whom were students of color.

It also lowered the cost per degree at the 3-year point, lower than the control condition, meaning that the program was also cost-effective.

In terms of other research, research has identified strategies for improving developmental education outcomes as well. As was mentioned earlier today, students needing remediation actually require more services, and it's necessary to address this issue to improve the graduation rates, because differences in outcomes vary by socioeconomic status, making gaps in achievement evident.

Several random assignment interventions have been conducted thus far that suggest that there are modest impacts and improvement that are possible through such interventions. At this point, we have second generation interventions—including new ways to assess incoming students to provide them with services before they enroll in college, and to improve and accelerate developmental education teaching—that are currently being evaluated, and findings are not yet available.

Structured pathway approaches have been shown to have some promise. Among the many structured pathway programs out there, ASAP is one example of a program that has implemented a lot of elements that are touted in the research as being useful.

Financial aid is also another important lever to help low-income students succeed. Studies demonstrate that incentive-based grants and innovation on traditional financial aid result in a larger proportion of students meeting academic benchmarks, a greater number of credits earned, and modest effects on GPA.

Building on what we already know, my written testimony offers a number of recommendations in two broad categories. First, give colleges and States incentives to replicate proven programs. For example, the Federal Government could support the spread of ASAP and other interventions with strong evidence of effectiveness.

Second, encourage innovation paired with research, particularly rigorous research, so that we continue to identify programs that make a real difference. Specifically, additional research could be conducted into structured pathways, an area for which little is known currently beyond programs such as ASAP, year-round financial aid, and innovations in work-study programs.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify here today, and I look forward to questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Richburg-Hayes follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LASHAWN RICHBURG-HAYES, PH.D.

#### SUMMARY

Thank you for inviting me to testify today about what the research evidence tells us about ways to improve the academic success of low-income college students. MDRC is known for conducting large-scale evaluations and demonstration projects to test the impacts and cost-effectiveness of education and social programs. Many of our studies use a random assignment research design, the most rigorous method for assessing such programs, which is able to determine the value an intervention adds to the status quo. Here are the main lessons of the existing research:

**1. Comprehensive and integrated programs can make a sizable difference in graduation rates.** The City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) is a comprehensive and integrated long-term program designed to help more community college students graduate more quickly. Both an opportunity and an obligation, ASAP nearly doubled 3-year graduation rates for students who started college needing developmental (or remedial) course work—at a lower cost per graduate than usual college services.

**2. Identifying effective strategies for developmental education students is critical to improving national graduation rates and evening outcomes by socioeconomic status.** Several random assignment interventions have been conducted that suggest modest positive improvements in outcomes are possible. Second-generation interventions are currently being evaluated and findings will be available shortly.

**3. A structured pathway approach has shown promise at improving graduation rates.** ASAP is one example of a program that implemented elements of a structured pathway approach, which is based on the idea that simple, well-defined programs of study may help more students complete community college.

**4. Financial aid is an important lever to help low-income students succeed.** Work by MDRC in this area has shown that incentive-based grants can increase first-year enrollment when the intervention targets graduating high school seniors, and that they can modestly improve academic outcomes for diverse groups of students.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

**1. Give colleges and States incentives to replicate proven programs.** For example, the Federal Government could support the spread of ASAP.

**2. Encourage innovation paired with research, especially rigorous evaluation.** Specifically, additional research could be conducted into structured pathways, year-round financial aid, and work-study programs.

Good morning, Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify today about what the research evidence tells us about ways to improve the academic success of low-income college students.

My name is Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, and I am director of the Young Adults and Postsecondary Education policy area for MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization based in New York City. MDRC was founded more than 40 years ago to build reliable evidence on the effectiveness of programs for the disadvantaged and to help policymakers and practitioners use that evidence to improve policies and programs. MDRC is known for conducting large-scale evaluations and demonstration projects to test the impacts and cost-effectiveness of education and social programs. Many of our studies use a random assignment research design, the most rigorous method for assessing such programs, which is able to determine the value an intervention adds to the status quo. This method, analogous to the one used in medical clinical trials, produces the most reliable evidence that a program works. As a result, it is the only method to be accepted without reservations by the Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse. Given that resources are limited and problems are very difficult to solve, proceeding with evidenced-based policy is prudent. Ensuring that the evidence is there when it is needed is our mission and that of many other dedicated researchers.

Let me begin by summarizing my main points. These are all lessons drawn from existing research:

1. Comprehensive and integrated programs can make a sizable difference. The City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) is a comprehensive and integrated long-term program designed to help more community college students graduate more quickly. MDRC's random assignment study of ASAP shows that the program nearly doubled 3-year graduation rates for students who started college needing developmental (or remedial) course work—at a lower cost per graduate than usual college services.

2. Identifying effective strategies for developmental education students is critical to improving national graduation rates and evening outcomes by socioeconomic status. Several random assignment interventions have been conducted that suggest modest positive improvements in outcomes are possible. Second-generation interventions are currently being evaluated and findings will be available shortly to inform policymakers and practitioners about what works in this area.

3. ASAP is one example of a program that implemented elements of a structured pathway approach, which is based on the idea that simple, well-defined programs of study may help more students complete community college. Most community college students are offered a vast array of courses and options to arrange their schedules and earn credentials. In theory, these allow them to match their interests with the right program. In reality, however, they leave many students confused and overwhelmed.

4. Financial aid is an important lever to help low-income students succeed. Given both the size of the financial aid system (\$226 billion) and the widespread use of financial aid for various purposes, financial aid must be thought of as another tool that can be used to improve academic success and postsecondary completion. A growing body of work has studied interventions that use financial aid as an incentive to improve academic success. Nine such studies demonstrate that incentive-based grants—an innovation on traditional financial aid—result in a larger proportion of students meeting academic benchmarks, a greater number of credits earned, and modest effects on grade point average in the first year. Work by MDRC in this area has shown that incentive-based grants can increase first-year enrollment when the intervention targets graduating high school seniors.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Give colleges and States incentives to replicate proven programs.** For example, the Federal Government could support the spread of ASAP. This could be through funding mechanisms such as First in the World. This year's First in the World competition did encourage applicants to propose replicating interventions that had strong evidence, but additional support could be fostered through future competitions and also through other funding mechanisms.

2. **Encourage innovation paired with research, especially rigorous evaluation.** Specifically, additional research could be conducted into structured pathways, year-round financial aid, and work-study programs.

- The Department of Education (or other parts of the Federal Government) can encourage tests of structured pathways. Components of structured pathways have been studied in different fields but evidence is lacking on the effectiveness of an en-

tire model. A center focused on structured pathways or a grant competition with long-term support can foster more research in this area.

- The Department of Education can test Pell Grant funding to cover the summer term of the academic year. Offering Pell Grant aid to students during the summer would offer an opportunity to test whether aid during short terms (that is, those less than 12 weeks in duration) helps students make stronger progress toward degree completion. Tying the reintroduction of summer Pell awards to some of the other strategies discussed in this testimony (for example, incremental aid disbursements) could help control program costs and make the program more sustainable.
- States and institutions could be encouraged to use internal or external grant funding to test whether summer funding improves outcomes. States and institutions with flexible grant aid dollars could allocate some of those funds to grants for summer or winter college enrollment, or both. Additionally, States and institutions could seek out partnerships with local and national donor organizations committed to helping low-income students graduate from college.
- The Federal Government could encourage a test that compares the current work-study model with a modified version designed to help low-income students make career advances while in college. Given the amount of money expended on this aid program (\$972 million in academic year 2011–12), it would be a worthy endeavor to clarify how that aid can help students most effectively.

#### THE CHALLENGE

Access to college has increased substantially over the last 50 years, but student success—defined as the combination of academic success and degree or certificate completion—has not improved.<sup>1</sup> What’s more, success is unevenly distributed by socioeconomic status, with students from high-income families attending and completing college at higher rates than low-income students are completing. While low-income students are now more likely to attend college, they are not more likely to complete college.<sup>2</sup>

Part of the reason is that students arrive at college underprepared. Many students from low-income families are unlikely to engage in a curriculum that prepares them for college. A large proportion of such students therefore arrive at college, are assessed to see if they are ready for college course work, and are placed into developmental education courses, where they linger.

The gap in completion rates is exacerbated by the fact that low-income students are more likely to attend open- or broad-access institutions that typically do not have the resources to provide the level of support that underprepared and unprepared students need in order to succeed.<sup>3</sup> To cite just one statistic, the Nation’s 1,200 community colleges enroll over 10 million students each year—nearly half of the Nation’s undergraduates. Yet fewer than 40 percent of entrants complete an undergraduate degree within 6 years.<sup>4</sup> The outcomes are not much better at public 4-year, open-access institutions, where the 6-year graduation rate is only slightly higher. In short, while there have been marked successes in college access since the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965—which extended need-based financial assistance to the general population for the first time—more work remains to be done to improve college persistence and completion rates.

The challenge is to develop more opportunities for low-income students to both attend and succeed at institutions of higher learning. Fortunately, research is beginning to point the way toward some possible solutions in four areas: comprehensive and integrated reforms, developmental education reforms, structured pathways, and innovations in financial aid.

#### COMPREHENSIVE AND INTEGRATED INTERVENTIONS

Many reforms have been found to help students in the short term, but few have substantially boosted college completion.<sup>5</sup> The City University of New York’s (CUNY’s) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), launched in 2007 with funding from the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity, is an uncommonly comprehensive and long-term program designed to help more community college students graduate and help them graduate more quickly. Earlier this year, MDRC released new results from our random assignment study of ASAP showing that the program *nearly doubled* 3-year graduation rates for students who started college needing developmental (or remedial) course work—at a *lower cost per graduate* than usual college services.<sup>6</sup>

ASAP represents both an opportunity and an obligation for students. It was designed to address multiple potential barriers to student success and to address them for up to 3 years. The key components of ASAP are:

- **Requirements and messages:** Students are required to attend college full-time (defined as 12 credit hours per term) and are encouraged to take developmental courses early and to graduate within 3 years.
- **Student services:** Students receive comprehensive advising from an ASAP-dedicated adviser with a caseload of 60 to 80 students (as compared with 600-plus for other CUNY advisers), career information from an ASAP-dedicated career and employment services staff member, and ASAP-dedicated tutoring services.
- **Course enrollment:** Students may enroll in blocked or linked courses (two or more courses grouped together with seats reserved for ASAP students) in their first year. Students also enroll in an ASAP seminar during their first few semesters covering topics such as goal setting and study skills. Students can also register for courses early.
- **Financial support:** Students receive a tuition waiver that covers any gap between financial aid and college tuition and fees. Students also receive free use of textbooks and free MetroCards for use on public transportation, contingent on participation in key program services.

Many of the components of ASAP (enhanced student services, financial aid as an incentive, linked courses, student support courses) have been studied rigorously in other settings and found to increase student success only modestly at best. Would combining them together create a whole that was more effective than the sum of its parts? For the MDRC study, ASAP targeted Pell-eligible low-income students who needed one or two developmental courses to build their reading, writing, or math skills and compared ASAP with regular services and classes at the colleges. MDRC's report, which provides results for 3 years, found that ASAP:

- **Boosted enrollment and credits earned.** ASAP increased enrollment in college, especially during the shorter winter and summer intersessions. ASAP increased the average number of credits earned over 3 years by 8.7 credits (47.7 for ASAP students vs. 39.0 for students in the control group).
- **Greatly increased graduation rates.** ASAP nearly doubled the percentage of students who earned an associate's degree in 3 years (40.1 percent for ASAP students vs. 21.8 percent for students in the control group, for an 18.3 percentage point difference). It is important to note that these students had to fulfill developmental education requirements before earning at least 60 college-level credits to graduate.
- **Increased transfers to 4-year colleges.** ASAP increased the percentage of students who transferred to a 4-year college by 7.8 percentage points (25.1 for ASAP students vs. 17.3 for the students in the control group).
- **Lowered the cost per degree.** At the 3-year point, the cost per degree was lower in ASAP than in the control condition. Because the program generated so many more graduates than the usual college services, the cost per degree was less, despite the substantial investment required to operate the program.

While ASAP offers many services to students (and expects their substantial commitment in return), it is important to emphasize that it achieves its effects without making changes in curricula or in pedagogy. A few other points are worth noting. A substantial portion of the effect on credit accumulation for ASAP students came during the winter and summer terms, which ASAP strongly encouraged students to attend. (In fact, students could fulfill their full-time status for a main spring or fall term by taking summer or winter courses). The value of providing support to students year-round is a subject I will return to later. While our research design cannot definitively determine which components of ASAP made the most difference, three aspects of the program stand out: (1) combining participation requirements for students with extensive support services, (2) tying the distribution of the MetroCard (worth more than \$100 per month) to student engagement in program services like advising *and* careful monitoring of student participation by CUNY, and (3) encouraging students to take developmental courses early and to enroll in summer and winter sessions. The success of ASAP does not come easy. Other similarly ambitious programs have confronted a variety of implementation and institutional challenges.

What is next for ASAP? ASAP's success has prompted New York City to invest up to \$42 million by 2019 to bring the program to as many as 25,000 students. As CUNY has expanded ASAP, it has been able to bring down its per-student cost. In addition, CUNY and MDRC, with anchor funding from the Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation, are replicating ASAP at three Ohio community colleges to test whether it can be successfully adapted in new contexts serving different student populations. In the future, MDRC may work with other colleges interested



in implementing their own versions of ASAP to evaluate the effectiveness of these adaptations.

#### DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION REFORMS

Research suggests that about one-half of all entering college students and 68 percent of entering community college students take at least one remedial course within 6 years. Many enroll in more than one remedial course, either in one subject or in multiple subjects.<sup>7</sup> Fewer than half of students successfully make it through the sequence of courses to which they are referred and only one-third of students who take a remedial course ever earn any postsecondary credential.<sup>8</sup> Low-income, minority, and first-generation college students are all overrepresented in these negative outcomes associated with developmental education.<sup>9</sup>

Several interventions have shown modest short-term effects for students with developmental education needs. For example, MDRC studied eight summer bridge programs in Texas that aimed to reduce the need for remediation by offering students accelerated, focused learning opportunities between the senior year of high school and college. That study found positive impacts on introductory college-level course completion in math and writing, though those impacts faded by the end of 2 years. MDRC also evaluated learning communities, a strategy to address developmental education by bringing together small groups of students who take two or more linked courses that have mutually reinforcing themes and assignments. That evaluation also found modest, positive impacts for students while the learning communities were in place.

More research will emerge on strategies effective at addressing developmental education. The Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness (CAPR)—a joint center funded by the Institute for Education Sciences and run by MDRC and the Community College Research Center at Teacher's College, Columbia University—is conducting research to document current practices in developmental English and math education across the United States and to rigorously evaluate innovative assessment and instructional practices. The purpose of CAPR's research is to help advance a second generation of developmental education innovation in which colleges and State agencies design, implement, and expand stronger and more comprehensive reforms that improve student outcomes. CAPR is conducting three major studies that together will help provide a foundation for this undertaking: (1) a national survey of developmental education practices at 2- and 4-year colleges, (2) an evaluation of alternate systems of remedial assessment and placement, and (3) an evaluation of an innovative developmental math pathways program.

In addition to CAPR, rigorous random assignment evaluations are currently under way of several promising interventions including CUNY Start, a multifaceted prematriculation program that provides intensive instruction in reading, writing, and math through a carefully prescribed curriculum and instructional delivery system. CUNY Start condenses the time students spend preparing for college-level English and math into a single semester. In addition, it delivers enhanced academic and nonacademic support through advisers, tutors, and a weekly seminar that builds college success skills, at a cost to students of only \$75 per semester.

MDRC's Developmental Education Acceleration Project is also testing the effectiveness of an "accelerated" developmental education curriculum, using a random assignment design. The ModMath program at Tarrant County College in Fort Worth, TX, divides three semesters of developmental math into nine discrete modules, allowing students to enter the sequence at a point appropriate to their skills and to leave and return without losing as much ground as they would in semester-length courses.

#### STRUCTURED PATHWAYS

ASAP is one example of a program that implemented elements of a structured pathway approach, which is based on the idea that simple, well-defined programs of study may help more students to complete community college. Most community college students are offered a vast array of courses and options to arrange their schedules and earn credentials. In theory these allow them to match their interests with the right program. In reality, however, they leave many students confused and overwhelmed, unsure about what classes they need to complete their degrees and which credits can transfer to a 4-year institution. Moreover, little guidance is provided on how to sift through the chaos and make the right decisions based on their goals and long-term plans. Students end up taking courses and accumulating credits, but never finishing their degrees or getting their certificates.

More choice is not always better. For example, studies in behavioral economics have shown that when people are faced with a plethora of choices, seemingly irrele-

vant contextual factors tend to influence their decisions. In addition, when they are confronted with complicated decisions with long-term implications, they struggle to identify which factors are the most important, how to gather all the necessary relevant information, and how to weigh the costs and benefits of these factors.<sup>10</sup> Basically, people who are uninformed or overwhelmed with too much complicated information may make decisions that are not in their best interests.

A promising approach is to provide more structure and guidance and a limited selection of pathways in community colleges. In principle, the structured pathways model applies to all aspects of a student's experience in college. It includes robust services to help students choose career goals and majors. It integrates developmental education courses with college-level courses and organizes the curriculum around a limited number of broad subject areas that encourage defined programs of study. It also emphasizes ongoing collaboration among faculty, advisers, and staff members.

Beside the robust and structured advising and guidance offered by ASAP, other schools that have implemented the structured pathway approach include Guttman Community College in New York City. Students there were required to enroll full-time their first year and to take a common first-year curriculum. They were also placed in "houses," which were similar to learning communities and which included faculty members who taught the students throughout their first year at school. After the first year, students could choose their preferred program of study from a limited selection. The first-year students had promising outcomes, although no rigorous evaluation has been conducted.<sup>11</sup>

#### FINANCIAL AID INNOVATIONS

Financial aid has long been the tool of choice to increase access. In fact, one of the original purposes of student financial aid was to ensure more equitable access to postsecondary education for those traditionally underrepresented and those least able to afford it.<sup>12</sup> However, the current financial aid system serves far more students than originally envisioned by the legislation that created it, and for purposes beyond the inability to pay. Almost two-thirds of all undergraduates receive some form of financial aid and many institutions are using financial aid for other reasons, such as "enrollment management" to attract competitive students to attend their institutions rather than others.<sup>13</sup>

Given both the size of the financial aid system (\$226 billion) and the widespread use of financial aid for various purposes, financial aid must be thought of as another tool that can be used to improve academic success and postsecondary completion.<sup>14</sup> Yet little is known about whether financial aid *increases* access and *improves* academic success. Previous research suggests that financial aid is positively associated with increased enrollment in postsecondary education,<sup>15</sup> and also positively associated with increased persistence.<sup>16</sup> Generally, the relationship between financial aid and student outcomes has been difficult to answer because of problems with endogeneity.<sup>17</sup> That is, factors that are associated with financial need, such as low family income, are also associated with a lack of academic success, making it difficult to isolate the effect of additional financial aid on student achievement. This issue of selection bias is best addressed through the employment of a random assignment experimental design.<sup>18</sup>

A growing body of work has studied interventions that use financial aid as an incentive to improve academic success. Fortunately, several of the incentive-based grant programs—where incentive-based grants are defined as additional financial aid to students that is contingent on academic performance—have been evaluated using random assignment.<sup>19</sup> Since it is not ethical to eliminate need-based aid and experiment with randomly providing aid to students, the studies have focused on randomly providing additional aid.<sup>20</sup> Nine such studies demonstrate that incentive-based grants—an innovation on traditional financial aid—result in a larger proportion of students meeting academic benchmarks, a greater number of credits earned, and modest effects on grade point average (GPA) in the first year.<sup>21</sup> Work by MDRC in this area has shown that incentive-based grants (known as performance-based scholarships in MDRC's studies) can increase first-year enrollment when the intervention targets graduating high school seniors.

There are several promising innovations for financial aid that could improve success and allow students to complete their degrees faster: (1) distributing aid in a way that encourages students to devote effort to their studies, (2) providing year-round financial aid so students can accelerate their studies, and (3) restructuring the notification of satisfactory academic progress (SAP) requirements so that students are aware of the requirements and have an incentive to meet them. It is im-

portant, however, that these reforms be rigorously evaluated before they are implemented on a large scale.

***Innovative Distribution of Aid:*** In order to support students' ongoing expenses, encourage students to stay enrolled, and reduce the inefficiencies and risks of disbursing financial aid at the start of the semester in a lump sum, States and institutions could consider disbursing aid on various timetables. Typically, any amount left over of a student's financial aid after tuition, fees, books, and supplies is refunded to the student in a lump sum at the beginning of the semester. While these financial aid refunds may support and enable student success, when students withdraw prior to the 60 percent point in the term, the college may be required to pay back part of the refunded aid (Return to title IV), and may need to recoup those funds from students. Students who are unable to settle their debts with the college may not be allowed to re-enroll until they do. MDRC does not know of any national data about the scale of these returns or the number of students affected, but anecdotally it seems common for large colleges to report that they lose over \$1 million a year due to returns to title IV.

One innovation to consider is to have institutions reallocate lump sum aid into small increments. When refunds (both grants and loans) are disbursed to students in small biweekly or monthly increments, those students could potentially better budget and manage the financial aid that they receive. These more frequent incremental disbursements may also better align with the timing of when aid is earned, which could result in fewer or smaller returns to title IV (which would benefit colleges as well as students). MDRC's Aid Like A Paycheck evaluation is currently evaluating the impact of this intervention.<sup>22</sup>

Another innovation to consider is a restructuring of Federal work-study. Students who are employed full-time while enrolled in college are at a greater risk of dropping out or at least prolonging their time to degree completion. Work-study could be expanded to more low-income students to reduce their need to work full-time jobs disconnected from their educational pursuits. While this idea has not been studied, the Federal Government could alter the funding formula for work-study. Current allocation formulas send more work-study funds to institutions with small numbers of low-income students (according to Pell Grant eligibility).<sup>23</sup> In addition, many work-study jobs bear little relation to students' career objectives.<sup>24</sup> Modifications to job development processes for work-study-eligible jobs could improve the program's ability to advance students' careers.

***Year-Round Financial Aid:*** Faster is better for college completion. Faster completion can be achieved if students are encouraged to attend college full-time when possible and supported in doing so. While it is clear that many community college students work and need to attend school part time, it may be helpful and feasible to encourage them to increase their "attendance intensity." There are two ways to get there. One way would be to try to increase the number of credits students earn per semester. The other would be to make greater use of the winter intersession and summer sessions. Focusing on year-round attendance would change the mental accounting period for students to a full year, possibly making it easier for them to accumulate 24 or 30 credits and keeping them on track for timely degree completion. Year-round attendance could help students catch up or move ahead in their studies, which may be especially important for students who need to combine work and school. In addition, summer enrollment keeps students connected to college without a large break, which may boost re-enrollment the following academic year. Evidence from three studies suggests that year-round aid can increase enrollment during the summer and winter, and that summer and winter enrollment can help students earn more credits.

One of these studies—the Performance-Based Scholarship Demonstration evaluation at two community colleges in New York City—evaluated the effect of adding a summer scholarship offer to scholarships otherwise offered only during the fall and spring. Students in the program group could receive up to \$1,300 per semester if they enrolled for a certain number of credits and kept their grades above a "C." Half of the program group could receive the scholarship for two semesters, the other half for two semesters plus a summer term. The summer-scholarship group was 6.8 percentage points more likely to enroll in summer than the group who received scholarships only in the fall and spring, an increase of about 35 percent over the fall- and spring-group's summer enrollment rate of 19.4 percent.<sup>25</sup>

Recent research also suggests that undergraduates who attend summer school have better retention rates thereafter and are significantly more likely to complete a degree.<sup>26</sup> Two MDRC studies (CUNY ASAP and the Opening Doors Learning Communities) encouraged students to enroll in summer and winter and included financial support for them to do so. Those two studies also suggest that increased enrollment during intersessions may be linked to greater credit accumulation over

time. Students in both studies could use financial aid during the summer and winter, meaning that the usual financial barriers to year-round enrollment were largely absent.

- **ASAP:** As mentioned above, much of ASAP's large impact on student outcomes could be traced to ASAP's outsized effect on students' performance during summer and winter intersessions—where ASAP pushed hard for students to enroll. During the main sessions of the second through sixth semesters after students joined the study, ASAP boosted enrollment by between 4.6 percentage points and 9.6 percentage points. Yet ASAP's effects on intersession enrollment were far more dramatic, peaking at 25.2 percentage points during the second semester. That rise in intersession enrollment is responsible for the program group earning on average 2.4 more cumulative total credits over six semesters (the equivalent of taking nearly an additional extra course), about a quarter of the program's total impact on credits earned.<sup>27</sup>

- **Opening Doors Learning Communities:** The Opening Doors demonstration at Kingsborough Community College found that on average, program group students enrolled in more intersessions than control group students and earned more credits on average during intersessions: 0.5 credits more in the first year (than the 3.7 credits earned in the control group) and 1.0 credits more after 6 years (than the 9.2 credits earned in the control group). This gain accounted for about a quarter of the program's total impact on credits earned. The demonstration put freshmen into groups of up to 25 who took three classes together their first semester, and provided enhanced counseling and tutoring as well as textbook vouchers. Students were encouraged to enroll in the intersession following the program session, and received an additional textbook voucher of \$75 if they did.<sup>28</sup>

Taken together, these three studies suggest that a year-round Pell Grant program may be beneficial. If it is reintroduced, however, it should be with a plan for rigorous evaluation to inform the policy moving forward.

**Restructure the Notification of SAP Requirements:** Students must make satisfactory academic progress (SAP) to maintain any title IV Federal aid (including Pell Grants). SAP has three components: (1) passing 60 percent of courses attempted (to demonstrate academic progress); (2) earning a GPA of at least 2.0 in these courses (to demonstrate academic performance); and (3) if these first two components are violated, increasing performance during an academic probation semester to be returned to good standing. While these criteria appear straightforward, in practice students may fail for several terms before their eligibility is restricted, as 2-year institutions are only required to check SAP annually for students in 2-year programs (though they can check more frequently). In addition, students may continue to be in violation of SAP, lose their title IV eligibility, yet remain enrolled if the cost of tuition and fees are very low.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the current system may provide only a weak incentive to induce students to alter their behavior.<sup>30</sup>

Many students are not aware of an institution's SAP requirements and institutions typically evaluate SAP progress at the end of each academic year, so students do not know if they are at risk of failing to meet the standards. One innovation in financial aid could have institutions implement an early notification system, so that students have the opportunity to change their behavior if they are at risk of failing to meet SAP standards. While such systems are often labeled as student success strategies, they can have sizable implications for financial aid as well. Georgia State University's predictive analytics intervention is a well-known example of this type of intervention.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

**1. Give colleges and States an incentive to replicate proven programs.** For example, the Federal Government could support the spread of ASAP. This could be through funding mechanisms such as First in the World. This year's First in the World competition did encourage applicants to propose replicating interventions that had strong evidence, but additional support could be fostered through future competitions and also through other funding mechanisms.

**2. Encourage innovation paired with research, especially rigorous evaluation.** Specifically, additional research could be conducted into structured pathways, year-round financial aid, and work-study programs.

a. *The Department of Education (or other parts of the Federal Government) can encourage tests of structured pathways.* Components of structured pathways have been studied in different fields but evidence is lacking on the effectiveness of an entire model. A center focused on structured pathways or a grant competition with long-term support can foster more research in this area.

b. *The Department of Education could clarify areas for innovation.* In our experience, institutions are very conscious of complying with title IV regulations and are reluctant to innovate if such innovation is not clearly protected. To remedy this, the Department of Education could put out a fact sheet about what colleges can do right now to disburse aid differently without approval from the Department or a legislative change. Waivers could also be granted more readily for experimentation.

c. *The Department of Education can test Pell Grant funding to cover the summer term of the academic year.* Offering Pell Grant aid to students during the summer would offer an opportunity to test whether aid during short terms (that is, those less than 12 weeks in duration) helps students make stronger progress toward degree completion. Tying the reintroduction of summer Pell awards to some of the other strategies discussed in this testimony (for example, incremental aid disbursements) could help control program costs and make the program more sustainable. While summer Pell turned out to be prohibitively expensive for the government, it might not be more expensive if analyzed in terms of costs per graduate. In addition, costs may be mitigated by targeting the availability of summer aid in various ways.

d. *The Department of Education (or other parts of the Federal Government) could also encourage a test of Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) funding to cover the summer or winter terms of the academic year, or both.* Federal Student Aid could collaborate with selected 2-year and 4-year institutions to test offering additional SEOG funds to students during summer and winter terms.<sup>31</sup>

e. *States and institutions could be encouraged to use internal or external grant funding to test whether summer funding improves outcomes.* States and institutions with flexible grant aid dollars could allocate some of those funds toward grants for summer or winter college enrollment, or both. Additionally, States and institutions could seek out partnerships with local and national donor organizations committed to helping low-income students graduate from college. The effect of summer grant aid on students' academic success could be tested by randomly assigning students to one of three groups: aid during the summer and winter, more aid during all academic terms, or no additional aid. Designing a test with these three variable conditions would help to inform the field about how much summer aid helped students, and about whether summer aid alone was enough to see a meaningful impact on student success.

f. *The Federal Government could encourage a test that compares the current work-study model with a modified version designed to help low-income students make career advances while in college.* To date, little research has been conducted to test the effectiveness of the Federal Work-Study program. The few studies that have been conducted of such aid have been quasi-experimental and have yielded heterogeneous findings.<sup>32</sup> Given the amount of money expended on this aid program (\$972 million in academic year 2011–12), it would be a worthy endeavor to clarify how that aid can help students most effectively.

#### REFERENCES

1. Turner, Sarah T. 2004. Going to College and Finishing College: Explaining Different Educational Outcomes. In Caroline Hoxby (Editor), *College Choices: The Economics of Where to Go, When to Go, and How to Pay for It*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
2. Kelly, Andrew J. 2014. *Big Payoff, Low Probability: Post-secondary Education and Upward Mobility in America*. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute.
3. Jenkins, Davis, and Olga Rodriguez. 2013. Access and Success with Less: Improving Productivity in Broad-Access Postsecondary Institutions. *Future of Children: Special Issue on Postsecondary Education in the United States*. Volume 23, Number 1, 187–209.
4. Bailey, Thomas R., Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins. 2015. *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
5. MDRC. 2013. *Developmental Education: A Barrier to a Postsecondary Credential for Millions of Americans*. New York: MDRC.
6. Scrivener, Susan, Michael J. Weiss, Alyssa Ratledge, Timothy Rudd, Colleen Sommo, and Hannah Fresques. 2015. *Doubling Graduation Rates: Three-Year Effects of CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for Developmental Education Students*. New York: MDRC.
7. Attewell, P., Lavin, D., Domina, T., & Levey, T. (2006). New evidence on college remediation. *Journal of Higher Education*, 77(5), 886–924.
8. Adelman, C. (2004). *Principal indicators of student academic histories in post-secondary education, 1972–2000*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Bailey, T., Jeong, D. W., & Cho, S. W. (2010). Refer-

ral, enrollment, and completion in developmental education sequences in community colleges. *Economics of Education Review*, 29(2), 255–70.

9. Perry, M., Bahr, P. R., Rosin, M., & Woodward, K. M. (2010). *Course-taking patterns, policies, and practices in developmental education in the California Community Colleges*. Mountain View, CA: EdSource. Retrieved from [http://www.edsource.org/iss\\_research\\_communitycollege.html](http://www.edsource.org/iss_research_communitycollege.html).

10. Scott-Clayton, Judith. 2011. *The Shapeless River: Does a Lack of Structure Inhibit Students' Progress at Community Colleges?* New York: Community College Research Center.

11. Bailey, Thomas R., Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins. 2015. *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

12. Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 references the purpose of financial aid in this way.

13. Enrollment management refers to the consolidation of recruitment, admission, and retention under a single leader or office. Among other things, many enrollment managers systematically test financial incentives to maximize enrollment yield with targeted groups of students or to increase net tuition revenue. Harrison Keller and Nate Johnson, "Completion Management: Using Aid and Price to Improve Results," Working Paper: Report of the Institutional Working Group (Indianapolis, Indiana: Lumina Foundation, 2013).

14. The size of Federal, State, and institutional aid for both undergraduate and graduate students as cited in HCM Strategists, *The American Dream 2.0: How Financial Aid Can Help Improve College Access, Affordability, and Completion* (Washington, District of Columbia: HCM Strategists, 2013).

15. Edward St. John, et al., *Meeting the Access Challenge: Indiana's Twenty-first Century Program* (Indianapolis, IN: Lumina Foundation for Education, 2002); Thomas Kane, "Evaluating the impact of the DC Tuition Assistance Grant Program," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 10658 (2004); Susan Dynarski, "Hope for Whom? Financial Aid for the Middle Class and Its Impact on College Attendance," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 7756 (2000); Susan Dynarski, "Does Aid Matter? Measuring the Effect of Student Aid on College Attendance and Completion," *American Economic Review* 93, no. 1 (March 2003); Christopher Cornwell, David B. Mustard, and Deepa J. Sridhar, "The Enrollment Effects of Merit-Based Financial Aid: Evidence from Georgia's Hope Program," *Journal of Labor Economics* 24, no. 4 (October 2006).

16. Edward St. John, Shouping Hu, and Jeff Weber, "State Policy and the Affordability of Public Higher Education: The Influence of State Grants on Persistence in Indiana," *Research in Higher Education* 42 (2001); Susan Choy, *Access and Persistence: Findings from Ten Years of Longitudinal Research on Students* (Washington, District of Columbia: Center for Policy Analysis, American Council on Education, 2002); Stephen L. DesJardins, Dennis A. Ahlburg, and Brian P. McCall, "Simulating the Longitudinal Effects of Changes in Financial Aid on Student Departure from College," *Journal of Human Resources* 37, no. 3 (2002); Eric Bettinger, "How Financial Aid Affects Persistence," in *College Choices: The Economics of Where to Go, When to Go, and How to Pay for It*, ed. Caroline M. Hoxby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Larry Singell and Mark Stater, "Going, Going, Gone: The Effects of Aid Policies on Graduation at Three Large Public Institutions," *Policy Sciences* 39, no. 4 (2006).

17. (Dynarski, 2002)

18. (Shadish, Cook, and Campbell, 2002)

19. See Joshua Angrist, Daniel Lang, and Philip Oreopoulos, "Incentives and Services for College Achievement: Evidence from a Randomized Trial," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 1, no. 1 (2009). Joshua Angrist, Philip Oreopoulos, and Tyler Williams, "When Opportunity Knocks, Who Answers? New Evidence on College Achievement Awards," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 16643 (2010). Edwin Leuven, Hessel Oosterbeek, and Bas van der Klaauw, "The Effect of Financial Rewards on Students' Achievement: Evidence from a Randomized Experiment," *Journal of the European Economic Association* 8, no. 6 (2010). MacDonald, et al., *Final Impacts Report: Foundations for Success* (Ottawa, Canada: R.A. Malatest & Associates LTD., 2009). Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, et al., *Rewarding Persistence: Effects of a Performance-Based Scholarship Program for Low-Income Parents* (New York: MDRC, 2009) and Lisa Barrow, et al., "Paying for Performance: The Education Impacts of a Community College Scholarship Program for Low-Income Adults" *Journal of Labor Economics*, Volt. 32, No. 3 for Opening Doors Louisiana; Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, et al., *Providing More Cash for College: Interim Findings from the Performance-Based Scholarship Demonstration in California* (New York: MDRC, forthcoming) for California; Cynthia Miller, et al.,

*Staying on Track: Early Findings from a Performance-Based Scholarship Program at the University of New Mexico* (New York: MDRC, 2011) for New Mexico; Reshma Patel and Timothy Rudd, *Can Scholarships Alone Help Students Succeed? Lessons from Two New York City Community Colleges* (New York: MDRC, 2012) for New York; Paulette Cha and Reshma Patel, *Rewarding Progress, Reducing Debt: Early Results from Ohio's Performance-Based Scholarship Demonstration for Low-Income Parents* (New York: MDRC, 2010) and Reshma Patel, et al., *Using Financial Aid to Promote Student Progress: Interim Findings from the Performance-Based Scholarship Demonstration* (New York: MDRC, 2013) for Ohio.

20. Therefore, the results of these studies are likely to reflect marginal returns to financial aid since the aid is on top of any other aid for which students are eligible.

21. See Richburg-Hayes, Lashawn. (2014). "Incentivizing Success: Lessons from Experimenting with Incentive-Based Grants," in Andrew Kelly and Sara Goldrick-Rab (Eds.), *Reinventing Financial Aid* (PP. 101–26) Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

22. Ware, Michelle, Evan Weissman, and Drew McDermott. 2013. *Aid Like A Paycheck: Incremental Aid to Promote Student Success*. New York, NY: MDRC.

23. The top 10 institutions that were awarded the most work-study allocations in 2012–13 are (in order of greatest to least): City University of New York, New York University, Columbia University, University of Southern California, Pennsylvania State University, DeVry University, ITT Technical Institute, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor), International American University of Puerto Rico, and Cornell University. See <http://www.nationaljournal.com/next-america/education/the-ten-colleges-that-get-the-most-work-study-aid-20141001>.

24. O'Sullivan, Rory, and Reid Setzer. 2014. *A Federal Work Study Reform Agenda to Better Serve Low-Income Students*. Washington, DC: Young Invincibles; Scott-Clayton and Minaya, 2014. "Should Student Employment Be Subsidized? Conditional Counterfactuals and the Outcomes of Work-Study Participation." NBER Working Paper 20329. Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research.

25. Patel, Reshma, and Timothy Rudd. 2012. *Can Scholarships Alone Help Students Succeed? Lessons from Two New York City Community Colleges*. New York: MDRC.

26. Paul Attewell and Sou Hyun Jang, "Summer Coursework and Completing College," *Research in Higher Education* 20 (2013): 117–41.

27. Scrivener, Susan, Michael J. Weiss, Alyssa Ratledge, Timothy Rudd, Colleen Sommo, and Hannah Fresques. 2015. *Doubling Graduation Rates: Three-Year Effects of CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for Developmental Education Students*. New York: MDRC.

28. Sommo, Colleen, Alexander Mayer, Timothy Rudd, and Dan Cullinan. 2012. *Commencement Day: Six-Year Effects of a Freshman Learning Community Program at Kingsborough Community College*. New York: MDRC.

29. See Sue Scrivener, Colleen Sommo, and Herbert Collado, *Getting Back on Track: Effects of a Community College Program for Probationary Students* (New York: MDRC, 2009) for evidence of this in California.

30. See U.S. Department of Education, *Federal Student Aid Handbook 2012–13* (Washington, District of Columbia: U.S. Department of Education, 2012): Chapter 1 for specific details.

31. Institutions have discretion over the schedule of SEOG disbursements, so this innovation would need to be a partnership between Federal Student Aid and selected institutions.

32. Scott-Clayton (2011) and Scott-Clayton and Minaya, 2014.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. We'll begin those questions now with a round of 5-minute questions for Senators.

One of the tempting things to do when you hear great stories of success like this is to say, "OK. That sounds good. Let's just make everybody do it." That usually isn't the right thing to do, even as impressive as Georgia State's progress has been.

One question might be: Should we require, should we encourage, should we change something about the Federal requirement that you've got to take 12 hours to qualify for a student grant or a student loan when there's so much evidence that if you take—if that puts you on a track to taking more time than 4 years or 2 years or 1 year to get your certificate, is there something wrong with re-

quiring Federal student aid to be based upon 15 credits instead of 12?

Or if there's something wrong with that, is there some way we could encourage colleges to do that? Why aren't more colleges and institutions doing that? I know in Tennessee, once they focused on student success, they were wise enough to let different campuses do it different ways. Austin Peay focused on remediation, as you talked about. UT Knoxville told its students that you may take 12 hours if you want to, but you're going to pay for 15, and they began to see an immediate increase in the number of students who took 15 hours.

What should we do about that, and what should we not do about it?

Mr. JONES.

Mr. JONES. I'm glad you mentioned that, because the Pell grant not only has an effect by itself, but it has the effect of changing every university's financial aid program, every State's financial aid program to be *de facto* at 12 credit hours. You'd have a huge ripple effect if you would incent students to take 15 credit hours.

Those colleges that have done this—this started in Hawaii—have had their incoming freshmen essentially double the number of students taking 15 credit hours just in 1 year. How I would do it at the Federal level would not be to necessarily raise to 15, but students get so many semesters. I would incent them, to say, "If you take 15, we'll just take it off the back end of what you might have been eligible for 6 years later." That would benefit the student and benefit the taxpayer as well.

The CHAIRMAN. You're right. We spend \$130 billion a year in grants and loans. If we make a single change like that, it affects millions of students and 6,000 institutions. What's the down side of that?

Mr. JONES. I guess I wouldn't want to penalize students—

The CHAIRMAN. Let me ask Mr. Ralls.

Mr. RALLS. I don't think it takes much research to say that students who are going full-time are more likely to complete. The thing I would worry about, though, is that so many students work. When students are working, if the choice for many of them is the choice between working and going to college, they're going to choose to work, not because they want to, but because they have to. That's so much the circumstances for lower income students, community college students.

My greatest fear is how you would structure incentives that would challenge students who must work to further their college education and move forward.

The CHAIRMAN. So you'd leave that to the State system, for example, to make judgments about that?

Mr. RALLS. It's important to encourage continuous movement forward. That's why I think the push toward year-round Pell grants is so important to make sure that movement is continuous. I would be very cautious about anything that would discourage students who are working from being able to pursue college attainment.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me ask about remediation. There's been a shift in that over the last 30 years, at least, that I've seen. In our State, we thought we'd made great progress to say, "You may come



to the community college, but if you're not prepared for it, you don't get credit for the courses you take."

Based upon your testimony, Mr. Jones, that's sort of a bridge to nowhere. Only 1 in 10 remedial students will ever graduate.

The Austin Peay experience took a different approach, as I understand it, and said, "Come on in if you need remedial help, and we'll just find other ways to help you succeed," and they had a great success story from that.

Dr. Renick, what's your advice about how we deal with remediation? Are there any changes in Federal policy or incentives that we should include in the Higher Education Act?

Mr. RENICK. It's clear that one-size-does-not-fit-all, and it's always a risk if we try to mandate one path forward. We have been able to collect, with the help of Complete College America and other organizations, increasingly convincing evidence that remediation works best when it's an add-on to students who are already engaged in college-level credits.

If that's the case, then some of these questions about whether remediation should be funded or not become far less central. Students are in college-level courses, and at the same time, they're getting the support system that they need to be able to increase their reading or writing ability or whatever deficiencies they currently have.

This discipline-based support has been much more effective at institutions like Georgia State and at institutions like Georgia Perimeter, the university we're consolidating with. As a result, we will absolutely require it for all remedial programs for our students over the next 12 months.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Murray.

Senator MURRAY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just following on your first question, sometimes our higher education policy is driven by our own memories of what we did in our college experience rather than what's actually happening today, when more and more students are worrying about a lot more than college classes. They might be parents. They are working two or three jobs to pay for college today.

I want to make sure that we don't disenfranchise those students who are struggling the most by setting a bar that makes it impossible for them to meet. We have to be very careful with that.

Mr. Ralls, I appreciate your comments on that.

Dr. Richburg-Hayes, I wanted to ask you—I'm very interested in the results of the CUNY ASAP program that you talked about that doubled the graduation rates for community college students that needed remediation. Can you talk just a little bit about the support services that were provided to the students and getting the impressive results from that program?

Ms. RICHBURG-HAYES. The support services were basically in four broad categories. The first was requirements and messaging. Students were invited to the program and told that they needed to enroll full-time, full-time being 12 credits.

They were allowed to make up this full-time enrollment through the regular normal academic terms of fall and spring, as well as intersessions and summer enrollment. In totality, their intensity of

enrollment was based on their accumulation of credits across an academic year and not just two semesters.

In terms of student services, students received a comprehensive advisement from advisors. The advising ratio for the study that we performed was one advisor per 80 students. Students also were able to talk to career advisement.

They also received automatic course enrollment with block scheduling available to some students, and students in limited majors were available for this program. For example, some majors, such as nursing—it's not possible to graduate in a very short period of time, given practicals and other requirements of the major.

Finally, students were given financial support, including tuition gap coverage. All students were required to fill out the FAFSA and to apply for all aid for which they were eligible. If there should be unmet need for tuition and fees after that amount, the program covered that gap, in addition to incentivizing students through having a transportation voucher and providing use of free textbooks.

Senator MURRAY. Dr. Renick, what support services did you provide?

Mr. RENICK. We've worked to try to recognize what is tripping up students overall, and what we found is those kinds of interventions had a disproportionate positive impact upon the students who were most at risk. I don't think we appreciate enough how much institutional know-how it takes to navigate a modern postsecondary institution. These are big bureaucracies.

You hand students and their families these FAFSA forms. Then you put them through a process of registering for classes. At places like Georgia State, we have over 90 majors and 3,000 courses. And then we're surprised when some students who don't have family support systems and knowledge about college go off path.

What we're doing is trying to recognize that it takes a combination of technology and high touch, personal contact. We've increased the number of advisors—more than doubled them—over the last 4 years, and we've put technology in their hands so that they can reach out to students in the most personal and most timely way imaginable. That's where we're beginning to see huge results.

Senator MURRAY. It makes sense when you say it. Absolutely.

Mr. Jones and Dr. Ralls, I wanted to ask you—I said in my opening statement that it's really critical that we have the right data on student outcomes if we want to make sure we're targeting our intervention to really make sure we're successful.

Dr. Ralls, you noted in your testimony that less than a third of the students in North Carolina community colleges are included in the current Federal completion data. Can both of you talk a little bit about how this data might help us better inform what policy we should be pursuing in terms of low-income and non-traditional students?

Mr. RALLS. That's because until recently, it's only been first-time, full-time students that are counted. less than a third of the students who go for degrees in our system are counted in that regard.

Mr. Jones pointed out that if you look at the Federal IPEDS data, the national average for community college completion within 150 percent is 21 percent. If you look at the recent National Stu-

dent Clearinghouse data, after 6 years, 57 percent of community college students have earned a bachelor's degree or a community college degree.

Fifty-seven percent is not the reason for a victory dance. Don't get me wrong. It's a lot more than 21 percent, and it illustrates the gaps in terms of defining, in terms of what is success. Many students that come to us are part-time, and so it takes 300 percent, that period of time for many to succeed.

Another factor for us is so many of our students leave with alternative credentials that are recognized in the workplace but are not counted. When we did our student success tour, I remember going to a college in the mountains, Tri County Community College, and the welding instructor said,

"I need to give you some supplemental data, because if you've looked at our completion rate for the welding program, you know it's 8 percent."

He put a stack of pay stubs on the desk and noted that all of those students had AWS welding certifications that led to very lucrative opportunities for them.

We don't count those. We don't count students who transfer from community colleges and ultimately get a 4-year degree. Those are the factors that—we have to look at the totality of student success, and that's not what's done now with current metrics.

Senator MURRAY. I'm out of time.

Mr. Jones, if you can just be concise.

Mr. JONES. The obvious one is called grant graduation rates. Why the Federal Government wouldn't collect data on whether Pell students graduate is beyond my comprehension. But they don't. They don't—also, there's been this back and forth about whether we graduate veterans or not. That's pretty obvious. We should know that, too.

They don't collect data on remediation, which both of you have remarked. That's pretty obvious, too. The metrics we use have been adopted by the National Governors Association back when Senator Manchin was Governor Manchin and started that initiative.

There's a key set of small, disaggregated metrics that are important to college. As Senator Alexander pointed to, these things send signals across the whole U.S. colleges and universities.

Senator MURRAY. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Collins.

#### STATEMENT OF SENATOR COLLINS

Senator COLLINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My concern is focused on those students who end up in debt and with no degree. That's the worst possible combination. Yet when I hear about the low completion rates, we have a whole category of people in that situation. We also know that if students don't graduate that they are three times more likely to default on their student loan debt.

I want to describe a program that is going on at a college in Maine and get your reaction to it, but also run by you a suggestion that has been made to me by the director of that program.

Eastern Maine Community College has a student success center, and it has two main components. First, for incoming students, it has an intensive 2-week remedial course in mathematics and writing. That has helped improve their retention rate, just that 2-week intensive course right at the start.

Second, for ongoing purposes, there is a student success center where students can come for peer mentoring, for tutoring, for counseling, for small grants that may help them out if they're having childcare problems or transportation problems. It looks at the whole person and what the barriers to completion are, and that, too, combined with the academic advising, has increased retention rates.

The director of the center has suggested to me—given the high default rate of students who don't complete college and given the fact that we know that if they do complete college, they are going to have lifetime earnings that are a million dollars higher than someone with just a high school diploma—that if we had some sort of incentive in the form of very small loan forgiveness, that it would help provide the incentive that students need to complete college.

I'd like to get your reaction to that idea. Why don't we just start and go across the panel with Mr. Jones?

Mr. JONES. I want to pick up on your point about the short remediation right before classes start and Senator Alexander's example of Austin Peay, where they connect a class with remediation support. Tennessee is now going to do that statewide starting in the fall.

Georgia has a different model that they're doing statewide starting this fall, as is West Virginia. They're doubling the success rates in English. They're quadrupling the success rates in math.

You provide in the Pell program money that is used for remediation. You could strengthen that by encouraging that money to be used in programs like you suggested in Maine, in that fashion, or programs they're doing in Georgia or they're doing in Tennessee, and you'll get more bang for your buck, more success, than traditional remedial programs that are unconnected.

Senator COLLINS. Dr. Ralls.

Mr. RALLS. I believe your comments illustrate there's no one magic bullet, and we have to do all of these things, so things such as how we look at remediation or developmental in that regard. We all know that for many students, we were over-medicating them. We can accelerate them through.

There's a number of students who come to us who haven't learned the material the first time through. They've only been exposed to us. We haven't found the secrets to those. We know that mentorship and having students in cohorts makes a difference. They need that type of support. We have to create that.

We also have to create structures, though, that are not so complex and complicated and that sometimes don't give them as many options, because often they don't do optional as well.

And finally, Your comments are right on about—many of our students—I'll go back to the working students—they live on the edge, and sometimes—one of the most heartbreaking things I used to see

as a college president is a student who would drop out 2 weeks away from completing because their transmission died.

Those are the realities that they face. We have to have ways of helping them get to that finish line, which is often not just motivating them, but giving them some resource to get to that finish line.

Senator COLLINS. Dr. Renick.

Mr. RENICK. The ideas that you are suggesting, are wonderful. Our approach to getting students off to a great start is slightly different. We have a summer academy for the most at-risk students, and they attend 7 weeks. They're taking bachelor's level courses, but they're getting the kind of remedial support on the perimeter. For those students, we've turned the retention rates from about 50 percent to now very close to 90 percent, and we've done that in a 3-year period.

Getting students off to a head start is great. As you heard with our retention grant program, it's a wonderful idea to have these micro loans, micro grants available to meet the students where they are. The reality is that \$200 or \$300 can make the difference between a student staying enrolled or not. It's sometimes hard for us to recognize.

When you have an annual household income of \$20,000 a year or less, and you're short \$300, and you're not getting that money from a bank, and you're not getting it from a relative, if institutions can plug it in, it actually can be a cost saver for the taxpayer, because these students can cross the finish line rather than swirling and having less promising futures.

Senator COLLINS. Dr. Richburg-Hayes.

Ms. RICHBURG-HAYES. I'm trained by nature to be skeptical. With that said, the program sounds very interesting. A lot of the components seem to be based on research. There's some support for individual components.

Yet I would be concerned that this program is not necessarily one that could fit all. As we said here, there's targeting that needs to be involved and some reflection of what student supports are needed for different types of students.

In addition, it seems that the engagement nature of this program would be something that would need to be shored up in order to make sure that the students who needed it most were the ones who were actually participating in the student success centers. We've actually done random assignment evaluations of student success centers, and they work when students attend.

I would also say that in terms of the solution of providing loan forgiveness, there has been some rigorous research that suggests that when you have a loan forgiveness program, you can generate the desirable outcomes that you'd want. The structure of such programs really matter. Pulling in behavioral concepts and being very privy to the incentive structures in place is very important.

I would just say that these are the types of ideas that really warrant themselves to be studied in order to determine unintended consequences before they're scaled up and required and mandated as a policy.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Murphy.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR MURPHY

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Almost without exception schools are making decisions about programs based on what's best for students. I guess I don't think that schools can completely ignore, at least at a subconscious level, the financial incentives that dictate what you invest in and what you don't invest in.

Right now, when it comes to Federal support for colleges, the only thing that gets you in trouble is a massive default rate that puts you on the far edge of your cohort. There's nothing that provides a financial incentive for schools, for instance, to graduate more kids on time or to invest in these kinds of supports for remedial course work. In fact, you can argue that there's actually a financial incentive not to invest in those things. I don't think that prevents schools from doing it.

Mr. Jones, I'll ask the question to you. Don't you think it would make sense for us to try to rework the way in which we send billions of dollars to schools through the Pell grant program and the Stafford program such that we provide at least a small financial incentive for schools to invest in all these programs? It might actually be a way of addressing this legitimate concern that many have about being overly prescriptive.

If we just simply used all of the money we send to schools to expect them to do a little bit better and left it up to them to follow the evidence where it led them, wouldn't that get us a little bit faster to where we want to go?

Mr. JONES. I think that's exactly right. When we started 6 years ago, there were only three States in the country—Washington was one of them, Indiana was one of them, Ohio—that had performance funding. There are 15 States. We're quickly going to 30 States. My projection in 10 years is we'll be at 40 to 45 States that will have their own performance funding.

What you also can do in providing incentives is provide incentives to graduate more low-income students, like Pell students, or incentives to get students through remediation in a more timely way, or incentives to graduate students on time. Between, as you pointed out, all the other Federal grant programs that you have as well as the Pell program, it would be very powerful.

It doesn't take much money to put on the table—no disrespect to the former president of the University of Tennessee—to get presidents interested in changing their ways. Put a little money on the table in the right direction.

Senator MURPHY. Dr. Renick, I was so impressed with the focus you've had on bringing in low-income students. Do you think there's a way to do this, to build an accountability system that doesn't discourage schools from reaching out and taking in at-risk students? That's often the critique of these accountability systems, that you're going to make it less likely that you have low-income, at-risk students coming through the door, as if you get punished for, for instance, longer graduation times.

Is there a way to do this that risk adjusts for schools that are reaching out to these student populations?

Mr. RENICK. Absolutely. I do believe that we should incentivize universities to do what's right and what works, and, currently, we're not doing enough of that. The idea, for instance, that we would put great emphasis upon rating schools based on income levels after graduation is inherently problematic, given that the best predictor of a student's income after graduation is their family income before they enroll in the first place.

What we need to do is find ways to reward institutions and reward students who are making a difference against the odds. Currently, we don't do that, and as you point out, there is a great incentive with regard to national rankings like U.S. News and World Report to actually turn your back on low-income and at-risk students.

One of the ironies of this whole progress that Georgia State has made over the last decade with our graduation rates up 22 percentage points is we've actually gone down in the U.S. News and World Report rankings over this time period, because we're educating more students at lower cost. Our SAT scores have actually declined some because we are opening our doors to students who previously were not succeeding at Georgia State and other institutions, and those things are things that count against you in those kinds of national rankings.

Senator MURPHY. I just think there's a way to take the billions of dollars that we're using and incentivize the kinds of programs we're talking about today in a way that's not prescriptive and also in a way that's not overly punitive, suggesting, for instance, that the outlier schools, the schools that really have the worst retention rates, may for a period of time have a portion of their Federal aid compromised.

We've had separate hearings on this topic. I hope it's something that we entertain as we move forward with the consideration of the reauthorization.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Murphy.  
Senator Cassidy.

#### STATEMENT OF SENATOR CASSIDY

Senator CASSIDY. I've really found this very enlightening.

Mr. Renick, your 800 variable model, is that open source? Could any university access that online? Is it proprietary? How does it work?

Mr. RENICK. It is proprietary, but there are some caveats to that. We collaborated with the Education Advisory Board here in DC to develop it. Those kinds of public-private partnerships are an important part of accelerating change. It enabled us to do things more quickly than we would if we developed it on our own.

The caveat is as follows: that there are ways to transfer these kinds of innovations more quickly. The first year project of the University Innovation Alliance, which includes huge public universities like not only Georgia State, but Arizona State, Texas, Ohio State, Michigan State, is to take this model for advising and tracking using predictive analytics and transfer it to all those universities.

Because of the work that was done already, the costs have already been reduced greatly, and in a 1-year period, all 11 of those

universities, representing 400,000 students, now have predictive analytics based on tracking systems that are very similar to the one at Georgia State.

Senator CASSIDY. If a community college system in Louisiana—they may already be doing it—or elsewhere, New York or you name it, wanted to take your open source thing, how much would it cost them to do it? Or does it cost them anything to say, “Oh, now we have it.” Is it like Linux, where, my gosh, I get it just by logging in and by downloading it? Or do they have to buy it from you? I’m sure there are costs to put in that kind of data. How does it work?

Mr. RENICK. There are costs involved, and some institutions are developing systems on their own. Some are using outside vendors. The cost is really quite modest comparatively.

Senator CASSIDY. Give me a dollar figure.

Mr. RENICK. For an institution like Georgia State to have a tracking system like this would cost about \$150,000 a year. That’s difficult at a time of constrained budgets, but the reality is—

Senator CASSIDY. You’ve got 30,000 students and it’s \$150,000. How much is required in terms of data entry?

Mr. RENICK. It’s a good amount of work. You have to have clean and accurate data that you put into the system. That, too, is not a major undertaking. At Georgia State, it took us about 6 months once we launched the project before we were tracking all 30,000 students.

Senator CASSIDY. You mentioned, or somebody mentioned, “Well, my gosh, this is particularly for Georgia State, but maybe not for elsewhere,” and I’m thinking you’ve got 800 variables. You’ve got a pretty robust data set. You also stated that other institutions are taking it on pretty quickly. It makes me think that it does have general applicability.

Mr. RENICK. I believe so, that many of the markers that we’re tracking are indices that would transfer to other institutions. For instance, we look at—

Senator CASSIDY. Let me stop you, because I’ve only got a minute or two left.

Mr. Jones, you mentioned, and by the way, you were talking about why doesn’t DOE publish Pell grant graduation rates. It turns out that they were required to by some consolidated bill of last year, and I’ve spoken to staff, and they’re actually not going to publish the rates until 2019 because once they’re instructed to do so, they begin collecting the data.

I guess my question is—you have each spoken of institutions knowing their Pell grant graduation rate, which makes me think that there’s proxy data.

Ma’am, let me compliment you. I’ve never had testimony with so many references. You’re clearly an academic in every sense of the word.

It makes me think that there must be some sort of way to get at this data, as opposed to, “Well, we were instructed to do it. Let’s start. Six years later, we’re going to give you a report.”

Ma’am, I’ll start with you again. Is there a way that we could know the graduation rates now as opposed to waiting for a 6-year longitudinal study?



Ms. RICHBURG-HAYES. Many institutions calculate those rates on their own using their internal institutional research departments to do so, because they need it for institutional decisionmaking. Whether you as a committee could demand that those studies come up—I don't think that there is a way in terms of a short timeframe from a research perspective.

Senator CASSIDY. Mr. Jones.

Mr. JONES. We collect data from 30 States, including Tennessee. They all collect data on Pell student graduation rates. Most every institution does collect it.

Senator CASSIDY. What about the for-profits?

Mr. JONES. I don't know. It's not available to the general public, to researchers. More importantly, the policymakers—I honestly think a letter from this committee to the secretary of education would be the fastest—

Senator CASSIDY. We've already requested that. We actually instructed it in a bill. They just started once we instructed them. Six years from now, they're going to tell us, which I find incredible that we are blinded to that which you generally know.

Mr. JONES. Most institutions have that information. They don't publish it.

Senator CASSIDY. I'm almost out of time. I yield back. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Cassidy.

Senator Baldwin.

#### STATEMENT OF SENATOR BALDWIN

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be a part of the discussion today. It's very enlightening. One of the things that we still use as terminology is the phrase, nontraditional students, and yet we find that the majority of students today are what we used to call nontraditional students. We've got to ultimately probably change that nomenclature.

It provides us with some real challenges in terms of making sure that we have the policies that increase the chance of these students completing their degrees or certificates on time with little or, certainly, a lot less debt, but also avoid implementing punitive measures that would serve to impede their success.

In July of this year, I was proud to introduce, along with 13 of my colleagues in the Senate and Congressman Bobby Scott in the House, a bill called the America's College Promise Act. The bill creates a new Federal-State partnership that would waive tuition and fees at community colleges, with States contributing \$1 for every \$3 of the Federal investment.

It's a first dollar program, meaning students can use their Pell grants and other financial aid to cover the many financial demands of obtaining a higher education outside of tuition and fees. I've been very interested in the questions that have been posed and the discussion that we've been having today, because when you start debate on a new idea, we don't need to repeat the mistakes of the past. We can incorporate what seems to be working.

America's College Promise doesn't just require States to invest financially. It asks them to make reforms, reforms like we've been talking about—expanding student supportive services, improving remediation, stressing career pathways—and these reforms, we

hope, will help the students complete their course work and be prepared.

What I want to ask is for you to perhaps weigh in a little further on this. We have a choice of making this prescriptive and mandatory or providing a menu and requiring these reforms be adopted as appropriate so it's not a one-size-fits-all. If we're going to get it right from the beginning, as we initiate this debate on covering the first 2 years of community or technical college, I want to hear where you see that balance.

I want to start with Mr. Ralls, but I certainly would welcome all of your comments on this.

Mr. RALLS. Thank you, Senator. I grew up in a state—and will reside for another month in this State—where the State constitution says that higher education should be free as practicable. While we do not have free tuition, we've always had among the lowest tuition in the Nation, and I think that's made a difference for our State. It's made a difference for middle income kids like me.

That's why the emphasis on making higher ed accessible—tuition is not the only cost, and in States like ours, it's really not the most challenging cost. That's why one-size-fits-all may not work everywhere. The notion of making it accessible for low-income and working class students is so important.

However, that being said, we also have to make sure that it—you have to hold us accountable, but we have to hold ourselves accountable to create the structures, that it's not just access, because then access becomes—you know, the open door becomes a revolving door. We have to create structures.

I would emphasize, too, that it's important to look at structures that go across institutions. We still talk very much about within single institutions. That's why I'm so proud of the work we've been doing in North Carolina around articulation agreements between all 58 colleges, all 16 universities, and most of the private colleges, because that's often where students fall through the cracks. Their credits fall through the cracks. They start and stop.

The Federal Government can do more to incentivize, at least, encourage those kinds of statewide agreements, those kinds of articulation agreements recognizing, as I said, embracing the swirl that is the reality of students going across multiple institutions.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you.

Mr. Jones.

Mr. JONES. I've spent most of my life pushing affordability. I would couple that with what you said—reform. We have a lot of people going to college—the highest ever in the recession, but we don't have the reform necessary.

I would make it a menu. Whether it's the Austin Peay model for remediation, or some of the models that Tim has done at Georgia State, or a model like the Tennessee Tech Center that has a 75 percent completion rate and an 80 percent placement rate, I would make it models or menus where there's evidence that they actually succeed in delivering, not just simply a menu—you could do this or you could do this—but menus where there's evidence of success. There is plenty of evidence out there where colleges like Georgia State and Austin Peay have done this very successfully.

Senator BALDWIN. Any other comments?

Dr. Renick?

Mr. RENICK. The one caution I would add is that we've run lots of data in analytics at Georgia State. We've found that there is actually a sweet spot, where if students have their costs covered completely, their completion rates are actually lower than those who have a little skin in the game.

The proposal overall is a good one. We found that somewhere between 7 percent and 15 percent to 20 percent of the total cost—that if that is what the student has to pay, they have more motivation, and they have more persistence.

Senator BALDWIN. Dr. Richburg-Hayes.

Ms. RICHBURG-HAYES. I would just add that programs really need to be targeted so that a menu is very important. It's unlikely that any one of the programs that we talked about today that are evidence-based strategies will be applicable to all institutions and to all students. It will be really important to give institutions the time and resources in order to develop programs that will work.

Georgia State University is a great example. It took them a decade to get where they are, and it's important for us to remember that. These changes do not happen immediately and overnight.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Bennet.

#### STATEMENT OF SENATOR BENNET

Senator BENNET. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing and for reminding us to be cautious about one-size-fits-all. As I listened to the testimony today, I'm reminded again that policy is one thing and implementation is something else. You can have the best policy in the world and terrible implementation, and you don't get the results that you need.

We compound that problem by also measuring the wrong things. We're asking the wrong questions. Dr. Renick pointed out that this gainful employment stuff has really made it difficult for a number of our institutions, because the correlation on income is actually what your family's income looked like, not what the institution you went to looked like, but we decided that would be a good way to measure outcomes. There's a lot of work for us to do, a lot of thoughtful work for us to pay attention to.

I wanted to spend my time with you, Dr. Renick, today. Georgia State has done some incredible things—amazing accomplishments. I wonder if you could describe what the GPS program looks like from the student's perspective. How do I know, if I'm a student at Georgia State, that I'm at Georgia State instead of someplace else, that my experience would be different?

Mr. RENICK. It's become significantly different—

Senator BENNET. It's not—you're measuring, you say, in the top 30,000 students, 800 factors. From the student's perspective, what does that look like?

Mr. RENICK. Right. From the student's perspective, we do have, as Complete College America recommends and others on this panel have supported, program maps for all students. Students have a pathway, a set of courses they're supposed to be taking each semester.

The challenge is we weren't enforcing it before. Students who are following their maps and doing everything right will hear very little from us, because no alerts are going off. Students who are making mistakes will hear from us almost immediately.

We're concentrating the kind of precious resources we have in personnel and advisors and so forth upon the students who need it the most. They're getting to know their advisors more personally and more quickly. We've made a move to bring the advisors to the classroom the first weeks of the fall semester so that the students get to know their advisors on a one-to-one basis.

The interactions that the advisors are having with the students and staff, in general, are much more personalized now. It's not just, "Come in and see me, and we'll shoot the breeze." It's,

"Oh, I saw you just registered for your spring classes. You're a bio major, and you're in the wrong lab sequence. Let's come in and talk about it."

As a result, the students are much more responsive, and they get to know their advisors and support staff on a much more personal level.

If a student is really struggling, the system can be a little annoying, to be frank about it, because they're going to have lots and lots of interventions. We've been polling our students ever since we went live, and not a single student has complained.

Senator BENNET. Tell me what those kinds of mistakes would be, away from the map, that you could detect, and how you reach out to the student.

Mr. RENICK. One very simple example of the kind of predictive analytics is that we found that the first grade that a student gets in what becomes his or her major is very predictive of their graduation rates. If a political science major gets an A or a B, they're graduating from Georgia State at a 75 percent clip. If they get a C in their first political science course, they're graduating at a 25 percent clip.

In the past, we would do nothing with that C student other than pass them along to upper level work that was more demanding, and whatever weaknesses were being revealed by that C grade becomes exacerbated and they begin to get Ds and Fs and run into problems. What we do across the whole curriculum is trace those kinds of markers, and we have an immediate intervention as soon as the student gets a C grade.

We bring them in. They may go to tutoring, reading, writing, whatever we diagnosed as the problem. The idea is to correct the issue before they waste money and time and put themselves at risk by taking courses they're unprepared to succeed in.

Senator BENNET. I was also struck by something you talked about in terms of how we measure success for institutions and for students. We've just, with the Chairman's leadership, managed to pass a reauthorization of what used to be called No Child Left Behind, which for a long, long time measured the wrong thing. It said, "These are successful schools because the kids are at a high status, and these are failing schools."

Even though these kids might not be growing, and these kids were actually growing while they're there, we were telling the world that these schools where the teachers were actually driving

success and growth were failures. One of the things you said was that we ought to reward students and institutions who are making a difference against the odds. That is the right way to think about it. How do we do that?

Mr. RENICK. We need to incentivize in lots of ways. This goes from Federal grant programs, which often are bestowed upon institutions that are meeting those kinds of quality markers in the most traditional sense, have the highest graduation rates, but maybe not have the greatest struggles—we need to be much more flexible with the way we assign Federal financial aid.

Right now, it is in many cases a one-size-fits-all model, where students who are not meeting certain progress markers are denied aid. Others are granted aid. That shouldn't be the case if what we can show by more reliable data is that students are doing what they need to do within the context of their ability and their resources and making significant progress toward their degrees.

Senator BENNET. I'm out of time. If you don't mind, I'll followup with you after the panel to get your list.

Mr. RENICK. Absolutely.

Senator BENNET. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Bennet.

Senator Warren.

#### STATEMENT OF SENATOR WARREN

Senator WARREN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all for being here today.

We all know that helping students should be a high priority, and I know that you all see this. I've read your testimony, and you've provided a lot of good information about programs that colleges can adopt to improve student outcomes. Only a few colleges are showing any real leadership in this area. I want to focus on Federal policies that can push schools harder in that direction.

Mr. Jones, could I start with you? Your organization works with schools and States to help improve outcomes for students. In your opinion, do colleges have enough incentives to improve student success?

Mr. JONES. They don't. Typically, the old incentive was what we call the 10-day or the 14-day count. You got your money based on whether you were there on the 10th day. If you weren't there on the 11th day, it didn't make any difference. States have moved rather rapidly to change that.

The Federal Government is very powerful in the money that you provide, both in the Pell money, but other grant programs that you provide. Providing incentives to graduate more students, graduate them in a more timely way, because they'll incur less debt, get them through remediation into the credit-bearing classes—those are all incentives that you could easily do and put in programs.

Senator WARREN. Good. I just want to underline what I'm hearing you say about this is putting financial incentives in place so that schools have a reason to invest not just in getting students in through the door, but in having them succeed.

When we talk about improving student success, we aren't just talking about getting students through a graduation ceremony—getting them in the row and walking them across the stage. We're

talking about making sure that students leave college with an education that helps them succeed.

I wanted to turn to you on this, Mr. Renick. Which colleges are doing a better or worse job at making sure that students are prepared for good jobs after they graduate?

Mr. RENICK. That's an increasingly important topic in my world. Where I think the scalable growth is, again, in using data and analytics to help us advise and promote good career and postgraduation knowledge for our students. We now, as part of our platform, have an alliance with a vendor called Burning Glass that is tracking data for job listings across the country every day.

As students come in at Georgia State and pick majors, they actually can see for any major that we offer the 25 to 40 careers that are most likely to result in an empirical basis for majoring in that area. Then they can see job data about what job demands are like, what starting salaries are like, what qualifications—

Senator WARREN. Let me just stop you there, though, Mr. Renick. I very much hear your point about helping students find out what career paths may be most informative for them.

I particularly want to focus on—I heard you say, earlier or know that you referred to predatory institutions, that we're not just talking about how we get more students to study things that are going to be useful. It's about whole institutions and where institutions are focused. Do you want to say just a word about that?

Mr. RENICK. Yes, absolutely. We see at Georgia State the kind of back end of some of these predatory practices. Because our student population is largely at-risk, they're often the students who are targeted. We have two students arriving at Georgia State this fall as transfer students who already have \$100,000 of debt.

We hear these stories and ask, what happened once they get to campus? It's usually a trail of broken promises and misleading claims. Oftentimes, these students have very little usable credits. We've had students who have been approached by lenders who actually tell them not to fill out the FAFSA because it's so complicated, but fill out this one sheet of paper and they can get the same money, never fully explaining the difference in the terms.

Senator WARREN. So \$100,000 in debt and very little credit that will actually transfer. For-profit colleges seem more interested in shareholder success than in student success. About one in five students who borrow to attend a for-profit college default on their loans within 3 years of leaving school. That means, on average, that for-profit colleges are failing at least one in five of their students. Let me just see if I can wrap this up really quickly with a note here.

Mr. Jones, what kinds of policies would give for-profit colleges an incentive to improve outcomes for their students?

Mr. JONES. You should look at the creditors. You authorize the creditors. Right now, it's all about resources for colleges, but it ought to be about outcomes, both in terms of completion rates and on-time completion rates. Do they get jobs? What kind of debt ratios do they serve?

The creditors, have been very lax at looking at any of those factors in terms of re-accrediting schools. I can't imagine the ones they've accredited just can't meet those—having met those stand-

ards. I'd look to the creditors and how they do this and rewrite that.

Senator WARREN. Good. I'll just put this in——

Mr. JONES. For both private and public.

Senator WARREN. Thank you. I'll put this in as a question for the record for everyone here.

We just have to go back to the fact that the Federal Government is shelling out \$150 billion every year to help students attend college. Some schools are doing their part to make sure that those dollars are well-spent. Some are not. As we work on the Higher Education Act, it is critical to focus on whether all colleges that dip into that \$150 billion have the right incentives to invest in the success of their students.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Warren.

Senator Murray, do you have any further thoughts?

Senator MURRAY. I do not. I just want to thank our panelists today for a really important discussion.

As we move forward to work to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, you've given us a lot to ponder and think about. At the end of the day, we want to make sure that all young people today and adults from all walks of life have access, and this has been an important part of that discussion. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. This has been a very helpful hearing and a reminder about how big and complex and diverse our system of higher education is. It makes me think, with all these really good ideas, 75 percent, 76 percent of our students go to public 2-year schools, 4-year schools, and they have legislators and Governors and Higher Education Commission members and university presidents and board of trustees all rushing around to meet with one another to find out what North Carolina is doing.

I know I used to—when I was Governor, I'd go see Bill Friday, and I'd try to learn everything I could about North Carolina's higher education system. I'm sure that Dr. Renick has seen a great many of our other institutions work to adopt his progress.

Senator Warren is right. We spend a lot of money here, and we have a chance here in the next few months to make sure we spend it wisely to create an environment in which you can do more of what you're doing without imposing on you what might be a very good idea that works here but doesn't necessarily work there and not to tar you with predatory practices that might exist in other places.

As you followup this hearing, if you have thoughts that you'd like to suggest to us about ways to adjust our system of financial aid so that we can encourage the kind of student success that so many States have been adopting over the last few years really on their own, if there's an appropriate way for us to do that, we certainly ought to consider it. If there are things that you think we should definitely not do that would get in the way of letting that happen, I'd like to hear that as well.

The hearing record will remain open for 10 days to submit additional comments and any questions for the record that Senators may have. We plan to hold the next HELP hearing in September.

Thank you for being here today. The committee will stand adjourned.  
[Additional Material follows.]



## ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

RESPONSE BY STAN JONES TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR ALEXANDER, SENATOR CASSIDY, SENATOR COLLINS, SENATOR ENZI, SENATOR MURRAY, AND SENATOR WARREN

SENATOR ALEXANDER

*Question 1.* Does Federal aid allow for so many remedial classes that it unintentionally puts students on a “bridge to nowhere” as your organization’s report on remediation puts it?

Answer 1. Yes, under the Federal Pell grant program, students can use their Pell grant to cover up to 30 credits of remediation. This is problematic for three reasons:

a. Current regulations limit a student’s eligibility for Pell to 12 semesters. If a student uses their full allotment of remedial credits, they will likely run out of Pell funding prior to completing their bachelor’s degree, making it less likely that they will complete the degree.

b. Traditional remediation does not work. Only 1 in every 10 remedial students graduate with an associate’s degree in 3 years and a little more than one-third graduate with a bachelors degree from non-research institutions.

c. Pell students have a higher rate of remediation than non-Pell students (55 percent compared to 30 percent), meaning Pell students are more likely to fall into this group of students who take multiple levels and semesters of remediation without completing.

Complete College America recommends rethinking the remedial allotment of Pell by encouraging States and institutions to adopt corequisite remediation, which allows students to complete college-level English and math much more quickly, while receiving just-in-time remedial supports. States and institutions that have adopted this model at scale are seeing tremendous results. For example, Tennessee went from 12 percent student completion of traditional math remediation to 63 percent completion for both the remedial and college-level math course by using a corequisite strategy. In English, Tennessee went from 31 percent completion of traditional remediation to 74 percent completion for both the remedial and college-level English course through the corequisite strategy.

One possible solution would be distinguish remedial credits between those that are taken as a pre-requisite vs. those that are taken as a corequisite—with the college-level course. For example, the Pell program could maintain the current 30-credit allotment, but make clear that no more than 15 credits be used for standalone prerequisite remediation and that all other remedial credits must be taken as a co-requisite course, while students are enrolled in the gateway course for which they require remediation.

*Question 2.* Why is it important that students complete their degree or certificate?

Answer 1. Degree and certificate completion matters for both individual and societal reasons. Individuals with a college degree on average earn over \$1 million more during their lifetime than individuals with a high school diploma. While students may accrue skills during their postsecondary experience that aids them in future roles regardless of whether they complete the degree or certificate, without a degree or certificate, students are less likely to qualify for jobs, less likely to increase their earning power, and more likely to have student debt without the increased ability to pay back such debt. At the societal level, having more individuals with credentials and degrees is good for the economy, as the individuals will be better prepared to fill critical roles and contribute to the overall economy.

*Question 3.* You mentioned that Federal policies set *de facto* policies in States and at institutions, such as considering 12 credits as full-time student status. Based on that observation, what drawbacks or promise does the *de facto* standards setting effect of Federal policy have for policymakers as they consider potential changes to Federal student aid or Federal higher education policies?

Answer 3. Federal policies have significant implications for State and institutional policy and action, particularly given the size of the Federal investment in higher education and the signal that Federal policies send to the field. Future potential drawbacks or promise can be gauged by the outcomes of current Federal policy.

For example, IPEDs is the primary database that the bulk of higher education researchers rely on for their research. Regrettably, because it does not include part-time students, Pell students, and other key metrics, there are huge gaps in the research. The lack of these metrics sends a message about the importance of knowing the outcomes of part-time students, Pell students and other key components. States

and institutions also rely on the standards set by IPEDs, such as 3-year and 6-year graduation rates, instead of maintaining a strong focus of on-time completion rates. This standard reduces accountability for States and institutions to graduate more students on-time.

Another example is the definition of full-time status for Pell students. All institutions accessing title IV funds must adhere to this definition. Beyond that, this definition of 12 credits per term has become the standard for many State-level and institutional-level aid programs. It signals that 12 credits per term is appropriate for full-time enrollment, even though 12 credits per term automatically put students seeking a bachelor's degree on the 5-year plan. Research from Temple University and The University of Texas found that the cost of a bachelor's degree dramatically rises for students in their fifth year and beyond. One reason for the dramatic increase is that many State, institutional or private grant programs are capped at four academic years. Consequently, Pell students may actually see a dramatic increase in their cost of attendance if they gear their educational program to the 12-credit requirement. Ultimately, this approach will lead to dramatic increases in student debt or even worse students abandoning or delaying their completion of a degree altogether. By encouraging and incentivizing students to enroll in 15 credits per term or 30 credits year round, the Federal Government would be sending a strong signal to States and institutions that they also should take action to encourage and incentivize their students to complete on-time.

*Question 4.* Is there a downside of incentivizing institutions and States to adopt policies that consider full-time as 15 credits, rather than 12 credits?

Answer 4. No, there is not a downside to incentivizing States and institutions to adopt policies that support students attending at 15 credits per term. Such policies will help students complete their degree programs on time, preventing them from spending extra time and money to earn the degree and allowing them to more quickly enter the workforce. Having students complete a degree on time is good for Federal and State governments, as it reduces additional expenditures in student aid beyond the 2 or 4 years. At the institutional level, it allows colleges and universities to more efficiently tailor their resources to helping students complete.

Certainly, not all students are able to enroll full-time, as many students have work and family obligations that make full-time enrollment impossible. However, such students may be able to complete 30 credits through year-round attendance. At the Federal level, re-installing the summer Pell offering would help make year-round attendance possible. Within institutions, highly structured programs, schedules and pathways would facilitate students' ability to more easily and successfully move through their degree programs for on-time completion.

SENATOR CASSIDY

*Question 1.* I am a father of a child who is dyslexic. As any proud father, I want the best for her and to see her succeed academically and in life. As such, research from the National Center for Learning Disabilities shows that students with learning disabilities—such as dyslexia—value a college education and most want to attend either a 2-year or 4-year postsecondary education program.<sup>1</sup>

While 68 percent of students with learning disabilities are graduating high school with a regular diploma—a statistic that is too low but has risen over time<sup>2</sup>—these students continue to lag behind their peers in entering and completing college. Just 34 percent of such students completed a 4-year degree compared to 51 percent of students without disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

- As your organizations reviewed reasons for students not succeeding in college and as part of your development of initiatives to help such students succeed, what considerations were given to students who had learning differences?

- If we really want students with learning disabilities to have access to postsecondary education, what are colleges and universities doing to educate their faculty about the needs of these college students? What are colleges and universities doing in general to accommodate these students?

Answer 1. One key challenge for students with disabilities is that Individual Education Plans at the K–12 level are not shared with postsecondary education institutions because of FERPA regulations. While we do not have recommendations related to these regulations, we do think it is important to encourage postsecondary education institutions to develop more effective intake processes to better understand

<sup>1</sup><http://www.nclld.org/reports-and-studies/2014-state-of-ld/>.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.nclld.org/reports-and-studies/diplomas-at-risk-a-critical-look-at-the-high-school-graduation-rate/>.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.nlts2.org>.

their new entering students. Complete College America strongly encourages institutions to abandon the process of assessment and placement of new entering students based on highly ineffective placement exams, such as the Accuplacer, to determine the starting point for students in higher education.

Instead, we recommend a process where students are provided the opportunity to identify the academic goals, career goals and other important information that will enable a more comprehensive strategy for ensuring that all students, including those with learning disabilities, can identify and follow a clear path to completion.

*Question 2.* The U.S. Department of Education's College Navigator, an online tool to provide parents and prospective students with information about colleges falls short in collecting information about services available to students with learning disabilities. A random review of the profiles of 400 institutions of higher education in the College Navigator revealed that only six provided any information to students and the public about services available for students with learning disabilities at that college.<sup>4</sup> When information is not provided to parents and students, it's difficult to make informed decisions about which college to attend.

- How do colleges communicate with prospective and enrolled students about the types of services and supports offered for students with learning disabilities, such as students with dyslexia?

- Overall, how do colleges work with the K–12 educational system to support a seamless transition from high school to postsecondary education for students with learning differences, such as students with dyslexia? If colleges and universities do not work with K–12 educational systems for such students, is this something Congress should consider as we reauthorize the Higher Education Act?

*Answer 2.* A mechanism for ensuring the success of all students is to support funding models based on student success, rather than enrollment. By creating specific financial incentives to colleges to meet the needs of specific demographic groups or other subgroup of students, colleges are incented to provide services that will support students—to include students with disabilities.

SENATOR COLLINS

*Question 1.* The various forms of Federal financial aid have helped increase college access. I am concerned, however, that there is little Federal effort to increase awareness among students about college costs, debt, and repayment, and that students can become discouraged from completing their degrees if they feel overwhelmed by cost.

*Answer 1.* Husson University in Bangor, ME, where I worked prior to my election to the Senate, requires all freshmen students to enroll in a one-credit student success seminar, which includes financial literacy and other essential skills development. In your view, what forms of financial counseling are most effective? Are there Federal impediments to increasing student financial awareness?

Complete College America fully supports helping students complete their degree programs on-time in order to reduce the level of college cost and debt, as well as to increase their ability to repay such debt. College costs and student debt are at all-time highs. These are important issues for Congress, States, and institutions to address. While Complete College America does not offer specific strategies around financial counseling or financial literacy, we agree that supports are essential to prepare students to make informed choices before, during, and after their college experience.

SENATOR ENZI

*Question 1.* Can you tell us about the effort that States are taking to help students in dual-enrollment programs receive full credit at and/or from their in-State Institutions of Higher Education? What strategies would you recommend we focus on within the context of this reauthorization process to ensure that States are not prohibited from establishing such programs?

*Answer 1.* At this time, Complete College America works primarily at the postsecondary level and does not directly engage the secondary education sector. We believe dual enrollment is an important on-ramp to college access for many students and can help reduce both time and cost to degree. States differ in their approach to dual enrollment. Some States use it as a strategy to help more students become college-ready and begin accruing college credits early. Other States offer it as a benefit and tool only for students that meet GPA and other college readiness criteria. For more information on best practices for dual enrollment, please contact the National Alli-

<sup>4</sup>NCLD conducted review in January 2014.

ance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, Jobs for the Future and the American Youth Policy Forum.

*Question 2.* Could you please tell us about the efforts that Institutions of Higher Education are making to accommodate retraining for adults to change careers by attending school part-time, especially in an economy as changing as ours?

Answer 2. Complete College America works with States and institutions to implement five key strategies, known as the Game Changers, to help all students complete certificate and degree programs. These strategies apply to and benefit all student populations. For example, we strongly encourage colleges to develop structured scheduling options to enable returning adults to more effectively balance the competing obligations of work, family and college. By creating program offerings that are scheduled as blocks which might be, Monday through Friday in the mornings, afternoons or evenings, will allow students to reliably schedule school, work and family obligations. Too often, students must choose between work and a college class because of time conflicts each semester. Even if they are able to find balance one semester, they have to go through the process again the following semester. Creating consistent blocked schedules for an entire program enables more students to enroll in and complete college programs.

SENATOR MURRAY

*Question 1.* Poverty and financial need can have a profound impact on students' ability to succeed. Research shows that high achieving students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to complete than high achieving students from families with higher incomes, even when controlling for their academic preparation at the time of enrollment.

Answer 1. Are there opportunities for postsecondary institutions, including community colleges and traditional 4-year colleges, to develop counseling and support services specifically geared toward meeting the unique needs of high achieving, first-generation students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and ensuring that they are successful? Please describe how such initiatives might work and the benefits they could bring to this demographic of students.

Complete College America works with States and institutions to promote completion strategies for all students. We believe our strategies, known as the Game Changers, will support all students in moving through to graduation, including high achieving, lower income students. These game changers include providing highly structured programs, pathways and schedules to give students a straight line to graduation with all of the supports built in to help them succeed. Changing policies to incentivize students to take 15 credits per term or 30 credits year round for part-time students will facilitate greater completion and on-time completion. Such policies or initiatives could include banded tuition, advising students on the benefits of on-time completion, marketing efforts to students, other incentive programs to support this level of enrollment. Being aware of the completion rates of lower income students is also a recommended step, specifically the graduation rate for students receiving Pell grants. There is currently no mandated Federal reporting of this metric, only a disclosure requirement, to which many institutions do not adhere. With the Federal Government spending billions of dollars each year on the Pell grant program, understanding how these students are succeeding is an important component.

SENATOR WARREN

*Question 1.* Do colleges have enough incentives to improve student success?

Answer 1. Institutions are certainly more attentive than ever before to helping their students succeed and many institutions are engaged in a range of national, State, and institutional initiatives to improve their student outcomes. There are some key actions that can be taken to help better align institutions' focus on student success. At the State level, performance-based funding is an effective tool to help institutions prioritize student success and orient their programs and initiatives around efforts that will support student success. Policies and legislation that better enable institutions to implement strategies around highly structured programs, remedial transformation, and on-time completion can serve as incentives. The Federal Government can help colleges to better focus on student success by including additional progress and completion metrics into IPEDs that will highlight how colleges are serving their students and better position them to understand what changes can be made to improve their student outcomes. Complete College America recommends the Federal Government adopt its data metrics into IPEDS. This is a set of 12 metrics, which have been endorsed by the National Governors Association and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association and for which more than 30

States annually submit State-level data to Complete College America. Six of these metrics (completion ratio, progress on remediation, success in 1st year English and math, credit accumulation, course completion, and credit and time to degree) are not included in IPEDs. Another important data metric that the Federal Government should collect is Pell student graduation rate. There is currently no mandated reporting of this metric, only a disclosure requirement, to which many institutions do not adhere. With the Federal Government spending billions of dollars each year on the Pell grant program, understanding how these students are succeeding is an important component.

*Question 2.* What policies would give for-profit colleges an incentive to improve outcomes for their students?

Answer 2. Inclusion of the Complete College America data metrics into IPEDs, as noted above, and mandated reporting of Pell student graduation rates are a good first step to incentivize all institutions to improve outcomes for their students.

Thank you again for including Complete College America in the August 5th hearing. If we can provide any additional information, please let us know.

RESPONSE BY R. SCOTT RALLS TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR ALEXANDER, SENATOR CASSIDY, SENATOR COLLINS, SENATOR ENZI, SENATOR MURRAY, SENATOR WARREN AND SENATOR SCOTT

SENATOR ALEXANDER

*Question 1.* Why is it important that students complete their degree or certificate?

First, community college students who transfer to a 4-year college are significantly more likely to complete their bachelor's degree if they transfer after completing their associate's degree, compared to similar students who transfer without completion. A study by the Center for Community College Research (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University of first time-college students enrolled at North Carolina Community Colleges between 2002 and 2005 were 49 percent more likely to complete a bachelor's degree within 4 years, and 22 percent more likely to complete the degree within 6 years, than similar students who transferred without completing. These results are similar to a national descriptive study from the National Student Clearinghouse that found students who transferred with a certificate or associate's degree were 16 percentage points more likely to complete a bachelor's degree.

Answer 1. Second, research by CCRC of North Carolina Community College students has indicated that degree completers fare better financially. A study of our students over a 9-year period after first enrollment, demonstrated the internal rate of return (labor market gains net of tuition costs and forgone income) to an associate degree, compared with no award, is approximately 16 percent for women and 5 percent for men.

*Question 2.* How could the availability of a year-round Pell grant increase completion among your student body?

Answer 2. In North Carolina, much of our student success efforts have been built on a theoretical framework of loss and momentum points. In other words, examining points along students' educational progression where we lose students and they drop out, and opportunities for acceleration toward degree completion. A natural loss point is created by the slow-down in course taking behavior for community college students during the summer. Given that our students are older, with an average age of 28, this slowdown is not created by their desire to take time off during the summer, but rather by the lack of availability of course offerings and financial aid. Recognizing this, our State has pushed a legislative agenda for "year-round" community college funding, with STEM courses, healthcare, technical education, and developmental education courses now funded in the summer. In addition, Governor McCrory championing an effort this year for year-round funding for all courses. Of course even with this support for State funding of courses, many students will still be limited by the lack of year-round Pell grant opportunities.

Previous research by Benjamin Castleman has demonstrated the significant numbers of students impacted by what is referred to as "summer melt," and the proclivity of that loss among low-income students. As approximately two-thirds of community college students are from the lower half of the income bracket, efforts to prevent their loss during the summer through the availability of year-round Pell funding are likely to increase community college degree completion.

SENATOR CASSIDY

*Question 1a.* I am a father of a child who is dyslexic. As any proud father, I want the best for her and to see her succeed academically and in life. As such, research from the National Center for Learning Disabilities shows that students with learning disabilities—such as dyslexia—value a college education and most want to attend either a 2-year or 4-year postsecondary education program.<sup>1</sup>

While 68 percent of students with learning disabilities are graduating high school with a regular diploma—a statistic that is too low but has risen over time<sup>2</sup>—these students continue to lag behind their peers in entering and completing college. Just 34 percent of such students completed a 4-year degree compared to 51 percent of students without disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

As your organizations reviewed reasons for students not succeeding in college and as part of your development of initiatives to help such students succeed, what considerations were given to students who had learning differences?

*Answer 1a.* To provide better access to students with disabilities, in 2013 the North Carolina Community College System initiated a 5-year plan for web and e-learning accessibility. Colleges were asked to form an accessibility compliance committee to review all aspects of electronic information, including Web sites, e-Learning, and purchasing of electronic or digital assets or resources. As part of its Success NC initiative (student success strategic plan), colleges were asked to focus on strategies to increase student success, access and program excellence. As a result of Success NC, colleges are developing approaches to enhance access for all students through increased tutoring, improved advising, centrally located information and resources, and leveraging the use of technology.

*Question 1b.* If we really want students with learning disabilities to have access to postsecondary education, what are colleges and universities doing to educate their faculty about the needs of these college students? What are colleges and universities doing in general to accommodate these students?

*Answer 1b.* During staff development days, many colleges include sessions on working with students with disabilities as part of the program. The North Carolina Community College System Office (SO) has provided and arranged for sessions on students with disabilities, including LD, at various conferences, meetings and training sessions. In addition, the System Office had also provided training for faculty and staff at individual colleges upon request.

Disability counselors at all colleges assist students and provide reasonable accommodations to students who self-disclose/register with the disability services office and are confirmed to have a disability. Learning disabilities are unique to each student and accommodations are tailored to the needs of the individual student (case-by-case, class-by-class basis). Accommodations may include note-takers, smart pens, electronic tablets, distraction minimized environment for testing, frequent breaks, copies of instructor notes/presentations, extended time for assignments and exams, as well as other accommodations that fit the student's academic needs.

*Question 2a.* The U.S. Department of Education's College Navigator, an online tool to provide parents and prospective students with information about colleges falls short in collecting information about services available to students with learning disabilities. A random review of the profiles of 400 institutions of higher education in the College Navigator revealed that only six provided any information to students and the public about services available for students with learning disabilities at that college.<sup>4</sup> When information is not provided to parents and students, it's difficult to make informed decisions about which college to attend.

How do colleges communicate with prospective and enrolled students about the types of services and supports offered for students with learning disabilities, such as students with dyslexia?

*Answer 2a.* Most college disability services offices work with the local high school counselors to provide transition information for students with disabilities. Many colleges will schedule transition events for students with disabilities and their parents. For students already enrolled in a college, information is communicated during the admissions process and included in orientation programs and classes. Instructors are encouraged, and in some cases required, to include a statement on their syllabus which provides the location and contact information for the campus disability serv-

<sup>1</sup><http://www.nclld.org/reports-and-studies/2014-state-of-ld/>.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.nclld.org/reports-and-studies/diplomas-at-risk-a-critical-look-at-the-high-school-graduation-rate/>.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.nlts2.org>.

<sup>4</sup>NCLD conducted review in January 2014.

ices office and encourages students with special needs to register with the disability services office.

*Question 2b.* Overall, how do colleges work with the K–12 educational system to support a seamless transition from high school to postsecondary education for students with learning differences, such as students with dyslexia? If colleges and universities do not work with K–12 educational systems for such students, is there something Congress should consider as we reauthorize the Higher Education Act?

Answer 2b. Most colleges work with their local high schools to provide information to students with disabilities and to their parents. Partnerships with area colleges and high schools vary across the State with some working closely together, while others may have a less cooperative relationship.

Congress has an opportunity to encourage stronger transition partnerships between secondary and postsecondary institutions to better inform students and parents of the differences, resources and expectations for students with all disabilities who wish to enroll in a college or university. With the reauthorization, universal design which helps all students, but especially students with disabilities, could also be encouraged.

SENATOR COLLINS

*Question.* The various forms of Federal financial aid have helped increase college access. I am concerned, however, that there is little Federal effort to increase awareness among students about college costs, debt, and repayment, and that students can become discouraged from completing their degrees if they feel overwhelmed by cost.

Husson University in Bangor, ME, where I worked prior to my election to the Senate, requires all freshmen students to enroll in a one-credit student success seminar, which includes financial literacy and other essential skills development. In your view, what forms of financial counseling are most effective? Are there Federal impediments to increasing student financial awareness?

Answer. While not a requirement, as in Maine, financial literacy is often included in our college success courses that are required for degree completion. In addition, since 1972, North Carolina has provided free employability skills training through our 58 community colleges to individuals who have been dislocated from their jobs and/or make less than 200 percent of the Federal poverty level. Included in the available training is financial literacy education.

More recently, our North Carolina State Treasurer, Janet Cowell, and our State Education Assistance Authority, joined forces to create an initiative called Advanced Money Management for Community College Students. They did so after I requested their help in developing financial literacy tools that our community colleges in North Carolina may use in counseling student prior to taking out loans and assuming debt to pay for college. Colleges today face restrictions on requirements they may place on students for financial literacy instruction, prior to assuming Federal loans. In our State, many community colleges have dropped out of the Federal Loan program because they face significant consequences for accounting for loan defaults but have little control over student requirements prior to assuming a loan, such as taking a financial literacy course. A Federal impediment to increasing student financial awareness is the restrictions placed on colleges who may wish to require some type of financial literacy courses prior to providing a Federal loan.

SENATOR ENZI

*Question 1.* I would like to start off by saying that I am very proud that students in my home State of Wyoming, along with students in North Dakota and Nebraska, have the lowest student loan default rate of 5 percent in the Nation.

I was proud to work on and support the Every Child Achieves Act these past few months which highlighted State-funded dual enrollment programs in our K–12 education system. We know it is important for K–12 and higher education to communicate about expectations for college-level work. K–12 students who pursue dual enrollment learn about college expectations early and have a leg up gaining college credit so they can graduate from college faster and potentially with less debt.

Dr. Ralls, you mentioned that Federal legislation should encourage and incentivize State-funded dual enrollment partnerships between our K–12 public schools and community colleges and universities. Can you provide us with some recommendations on how we can improve communication between our K–12 education system and our Institutions of Higher Education and vocational training centers to expand dual enrollment programs and ensure that the credits and credentials being earned by students are transferable to their postsecondary education?

Answer 1. I would pay close attention to articulation agreements between community colleges and universities, and next dual enrollment agreements between community colleges and public schools, and look for opportunities to incentivize States and regions with strong agreements through Federal funding opportunities. In my opinion, articulation agreements between higher education institutions are best when they cover multiple institutions and provide clear, strong degree and course guarantees for students. Statewide agreements between systems of higher education greatly assist students in having consistent pathways that are similar across multiple institutions. Articulation agreements that provide guarantees that courses will transfer as general education credit (i.e., not just counted for elective credit), are best for students who are more likely to ultimately graduate, and taxpayers who do not have to pay for students to retake courses that do not transfer.

With respect to dual enrollment, the best agreements I believe are those that allow high school students to enroll free of charge, and where they enroll in pathways that have limited course choice directly to a degree, rather than random course taking. You can find several States, like North Carolina, or regions where these types of agreements are in place. The Federal Government could play a more active role in encouraging these types of agreements by making them a requirement for eligibility for various grant programs.

*Question 2.* Could you please tell us about the efforts that Institutions of Higher Education are making to accommodate retraining for adults to change careers by attending school part-time, especially in an economy as changing as ours?

Answer 2. Most community college students are working students attending part-time. There have been many efforts to accommodate working students in our sector including the rapid growth of distance education which adds to the convenience of when working students can take classes, as well as scheduling seated classes late in the evening and early in the morning outside of normal working hours.

One recent effort that I believe has great validity, is the effort by colleges in States such as ours to develop programs that lead to third-party certification, and then awarding credit on a competency basis toward completion of degrees. Many lower income working adults need the expediency of gaining an immediate skill, and the competency recognition of certification credential, to solidify or increase their earning potential. After doing so, if they can receive academic credit for such short-term, competency-based training, they can move further down the road toward the attainment of a degree which can further enhance their earning potential. This is why I believe consideration should be strongly given to opening Pell eligibility for students in short-term training programs, when those programs lead to rigorous third-party credentials, and those credentials have been articulated into degree programs through "stackable certification" models.

Also because part-time students typically choose to go part-time not because of personal preference, but rather job and financial necessity, I believe great caution should be taken in requiring full-time attendance for Pell eligibility. If lower income and working-class adults are forced to choose between working and going to college, most will be forced to give up their higher education pursuits so they can earn a living. However, this is also why I believe Pell grants should be eligible year-round, so that students who are working and going to school part-time can stay on a continuous forward trajectory and gain greater momentum toward completion of their degrees.

SENATOR MURRAY

*Question.* Poverty and financial need can have a profound impact on students' ability to succeed. Research shows that high-achieving students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to complete than high-achieving students from families with higher incomes, even when controlling for their academic preparation at the time of enrollment.

Are there opportunities for postsecondary institutions, including community colleges and traditional 4-year colleges, to develop counseling and support services specifically geared toward meeting the unique needs of high-achieving, first-generation students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and ensuring that they are successful?

Please describe how such initiatives might work and the benefits they could bring to this demographic of students.

Answer. Many community colleges, such as the one where I will be the new president (Northern Virginia Community College), are developing honors programs to support high achievers. I believe one of the most important policy levers for supporting high achievers, and other lower income students, is very strong community college to university articulation agreements. Approximately two-thirds of commu-



nity college students are from the bottom 50 percent of the income bracket, compared to only 14 percent of the students at the “elite 200” universities and 5 percent at the “elite top 50.” Increasingly, research has documented an increasing socioeconomic segregation in higher education with poorer students, even those with higher academic achievement, going to open-enrollment institutions, and fewer going to elite institutions. Therefore, as opposed to addressing “undermatching” from just a 4-year college enrollment issue, the greatest overall impact can be from policies that promote first very strong community college to articulation agreements with general education course guarantees (like we have in North Carolina), and strong direct guarantee admissions programs between community colleges and universities (like the DirectConnect program between Valencia College and University of Central Florida, and the Pathway to the baccalaureate program between Northern Virginia Community College and George Mason University). Research indicates that community college students who can transfer all or most of their credits are 2.5 times more likely to complete a bachelor’s degree, than students transferring half or less of their credits. As the Federal Government creates grant programs and other Federal fundings opportunities supportive of higher education, they can help low-income students by incentivizing strong community college to university articulation guarantees.

SENATOR WARREN

*Question 1.* Do colleges have enough incentives to improve student success?

Answer 1. No. Enrollment-based funding models, upon which most higher education funding is provided, put all of the incentives on getting students enrolled, not in graduation. In other words, rewarding inputs rather than outputs. I believe that a mix of funding is important. Enrollment funding helps cover the fixed costs that higher education institutions face with each student enrollment. (For example, community colleges put the vast majority of their funding in direct instructional costs, and if a class starts with 30 students but ends with 20, the teaching costs are the same). However, we have found that even a relatively smaller percentage of funding tied to student success outcomes play an important role in focusing greater attention to program completion and graduation.

One way the Federal Government could help in this process is providing greater incentives to States that maintain tuition to their public institutions at rates significantly below the national average. In fact, some current policies have been a disincentive to maintaining lower tuition. For example, Federal job training policy through the Workforce Investment Act (now WIOA) allows for eligible job training participants to receive training funds through ITAs that pay for the cost of community college attendance (i.e., tuition and fees). For States like North Carolina that maintain very low State-subsidized tuition, sometimes it is seen as “leaving money on the table” because the Federal funding can only pay for the highly State-subsidized tuition rate, not the actual cost of the training. This creates from some that tuition rates should be increased. Policies that would allow States that maintain tuition rates significantly below the national average, to flexibly use some of those funds to support instructional infrastructure costs such as technology, would help remove the disincentives to maintaining low tuition through high State subsidies.

*Question 2.* What policies would give for-profit colleges an incentive to improve outcomes for their students?

Answer 2. I’ve never worked with a for-profit college so I am not in a great position to answer this question. However, I do know very little higher education Federal funding is directly tied to outcomes other than enrollment, so it should be little surprise that if your underlying philosophy is based on a for-profit motive, less attention will likely be given to program completion outcomes. Recently, based on work in North Carolina and other community college systems, the Center for Community College Research at Columbia University has documented the high cost of adopting significant student success efforts in funding environments that primarily reward enrollment. For example, if we were built on a for-profit motive for our North Carolina community colleges, we would have very little incentive to have significantly changed our developmental education programs which “churned” students and as such generated funding, but were insufficient in producing student success. We knew this going into our statewide reform efforts, but did it anyway because student success was prioritized more than the financial impact.

SENATOR SCOTT

*Question.* In my home State, universities have made strides toward allowing students to utilize the full calendar year to work toward an undergraduate degree. The University of South Carolina, in particular, offers “on your time” and accelerated degrees that offer an increased variety of classes to students during the summers to encourage motivated students to complete a degree in their own time. In 2014, the South Carolina State legislature decided to allow students to use State-funded scholarships year round, rather than just during the traditional school year. S. 108, introduced by our Chairman, Senator Alexander, and my colleague Senator Bennett, will expand students’ ability to use Pell grants year-round. Do you believe full-year Pell grants have the potential to help students graduate on time or early, and could they reduce the cost of higher education for qualified students?

*Answer.* In my opinion, providing year-round Pell opportunities could be one of the most important policies in a new Higher Education Act that to significantly impact student success rates.

As in South Carolina, we in North Carolina have been aggressively pursuing State policies to enable year-round attendance. Starting 2 years ago, our State began providing year-round funding to community colleges for students taking STEM, health care, technical education and developmental courses. This year, Governor McCrory is helping to champion year-round funding at community colleges for all courses. The reason for doing so is that the average age of our students is 28 and they come to us with a primary goal of moving quickly into and upward in the workforce, or to transfer to a university. They are not looking to take a break in the summer, and if we do not provide them with year-round opportunity, some lose their momentum and “melt away.”

Last year presidents of our 58 community colleges in North Carolina declared year-round Pell funding as their No. 1 desired Federal policy change, because they believe it is so fundamental to helping students achieve their goals.

RESPONSE BY TIMOTHY M. RENICK TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR ALEXANDER, SENATOR CASSIDY, SENATOR COLLINS, SENATOR ENZI, SENATOR MURRAY, SENATOR WARREN AND SENATOR SCOTT

SENATOR ALEXANDER

*Question 1.* What is problematic about the academic progress benchmarks or indicators for students built into Federal student aid programs today? What would a better way to encourage progress look like in Federal student aid?

*Answer 2.* Our use of analytics to track all students at Georgia State University has revealed a subset of students who have high probabilities of graduation and yet who are out of compliance with SAP. Because we are the largest transfer recipient school in the State of Georgia and serve significant numbers of at-risk students, Georgia State enrolls a subset of students who arrive having largely exhausted their aid eligibility. In a significant number of cases, these students may have been misled by previous institutions, including schools that did not provide basic supports that promote student success. When they arrive at the more positive academic environment of Georgia State, these students progress nicely—but they often lack sufficient aid eligibility to get to graduation. We would like to be able to approve SAP appeals of students scheduled to graduate but who do not have extenuating circumstances as currently defined. Students who have been ill-served by previous institutions often exceed the maximum time for Federal aid and need one or two additional terms to graduate.

Especially with the increase in non-traditional and working students, SAP standards should be based on total financial aid payouts instead of a maximum timeframe. Some students are flagged for SAP but have not yet attempted anything close to 180 hours. This causes confusion and undermines the ability of some of the most at-risk students to graduate.

There should be more flexibility as it relates to SAP for students who change their majors. The new predictive analytics being used by universities such as Georgia State and Austin Peay can help struggling students to get back on track for graduation by having them switch to majors that better fit their abilities and make better use of their successfully completed courses. Change in major is not currently a valid basis for a SAP appeal.

There also should be more flexibility in calculating SAP for first-year students. These students are often adjusting to their first year in college, but such arguments do not count as extenuating circumstances for SAP purposes. We are required to deny these appeals, which impacts retention, progression and graduation rates, es-

pecially for at-risk students who often have the greatest challenge adjusting to college.

SAP requirements should only be required for undergraduates students. The academic progress of graduate and professional students should be monitored by academic departments. All graduate programs have measures in place to suspend or expel students who are not meeting department's academic standards. A least intrusive approach also makes sense for graduate and professional students since the vast majority of such students are only eligible for Unsubsidized and Grad Plus Loans.

*Question 2.* In order to improve student success, why is it important for the Federal Government to provide institutions the ability to require that students receive counseling and take training classes about their finances?

Answer 2. There are currently too many cultural barriers to college completion for at-risk student populations. Students who are the first in their families to attend college or who come from low-income backgrounds often lack experience making high-stakes financial decisions and have no natural support systems to guide them. Just one or two financial mistakes can mean the difference between a student dropping out and staying enrolled. We need to begin to equip students to navigate the financial decisions necessary to progress through college starting before matriculation and extending through graduation. Unfortunately, few students participate in such financial literacy training voluntarily. Georgia State University has created an internal system to induce students to go through financial literacy training: we require all recipients of institutional aid to sign a contract agreeing to go through training modules. This approach has proven helpful but is less than comprehensive. While I do not support one-size-fits-all, mandatory Federal training for financial literacy, I do believe we could use Federal requirements to induce students to participate in online and in-person literacy modules that would be customized to their circumstances: entering students learning the difference between types of educational loans and the impact of borrowing; seniors learning the rules and options surrounding paying back loans.

*Question 3.* The advising models developed by Georgia State University and Austin Peay State University have shown great success in keeping their students on track to graduation. What are the barriers to other institutions adopting similar models? Are there any drawbacks to a data-driven approach on student advising?

Answer 3. The largest barrier to the widespread implementation of analytics-based advising interventions nationally is cultural. We do not incentivize college leadership to embrace what is new and different, especially when it might create pushback from faculty, staff or other stakeholders. Presidents are too often rewarded for what they do not do—upset the status quo, anger constituencies—than what they do. We need to change the incentive structure.

On the issues of advising tracking systems, there are some more particular barriers:

(a) Tracking systems are only as effective as the data that are the basis for the alerts and predictive analytics. Institutions such as Georgia State and Austin Peay have invested in collecting and scrubbing data so that it is sound.<sup>1</sup> Too many institutions lack the infrastructure, history and culture to easily populate such systems. Still, we need to support national projects to identify data trends across institutions so that the benefits of such early alerts can be enjoyed by students at all institutions. For instance, there is much reason to believe that academic indicators from lower-level courses in pre-calculus math are accurate predictors of performance in upper-level chemistry courses across all institutions.<sup>2</sup> We could greatly accelerate the propagation of advising tracking systems by pursuing projects of a cross-institutional and even national level to collect such data.

(b) Many campuses are not currently set up effectively to respond to the alerts that come from these systems. Georgia State has supported 43,000 one-on-one proactive interventions between staff and students over the past 12 months because we were able to make substantial changes in the way we organize and deploy academic advisors on campus. At too many universities, academic advisors report to and are assessed by multiple stakeholders, making coordination of responses difficult.

<sup>1</sup>“GPS Advising at Georgia State University.” *Georgia State University Office of Institutional Effectiveness*, <http://oie.gsu.edu/files/2014/04/Advisement-GPS.pdf> (accessed September 3, 2015).

<sup>2</sup>N/A.

*Question 4.* Why is it important that students complete their degree or certificate?

Answer 4. The national data are compelling. According to a 2014 study of the Pew Research Center, even at the depths of the Recession, college graduates were only one-third as likely to be unemployed as Americans who possessed only a high school diploma.<sup>3</sup> The gap is even wider between college graduates and high school dropouts. The Pew study replicates the often-cited claim that, over a Lifetime, college graduates will earn more than \$1 million more than the high school graduates.<sup>4</sup> With the emergence of an American economy increasingly dependent on information, technology and service, there is strong reason to believe that these types of gaps will grow in the future. While there are exceptions—we all hear the stories of the college graduates with high depth who are unemployed or underemployed—by every objective indicator, such individuals are the exception and not the rule. Quality of life indices—life expectancy, access to good health care, education level of offspring, lower rates of incarceration—also increase with a college education.<sup>5</sup> This is an important instance in which what is right for the individual is also what is best for the Nation.

SENATOR CASSIDY

*Question 1.* I am a father of a child who is dyslexic. As any proud father, I want the best for her and to see her succeed academically and in life. As such, research from the National Center for Learning Disabilities shows that students with learning disabilities—such as dyslexia—value a college education and most want to attend either a 2-year or 4-year postsecondary education program.<sup>6</sup>

While 68 percent of students with learning disabilities are graduating high school with a regular diploma—a statistic that is too low but has risen over time<sup>7</sup>—these students continue to lag behind their peers in entering and completing college. Just 34 percent of such students completed a 4-year degree compared to 51 percent of students without disabilities.<sup>8</sup>

As your organizations reviewed reasons for students not succeeding in college and as part of your development of initiatives to help such students succeed, what considerations were given to students who had learning differences?

If we really want students with learning disabilities to have access to postsecondary education, what are colleges and universities doing to educate their faculty about the needs of these college students? What are colleges and universities doing in general to accommodate these students?

Answer 1. I share your concern for supporting students with learning disabilities. There is clearly a need to respect the personal privacy of the students. As such, we do not volunteer the information about students with disabilities to faculty members who may have such students enroll in their courses. We also do not want to require that students disclose their personal circumstances to all faculty and staff with whom they work on an individual basis. With these principles in mind, Georgia State staffs an Office of Disability Services.<sup>9</sup> Students with disabilities are encouraged to visit the office where appropriate accommodations can be discussed with highly trained professionals. Subsequently, students merely tell their instructors that they have an approved accommodation through the Office of Disability Services, and the Office then advocates on behalf of the students. If students, for instance, need more time to complete an exam, the Office of Disability Services will proctor the exam so the student will not be put in a position of requesting accommo-

<sup>3</sup>“The Rising Cost of Not Going to College,” *Pew Research Center*, February 11, 2014, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/02/11/the-rising-cost-of-not-going-to-college/> (accessed September 3, 2015).

<sup>4</sup>Anthony P. Carnevale, Stephen J. Rose, & Ban Cheah, “The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, Lifetime Earnings,” *Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce*, <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2011/collegepayoff.pdf> (accessed September 3, 2015).

<sup>5</sup>Sandy Baum, Jennifer Ma, & Kathleen Payea, “Education Pays 2013: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society,” *The College Board*, <http://trends.collegeboard.org/education-pays> (accessed September 3, 2015).

<sup>6</sup>Candace Cortiella, “2014 State of LD,” *National Center for Learning Disabilities*, November 24, 2014, <http://www.nclld.org/reports-and-studies/2014-state-of-ld/> (accessed September 3, 2015).

<sup>7</sup>Candace Cortiella, “Diplomas at Risk: A Critical Look at the High School Graduation Rate,” *National Center for Learning Disabilities*, November 24, 2014, <http://www.nclld.org/reports-and-studies/diplomas-at-risk-a-critical-look-at-the-high-school-graduation-rate/> (accessed September 3, 2015).

<sup>8</sup>*National Longitudinal Transition Study 2*. <http://www.nlts2.org> (accessed September 3, 2015).

<sup>9</sup>*Georgia State University Disability Services*. <http://disability.gsu.edu/> (accessed September 3, 2015).

dation directly from the instructor. Students do not have to disclose the nature of their disabilities to their instructors (unless they chose to do so) in order to be appropriately accommodated.

A challenge is reducing barriers that sometime hinder students from seeking this help, and I agree that requiring institutions to outline their support system in a standard place of the website would help to ensure that impacted students know what resources are available from day one.

*Question 2.* The U.S. Department of Education's College Navigator,<sup>10</sup> an online tool to provide parents and prospective students with information about colleges, falls short in collecting information about services available to students with learning disabilities. A random review of the profiles of 400 institutions of higher education in the College Navigator revealed that only six provided any information to students and the public about services available for students with learning disabilities at that college.<sup>11</sup> When information is not provided to parents and students, it's difficult to make informed decisions about which college to attend.

How do colleges communicate with prospective and enrolled students about the types of services and supports offered for students with learning disabilities, such as students with dyslexia?

Overall, how do colleges work with the K–12 educational system to support a seamless transition from high school to postsecondary education for students with learning differences, such as students with dyslexia? If colleges and universities were not to work with K–12 educational systems for such students, is this something Congress should consider as we reauthorize the Higher Education Act?

*Answer 2.* At Georgia State, we outline the resources available to students with disabilities through our orientation process and provide a referral service to the Office of Disability Services for faculty members who may identify unreported cases in the classroom. At present, there is not a seamless process from high school to postsecondary institutions. A challenge that we have not resolved is respecting the privacy of our students who understandably may resist (and whose parents may resist) their being tracked as students with disabilities across institutions or as students transition from secondary to postsecondary education. There is currently no means that I know of by which a student's circumstances with regard to special needs is relayed from K–12 to the college in which the student matriculates unless the student takes the initiative to do so. Because of this dynamic, we rely heavily of the students's self disclosure of his or her situation, which likely leaves some students unserved.

#### SENATOR COLLINS

*Question 1.* The various forms of Federal financial aid have helped increase college access. I am concerned, however, that there is little Federal effort to increase awareness among students about college costs, debt, and repayment, and that students can become discouraged from completing their degrees if they feel overwhelmed by cost.

Husson University in Bangor, ME, where I worked prior to my election to the Senate, requires all freshmen students to enroll in a one-credit student success seminar, which includes financial literacy and other essential skills development. In your view, what forms of financial counseling are most effective? Are there Federal impediments to increasing student financial awareness?

*Answer 1.* Like Husson University, Georgia State has a mandatory 1-hour course that includes a financial literacy component.<sup>12</sup> We have found it effective to have students who receive institutional aid sign a contract when that requires them to attend financial literacy training. We use in-person meetings as well as online modules, both of which we customize to serve the specific needs of the students.<sup>13</sup> Graduating seniors, for instance, might be assigned modules focusing on paying back their loans after graduation and managing credit card debt. All participation is tracked.

The link that we create at Georgia State between institutional aid and financial literacy training could be strengthened by building parallel requirements for the recipients of Federal aid. My caution is that we recognize that, as with all learning,

<sup>10</sup> *College Navigator*. <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/> (accessed September 3, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> NCLD conducted review in January 2014.

<sup>12</sup> "GSU 1010: New Student Orientation Curriculum," *Office of Undergraduate Studies*, <http://success.students.gsu.edu/files/2013/01/GSU-1010-curriculum.pdf> (accessed September 3, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> "Financial Literacy," *Georgia State University Student Financial Services*, <http://sfs.gsu.edu/the-financial-aid-process/financial-resources/financial-literacy/> (accessed September 3, 2015).

it needs to be incremental. A model that requires 17-year-olds to be fully literate about all types of loans, interest rates and so on before they can receive Federal aid will only hinder the educational progress of large numbers of the very students that such a policy would aim to protect.

The biggest help that the Federal Government could offer to the financial literacy of college students is to simplify the application and award processes and the numbers and types of programs offered by the Federal Government. Currently, even trained professionals have difficulties grasping the nuances. How can we expect first-generation, 17-year-olds to do so?

I also support certain steps proposed by the National Association of Financial Aid Administrators:<sup>14</sup> (1) First, we should allow students to use tax returns (their own or their parents, as appropriate) from the previous filing year. Our efforts to engage students in a personalized fashion about their financial aid, loans, and packaging is severely limited by the fact that tax returns are not due until April 15 and classes for the academic year end in May. In the vast majority of cases, changes in financial circumstances are insignificant. The only way to make true financial counseling tenable is to speed up the process by which students can be awarded aid. (2) Second, students whose income level (or that of their families, as appropriate) fall below a certain level (such as \$50,000) can and should have a vastly simplified FAFSA form to complete. The current complexities of the FAFSA add a disproportionate burden to low-income families or often lack the know-how and resources to complete the current form.

*Question 2.* Increasing college completion means preparing students for college success. I have been a longtime supporter of the Federal TRIO programs, which are among the Nation's most important educational support programs, particularly for first-generation and low-income students. TRIO supports a variety of services, including academic and career advising, and financial aid planning and assisting. Dr. Renick, Georgia State University has many of the TRIO programs on campus. Has the success of TRIO at Georgia State influenced the retention and support services on the campus as a whole?

Answer 2. We value our TRIO programs as an important resource for at-risk students.<sup>15</sup> Georgia State's TRIO programs have consistently outperformed targets. For example, **90** percent of participants served by our Student Success Services (SSS) Project persist from one academic year to the beginning of the next academic year or graduate and or transfer from a 2-year to a 4-year institution during the academic year. **Ninety-one** percent of participants served by our SSS STEM Project persist from one academic year to the beginning of the next academic year or graduate and or transfer from a 2-year to a 4-year institution during the academic year. **Seventy-six** percent of Upward Bound participants who enroll in a program of post-secondary education by the fall term immediately following high school graduation attain either an associate's or bachelor's degree within 6 years following graduation from high school. **Eighty-seven** percent of participants who complete their prescribed Veterans Upward Bound educational program enroll in programs of postsecondary education by the end of the next project year.

My advice here is that TRIO programs—at least those focused on the success of postsecondary students enrolled in college—be situated in the academic wing of colleges and universities, not in student affairs. The program's focus crosses many areas, from course content to social support, but placement of TRIO programs under the guidance of academic deans, provosts, and faculty members (rather than deans of students) legitimizes the effort of these offices and raises TRIO's visibility while creating linkages to a range of academic resources that are critical to the success of students.

SENATOR ENZI

*Question 1.* Could you please tell us about the efforts that Institutions of Higher Education are making to accommodate retraining for adults to change careers by attending school part-time, especially in an economy as changing as ours?

Answer 1. While the State of Georgia has millions of adults in the workforce who have earned some college credit but no college degree and tens of thousands of unfilled jobs in high-paying fields such as healthcare and technology, we continue to struggle as a State to induce adults to come back to our colleges and universities. At Georgia State University, we have used workforce projections in order to create new academic programs to address these needs. In the past 2 years, for instance,

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance: [http://chronicle.com/article/Everyone-s-Talking-About/232899/?cid=at&utm\\_source=at&utm\\_medium=en](http://chronicle.com/article/Everyone-s-Talking-About/232899/?cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en).

<sup>15</sup> Georgia State University TRIO Programs, <http://oeo.gsu.edu/> (accessed September 3, 2015).

we have added new programs in Analytics and Big Data, Health Informatics, Health Management, and Film Production to respond to the needs of employers in the State. The challenges here, though, are also cultural and economic. We have established an Office for Adult Learners with trained admissions counselors to help adult learners navigate the application and registration processes.<sup>16</sup> The program recognizes that these students have different needs, expectations and capabilities than the average high-school graduate and works to ease the transition for these learners back to the university setting. Georgia State also has teamed with the University System of Georgia in support of Governor Nathan Deal's "Go Back, Move Ahead" program to facilitate the return of adult learners to college. We also employ graduate students in our Early Childhood Education program to help staff one of the best pre-school centers in Atlanta to help parents who are returning to school to overcome one of their largest obstacles: childcare issues. Unfortunately, we have a student body of greater than 32,000 students, and the scale and cost of the challenge means that we cannot accommodate the vast majority of our students who wish to place children in our center. Inducing adults to return to college and providing these learners with the financial support and resources that they need once they are re-enrolled require a coordinated effort of universities and their local communities, as well as State and Federal Governments.

SENATOR MURRAY

*Question 1.* Poverty and financial need can have a profound impact on students' ability to succeed. Research shows that high-achieving students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to complete than high-achieving students from families with higher incomes, even when controlling for their academic preparation at the time of enrollment.

Are there opportunities for postsecondary institutions, including community colleges and traditional 4-year colleges, to develop counseling and support services specifically geared toward meeting the unique needs of high-achieving, first-generation students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and ensuring that they are successful?

Please describe how such initiatives might work and the benefits they could bring to this demographic of students.

Answer 1. "Summer melt" is a far too innocuous term used to refer to a profound problem. Summer melt refers to the group of students who apply to college, are admitted as fully qualified, confirm their plans to attend, but who never show up for classes. This group is growing at an alarming rate. In 2008, such students constituted approximately 8 percent of the incoming class at Georgia State. This fall, the number tops 20 percent.

Why should we be concerned about this group of students? First, they skew disproportionately first generation, low-income and non-white. In other words, they are precisely the type of students who we, in higher education, struggle to ensure are college-ready and apply to college. Second, large numbers of these students end up attending no college at all. Last fall at Georgia State, we had more than 100 students who were accepted and who confirmed their plans to attend Georgia State who never showed up for classes and who, 1 year later, had attended no college at all (according to National Student Clearinghouse data). When we looked at the profile of these students, they were largely first-generation and low-income. They had an average high-school GPA of 3.3 and averaged 9 hours of dual enrollment credit. These are students who are doing everything right academically and who are still sitting on the sidelines when it come to the opportunity that a college education affords. This is a tragedy.

We need to concentrate more efforts and resources on helping students figure the pathways to college, including the financial ones, while they are still in high school. We also need to make these pathways less complex and convoluted so we do not disadvantage those students who lack an independent support system to help them navigate the terrain. What can be done?

- Georgia State requires that recipients of our institutional scholarships sign contracts pledging to give something back. Many are assigned to mentor local middle and high school students with a focus on college preparedness. Our largest scholarship program for Latino students, for instance, requires recipients to spend time each week mentoring students in Cobb County public schools, the school district with the fastest growing Latino population in metro Atlanta. Such peer and near-peer mentoring programs are often more effective than placing trained staff in the

<sup>16</sup> <http://admissions.gsu.edu/how-do-i-apply/other-enrollment-types/non-traditional-students/> and <http://admissions.gsu.edu/how-do-i-apply/other-enrollment-types/gsu-62-students/>.

same settings. Peer mentors not only can tell students about how to succeed; they also can show them what success looks like. This is why the College Advising Corps is a great idea (though a program that is too limited in its focus and reach).

- A new program at Georgia State will use National Student Clearinghouse data to identify “melt” students and re-engage them in colleges. In cases in which the greatest obstacles are financial, we will help students complete FAFSAs and apply for scholarships and other forms of aid that might make college a reality for them, and in cases where adequate funding cannot be located to allow them to attend Georgia State, we will create pathways for these students into lower-costs Associate’s degree programs.

- In the 2015–16 academic year, Georgia State will open a Financial Counseling Center with a trained staff charged to identify and to reach out proactively to students who might be tripped up by the financial complexities of attending college. We have run analytics and found that there are early warning signs—some as simple as missing deadlines for turning in financial forms—that can help identify such students.

There are many challenges in preparing low-income students to be college-ready academically and getting them to want to go to college. The growing phenomenon of “summer melt” shows that, in a significant number of cases, we need to worry less about which students are college-ready and more about which colleges are study-ready.

The need for higher education rather than students to change typifies the approach that Georgia State University has implemented over the past 7 years. We have endeavored to change the way students experience college from the time they matriculate, including the way they choose courses and majors, their experiences in the classroom, and the support they receive outside of class. A summary of some of these programs and interventions and their impacts can be found in Georgia State’s 2015 completion plan at [www.enrollment.gsu.edu/files/2015/08/Georgia-State-University-CCG-Report-2015.pdf](http://www.enrollment.gsu.edu/files/2015/08/Georgia-State-University-CCG-Report-2015.pdf).

SENATOR WARREN

*Question 1.* Do colleges have enough incentives to improve student success?

Answer 1. In 25 years in higher education, I have never seen more attention paid to the issue of college completion. It is a true bi-partisan issue, and this support has served to motivate many campuses to turn their attention to student success. In many cases, these were institutions that, in the past, were content with their efforts and mediocre results. At Georgia State University, we have had teams from approximately 160 other colleges and universities visit us over the past 2 years to study our programs and initiatives.

With that said, there are still far too many disincentives for colleges and universities that wish to make a difference in the lives of the students who most need a college degree. While there is much talk about performance funding, few States have actually put meaningful amounts of funding behind the model. Universities are still far too often rewarded for serving students who bring success in with them as they matriculate in college rather than those who become successful because of college. High SAT scores and privileged social status are the most common distinguishing traits of highly ranked universities, not their ability to innovate. Such “inputs” are the primary basis for national rankings such as U.S. News and World Report. In fact, even as Georgia State was improving its graduation rates by 22 percentage points and awarding more bachelor’s degrees to African Americans than any other non-profit college or university in the Nation, it was losing points (and ground) in the U.S. News and World Report rankings by dropping in average SAT scores and serving more students for fewer dollars. Something is wrong with such a system. Most university presidents will not enroll more low-income and first-generation students as long as it means risking a drop in the national rankings. We need to change the equation.

We need to be very careful not to recreate disincentives in national ratings systems. The single best prediction of an individual’s income level after graduating from college is that individual’s family income level before enrolling in college. Rating systems that uncritically assess campuses by the debt levels or default rates of its graduates without equally weighing the incoming income levels of its students are destined to continue to create disincentives for campuses that might wish to do the hard and needed work of serving at-risk populations.

Colleges and universities that both (1) enroll large numbers and percentages of low-income and first-generation students, and (2) graduate them at high rates should be supported with greater amounts of Federal financial aid to distribute to students. Currently, there is no such benefit. As a Nation, we must invest in the



campuses that are serving students effectively rather than merely enrolling effective students.

*Question 2.* What policies would give for-profit colleges an incentive to improve outcomes for their students?

Answer 2. Ultimately, the best way to end predatory practices aimed at the most vulnerable students and their families is to make such practices unprofitable. If campuses and their students were awarded for their success with graduating, not merely enrolling, students, for-profit colleges would be incentivized to innovate on behalf of students rather than at their expense. They also might be incentivized to dedicate a higher portion of their profits to educational purposes rather than to advertising and recruitment.

How can we achieve this aim? First, the Federal Government needs to adopt a far better system of tracking the success of students than the model currently employed by IPEDS. I would suggest the Student Achievement Measure (SAM) system developed by the Association of Public and Grant Universities (APLU) and employed by universities such as Georgia State. (See <http://www.aplu.org/projects-and-initiatives/accountability-and-transparency/student-achievement-measure/>). SAM tracks the progression of part-time, transfer and other student populations in addition to full-time students who are in college for the first time, a critical factor in assessing the overall performance of institutions. Second, we need to set clear standards for success, requiring a minimum ratio of students graduated per Federal dollars invested. This means that, in effect, that institutions charging \$1,000 per credit hour would be required to produce better results than a community college charging \$100 per credit hour. This is how it should be. We need to create a system that incentivizes institutions to produce results in terms of student success for reasonable costs. If for-profit colleges are able to deliver results by this standard, we should be happy to accept them as partners in our efforts to educate Americans.

SENATOR SCOTT

*Question 1.* Between 1970 and 2009, undergraduate enrollment has more than doubled, while the completion rate has been unchanged. Students from more diverse backgrounds have been able to access college, but we still have a responsibility to ensure that those students are working toward degree completion while they are in college. Studies have shown that college dropouts cost taxpayers billions of dollars a year in State and Federal dollars. Dr. Renick, I understand Georgia State has utilized innovative resources for monitoring and promoting student success. From using data-driven indicators of success to your bridge grant program, which is similar to University of South Carolina’s “Gamecock Guarantee” program, what types of initiatives have been shown to close achievement gaps, and how can that model be applied to Federal programs?

Answer 1. See below.

HIGH IMPACT STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

1. GPS Advising

High-impact strategy .....	Use predictive analytics and a system of more than 800 alerts to track all undergraduates daily, to identify at-risk behaviors, and to have advisors respond to alerts by intervening in a timely fashion to get students back on track.
Related Goal .....	Goal #1: Increase in the number of undergraduate degrees awarded by USG institutions. Goal #2: Increase the number of degrees that are earned “on time”. Goal #3: Decrease excess credits earned on the path to getting a degree. Goal #4: Provide intrusive advising to keep students on track to graduate.
Summary of Activities .....	System went fully live in August 2012. This past academic year, there were more than 43,000 individual meetings between students and advisors that were prompted by alerts from GPS Advising.
Baseline Status .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current Six Year Graduation Rate: <b>54</b> percent</li> <li>• Total Students receiving undergraduate degrees in the 2013–2014 Academic Year: <b>4,622</b>.</li> </ul>
Interim Measures of Progress .....	<p>The numbers we are achieving via the programs are exceptionally strong. We have been tracking the use of the system and gathering interim metrics such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credit hours at the time of graduation (which have declined by an average of 3)</li> <li>• Percent of students in majors that fit their academic abilities (up by 13 points)</li> <li>• Percent of students with lower academic risk factors (up by 16 points)</li> </ul>

1. GPS Advising—Continued

Measures of Success .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undergraduate Six-Year Graduation rates.</li> <li>• Number of Undergraduate Degree conferrals.</li> </ul>
Lessons Learned .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The true potential of predictive analytics comes, not from its ability to identify students at risk, but in its ability to support intensive advising practices. In order for predictive analytics to make a significant impact in higher education, technology solutions must be accompanied by investment in advising personnel and practices that can most effectively translate data into action.</li> <li>• Academic choices have a significant impact on career aspirations and vice versa. With the introduction of a new career matcher feature into our existing GPA advising platform (powered by data from Burning Glass), students are shown lists of common careers commonly associated with their chosen or prospective majors, as well as information about what skills are sought after by employers in those fields. Advising students with a view to life beyond graduation provides them with a broader perspective about what academic success means, as well as stronger sense of direction and motivation to pursue their degree, not as an end in itself, but as a springboard to future success in life and career.</li> </ul>

What if students who enroll at large, public universities received the same kind of personalized attention that is afforded to students at small, elite colleges? How would such personalized attention transform student success rates? At Georgia State, we are pursuing the answer to these questions in part by leveraging new technologies. Our cutting-edge GPS Advising, a partnership with the Education Advisory of Board (EAB), uses more than 10 years of GSU student data—over 2.5 million grades—to create predictive analytics for how each individual student will fare in any major and in most courses that we offer. The system tracks students’ decisions and academic performances, and it is updated with data from our student information systems on a daily basis—with alerts going off when a student is off path. Last academic year, the system generated more than 43,000 individual meetings between advisors and students to discuss specific alerts—all aimed at getting the student back on path to graduation. Since Georgia State went live with GPS Advising 3 years ago, freshmen fall-to-spring retention rates have increased by 5 percentage points and graduating seniors are taking fewer excess courses in completing their degrees.

In 2016, Georgia State University will consolidate with Georgia Perimeter College (GPC). EDUCAUSE, with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust (the Helmsley Trust) and in partnership with Achieving the Dream (ATD), has awarded Georgia State University a grant to facilitate our efforts to deploy our technology solution and adapt our advising strategy in order to increase graduation rates for the 22,000 students seeking associate degrees at GPC. In addition to providing much-needed support to students seeking associate degrees, the extension of our GPS to encompass the entirety of the new consolidated university provides us with the opportunity to better understand and support transfer pathways between 2- and 4-year institutions.

2. Summer Success Academy

High-impact strategy .....	Use predictive analytics to identify admitted students for the fall freshman class who are academically at-risk and require that these students attend a 7-week summer session before fall classes.
Related Goal .....	Goal #7: Increase the likelihood of degree by transforming the way that remediation is accomplished
Summary of Activities .....	Program was initiated in 2012 as an alternate to deferring weaker freshmen admits to the Spring semester. Students earn 7 hours of credit toward their Bachelor’s degree while receiving intensive academic and personal support including supplemental instruction, advisement, learning communities, team building, financial literacy training.
Baseline Status .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Last year, the 1-year retention rate of 87 percent for Success Academy graduates marked a significant increase over the 50 percent retention rate that would be expected by this population as recently as 2011.</li> </ul>
Interim Measures of Progress .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retention rates for the students for the at-risk students enrolled in the Success Academy (87 percent) exceed those of the rest of the freshman class (83 percent).</li> <li>• In summer 2015, the program enrolled 370 students, up 50 from summer of 2014.</li> </ul>

2. Summer Success Academy—Continued

Measures of Success .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retention rates.</li> <li>• Graduation rates.</li> <li>• Degree completions.</li> </ul>
Lessons Learned .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While the Summer Success Academy is a program that would most certainly be of benefit to all students, it is important to ensure that the size of the program does not outstrip resources. The amount of personalized attention that students receive in the program is a significant reason for the program's success, not only because of the level of academic coaching required for our most at-risk students, but also because mentoring by peers and professionals also provides academy students with a sense of self-efficacy and the "soft" skills necessary to "do college."</li> <li>• Georgia State currently has a proposal before the Kresge Foundation to expand our current program, while at the same time collecting validation data that would allow the Foundation to help promote the Success Academy as a national best practice for closing the achievement gap for at-risk populations</li> </ul>

Georgia State takes students admitted to the fall freshmen class who are most academically at risk and requires that they attend a 7-week summer semester before the start of fall courses. Students enroll in 7 credits of college-level (non-remedial) courses and are given the support of all of GSU's tutoring, advising, financial literacy, and academic skills programs at their disposal. All students are in freshmen learning committees. Last year's cohort was retained at a rate of 87 percent. This compares to an 83 percent retention rate for remainder of the freshmen class who were, on paper, better academically prepared for college. It is important to note that these same students, when Georgia State was deferring their enrollment until the spring semester (as is the common practice nationally), were being retained at only a 50 percent clip. This equates to more than 100 additional freshmen being retained via the Summer Success Academy this past year alone than would have been the case under the old model.

3. Panther Retention Grants

High-impact strategy .....	Provide micro grants to students at the fee drop each semester to help cover modest financial shortfalls impacting the students' ability to pay tuition and fees to prevent students from stopping/dropping out.
Related Goal .....	<p>Goal #1: Increase in the number of undergraduate degrees awarded by USG institutions.</p> <p>Goal #10: Mitigate the detrimental effects of financial need on student recruitment, retention, and graduation.</p>
Summary of Activities .....	Staff examine the drop lists for students with genuine unmet need, who are on track for graduation using our academic analytics, and who have modest balances for tuition and fees. Students are offered micro grants on the condition that they agree to certain activities, including meeting with a financial counselor to map out plans to finance the rest of their education. Last academic year, nearly 2,000 grants were offered.
Baseline Status .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Last academic year, 61 percent of the seniors receiving PRG funding graduated within two semesters of receiving the grants.</li> </ul>
Interim Measures of Progress .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Of freshmen who were offered Panther Retention grants in fall 2013, 93 percent enrolled the following spring, a rate higher than that of the student body as a whole. 83 percent of freshman PRG recipients returned to class in fall 2014. The retention rate for freshmen who were offered the grants in fall 2014 was 88 percent.</li> <li>• We are also tracking the rate of "returnees" to the program, which we have been able to keep under 25 percent.</li> </ul>
Measures of Success .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ultimate measure of success is college completion. The largest group of recipients last year were seniors, who often are running out of Hope funding or exhausting other aid.</li> </ul>

3. Panther Retention Grants—Continued

Lessons Learned .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A data-driven approach to award dispersion ensures that support is given to students who are both in need and who are likely to succeed when their need is met. This represents a shift in perspective, away from distributing funds as a response to financial need alone, and toward an approach that is first and foremost motivated by an interest in eliminating non-academic barriers to student success.</li> <li>• Many students lack the financial literacy necessary to ensure that an otherwise sustainable amount of financial support is managed effectively through to the end of their degrees. The Panther Retention Grants are an excellent way to respond to the financial needs of student who are on track to a degree, but who encounter financial shortfalls as they near graduation. In an effort to be more proactive, GSU has added a set of financial indicators to its predictive analytics and has also committed to establishing a dedicated financial counseling center by the end of Spring 2016. Through proactive interventions like these, GSU expects to see fewer of its students run into financial problems later in their degree, while at the same time providing its students with the tools necessary for financial security in career upon graduation.</li> </ul>
-----------------------	---

This past fall, over 18,000 of Georgia State’s 25,149 undergraduates (72 percent) had some level of unmet need, meaning that even after grants, loans, scholarships, family contributions and the income generated from the student working 20 hours a week, the students lack sufficient funds to attend college. Each semester, hundreds of fully qualified students are dropped from their classes for lack of payment. For as little as \$300, Panther Retention Grants provide the emergency funding to allow students who want to get their degrees the opportunity to stay enrolled. Last year, nearly 2,000 Georgia State students were brought back to the classroom—and kept on the path to attaining a college degree—through the program. Sixty-one percent of the seniors who received PRG support last academic year graduated within two semesters of receiving the grant.

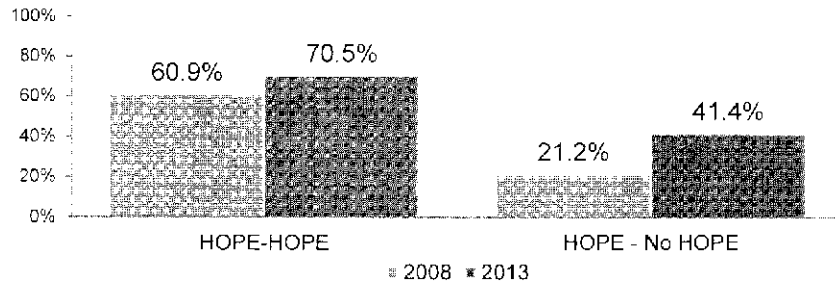
4. Keep Hope Alive (KHA)

High-impact strategy .....	In 2008, the graduation rates for students who lose the Hope scholarship were only 20 percent, 40 points lower than the rates for those who hold on to it. Gaining the Hope Scholarship back after losing it is a statistical longshot: only about 9 percent of Georgia State students pull this off. Using a \$500 incentive for two semesters after the scholarship is lost, the Program requires students to sign a contract agreeing to meet with their advisors, attend academic skills workshops and participate in financial literacy training.
Related Goal .....	Goal #1: Increase in the number of undergraduate degrees awarded by USG institutions. Goal #10: Mitigate the detrimental effects of financial need on student recruitment, retention, and graduation.
Summary of Activities .....	By signing a contract to receive \$500 for each of the first two semesters after losing Hope, students agree to participate in a series of programs and interventions designed to get them back on track academically and to make wise financial choices in the aftermath of losing the scholarship. Scholarship Criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program is open to freshman and sophomore students with a 2.75–2.99 HOPE grade point average.</li> <li>• Student must pursue a minimum of 30 credit hours within the next academic year (fall, spring, and summer semesters).</li> <li>• Students must attend Student Success workshops facilitated by the Office of Undergraduate Studies.</li> <li>• Students must meet with their academic coach on a regular basis.</li> <li>• Students are required to attend mandatory advisement sessions facilitated by the University Advisement Center.</li> </ul>
Baseline Status .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since 2008, institutional HOPE retention rates have increased by 50 percent, from 49 percent to 75 percent in 2013.</li> <li>• Compared to 2008, the 6-year graduation rate for students who lost their HOPE scholarship, at some point in their academic career, has doubled from 21 percent in 2008 to 41 percent in 2013.</li> </ul>

4. Keep Hope Alive (KHA)—Continued

Interim Measures of Progress .....	For students in KHA in the period from 2011 to 2014, better than 55 percent gained the scholarship back at the next marker. Leveraging our \$1,000 scholarship investment by gaining between \$6,000 and \$12,000 of Hope dollars back again.
Measures of Success .....	Retention rates for students receiving the HOPE scholarship. Six-year graduation rates for students who lost their HOPE scholarship at some point in their academic career.
Lessons Learned .....	Losing the HOPE scholarship puts students far more at risk than losing a 3.0 GPA.

6 Year Graduation Rates Among Students Receiving the HOPE Scholarship



With 59 percent of Georgia State students coming from Pell-eligible households (where the annual household income last year was less than \$30,000), the Hope scholarship can be a mixed blessing. The \$6,000+ scholarship provides access to college for thousands of Georgia State students, but for the student who does not maintain a 3.0 college GPA, the loss of Hope often means the student has to drop out for financial reasons. KHA provides a \$500 stipend for two semesters to students who have lost Hope as an incentive for them to follow a rigorous academic restoration plan that includes meeting with advisors, attending workshops, and participating in financial literacy training—all designed to help students improve their GPAs and to regain the scholarship. Since 2008, the program has helped to *double* the graduation rates of Georgia State students who lose the Hope scholarship.

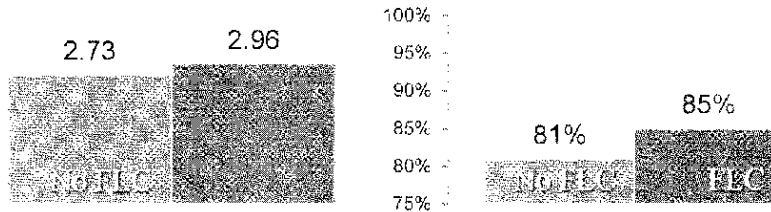
5. Meta-Majors

High-impact strategy .....	Requiring all students to choose a meta-major puts students on a path to degree that allows for flexibility in future specialization in a particular program of study, while also ensuring the applicability of early course credits to their final majors. Implemented in conjunction with major maps, block scheduling, and freshman learning communities, meta-majors provide clarity and direction in what would otherwise be a confusing and unstructured registration process.
Related Goal .....	Goal #2: Increase the number of degrees that are earned "on time." Goal #3: Decrease excess credits earned on the path to getting a degree
Summary of Activities .....	Upon registration, all students are required to enroll in one of seven <b>meta-majors</b> : STEM, Arts & Humanities, Health, Education, Policy & Social Science, and Exploratory. Once students have selected their meta-major, they are given a choice of several <b>block schedules</b> , which are pre-populated course timetables including courses relevant to their first year of study. On the basis of their timetable selection, students are assigned to <b>Freshman Learning Communities</b> consisting of 25 students who are in the same meta-major and take classes according to the same block schedules of 5–6 courses in addition to GSU1010, a 1-credit hour course providing students with essential information and survival skills to help them navigate the logistical, academic, and social demands of the University.

5. Meta-Majors—Continued

Baseline Status .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the 2013–14 academic year, enrollment in a Freshman Learning Community according to meta-major resulted in an average increase in GPA of 8 percent.</li> <li>• In the 2013–14 academic year, enrollment in a Freshman Learning Community by meta-major was found to increase a student’s likelihood of being retained through to the following year by 5 percent.</li> </ul>
Interim Measures of Progress .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopting an opt-out model has mean that 95 percent of non-honors freshmen are in freshman learning communities with common block schedules. This is up 15 percent from the 80 percent rate that was seen when the program was first implemented in its current form in Fall 2013.</li> </ul>
Measures of Success .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average GPA.</li> <li>• Freshman retention rates.</li> </ul>
Lessons Learned .....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time is money, and students who switch between majors, especially after the freshman year, accumulate wasted credits. With large numbers of low-income students who have strictly limited resources, mistakes in choosing majors can equate to college attrition.</li> <li>• Meta-majors, block scheduling, and freshman learning communities have all been shown to significantly improve the chances of student success. GSU has introduced each of these approaches at different times in its history. Bringing each of these best practices together as part of an integrated admissions strategy has produced a synergy, with power greater than the sum of that of its parts.</li> </ul>

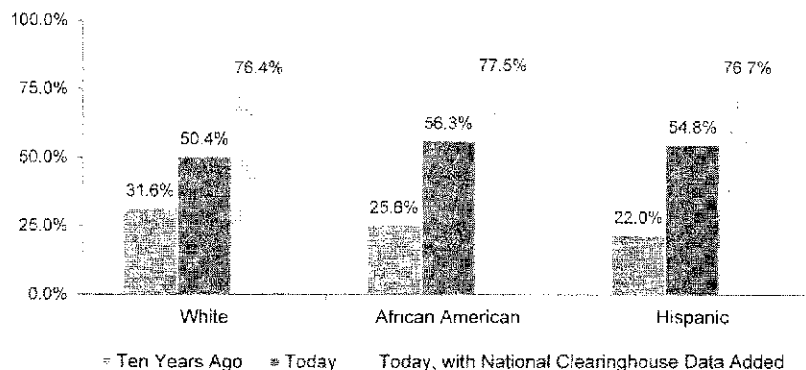
**Impact of Meta Majors and Learning Communities**  
2013 - 2014 Academic Year



At a large public university with 32,000 students, freshmen can feel overwhelmed by the size and scope of the campus and can have trouble building friendships and support systems. FLCs organize the freshmen class into cohorts of 25 students arranged by common academic interests, otherwise known as “meta majors” (STEM, business, arts and humanities, policy, health, education and social sciences). Students travel through their classes together, building friendships, study partners and support along the way. Block schedules—FLCs in which all courses might be between, for example, 8:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. 3 days a week—accommodate students’ work schedules and help to improve class attendance. FLC students not only are retained but graduate at rates 4 points above those of non-FLC students. Almost 80 percent of this fall’s freshmen class are in FLCs.

The net impact of these intervention has been to totally eliminate achievement gaps based on race and ethnicity, as seen in the chart below.

Georgia State Graduation Rates by Race and Ethnicity over the Past Decade



All disparities based on economic status have also been eliminated.

My responses to the questions of the various Senators outline a set of steps that would allow these same types of gains to be realized at other universities. We need to create Federal incentives for universities to enroll at-risk populations and then require that universities produce results. How can we achieve this aim? First, the Federal Government needs to adopt a far better system of tracking the success of students than the model currently employed by IPEDS. I would suggest the Student Achievement Measure (SAM) system developed by the Association of Public and Grant Universities (APLU) and employed by universities such as Georgia State. (See <http://www.aplu.org/projects-and-initiatives/accountability-and-transparency/student-achievement-measure/>). SAM tracks the progression of part-time, transfer and other student populations in addition to full-time students who are in college for the first time, a critical factor in assessing the overall performance of institutions. Second, we need to set clear standards for success, requiring a minimum ratio of students graduated per Federal dollars invested. This means that, in effect, that institutions charging \$1,000 per credit-hour would be required to produce better results than a community college charging \$100 per credit-hour. This is how it should be. We need to create a system that incentivized institutions to produce results (in terms of student success) for reasonable costs and invest in the kinds of innovations that universities such as Georgia State have shown to be cost-effective and impactful.

RESPONSE BY LASHAWN RICHBURG-HAYES TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR ALEXANDER, SENATOR CASSIDY, SENATOR COLLINS, SENATOR ENZI, SENATOR MURRAY, AND SENATOR WARREN

MDRC is pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the request for additional information from Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and members of the committee on what the research field has found about various ways to improve the academic success of low-income college students. We have attempted to provide complete but succinct answers to the questions; where we do not have expertise, we have suggested researchers who may be able to provide information that is more complete.

SENATOR ALEXANDER

*Question 1.* In your testimony, you explain that access to higher education has expanded widely over the last 50 years, but degree or certificate completion has not. Does research indicate that there are any reasons for stagnant completion rates?

Answer 1. Viewed historically, rates of completion at 4-year institutions have been unchanged since the Federal Government began tracking them in the 1970s and rates at community colleges have remained largely the same since tracking began

in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> While research suggests a number of reasons for stagnant completion rates, there is no simple answer. The reasons are very complex and partially reflect the increased diversity of the college-going population and the average decline in preparation for college (largely reflecting the fact that a larger number of students now attend college who might not have attended decades ago, as they may not have been considered “college material”).<sup>2</sup> Research also suggests that the change in how students attend college contributes to completion rates not increasing at the same rate as access. For example, greater part-time attendance, delayed entry after high school, and increased work while attending college are all associated with increased time to degree attainment, especially at community colleges.<sup>3</sup> The type of institution attended also matters; 4-year institutions have higher completion rates than 2-year institutions.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, some research suggests that the decline in resources provided to students at less selective public-sector schools is more important in explaining the stagnant rates of completions at these institutions than the above-mentioned changes in academic preparation.<sup>5</sup>

*Question 2.* There are multiple proposals regarding how to provide year-round Pell grant availability, meaning allowing eligible students to receive more than one Pell grant in a year. Currently, part-time students can already receive their one Pell grant in fall, spring and summer. Though their award can fall short, if they want to attend more than the equivalent of two full-time semesters. Does research provide any indications on how to best provide this additional aid, in a way that promotes credit accumulation and progress toward completion?

*Answer 2.* Research by MDRC and others has identified several factors associated with higher credit accumulation by students and higher likelihood of degree or certificate attainment. These include: (1) reducing hours worked while attending school, (2) greater intensity of enrollment (for example, full-time rather than part-time enrollment), and (3) enrollment in summer and winter intersessions.

Financial aid programs offer an opportunity to promote student success via these mediating factors—for example, by reducing the number of hours students need to work in jobs unrelated to their course of study. In the context of year-round Pell, an expansion of the program that encourages students to enroll full-time or attend summer and winter intersessions could improve students’ likelihood of obtaining a certificate or degree. Here are two ways such an expansion could do so:

- Students are currently eligible for a maximum Pell award upon enrolling in 12 credits in a single semester, but do not receive additional aid for enrollment beyond that. A redesign of Pell could provide incentives to enroll in additional credits. For example, Sandy Baum and others have advocated that students receive additional aid upon enrolling in 15 credits, the level of enrollment needed to graduate “on time” from many 4-year institutions.<sup>6</sup>
- Pell awards for the spring and fall semesters currently count against students’ total Pell limit for the year, reducing the amount of aid remaining for a winter or summer award. A redesign of Pell could provide a separate award for winter or summer intersessions, precluding scenarios where students would need to choose between receiving spring/fall aid and summer/winter aid.

These examples are far from comprehensive—there are many ways that the Pell Grant program could be structured to encourage full-time or intersession enrollment. Further research is needed to determine the impacts and relative efficacy of different potential approaches, as well as the costs associated with each. In other words, current research suggests “what” an effective redesign of Pell might accomplish, but not as much “how” or “how best” to achieve it. Additionally, care should be taken that an expansion of Pell with an eye toward boosting completion does not

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Brock, “Young Adults and Higher Education: Barriers and Breakthroughs to Success,” *Future of Children* 20, 1 (2010): 109–32.

<sup>2</sup>For a broad overview of these trends, see Sandy Baum, Charles Kurose, and Michael McPherson, “An Overview of American Higher Education,” *Future of Children* 23, 1 (2013): 17–39.

<sup>3</sup>John Bound, Michael F. Lovenheim, and Sarah Turner, “Why Have College Completion Rates Declined? An Analysis of Changing Student Preparation and Collegiate Resources,” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, *American Economic Association* 2, 3 (2010): 129–57; Ali Berker and Laura Horn, *Work First, Study Second: Adult Undergraduates Who Combine Employment and Postsecondary Enrollment*, NCES 2003-167 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

<sup>4</sup>Bound, Lovenheim, and Turner (2010).

<sup>5</sup>John Bound, Michael F. Lovenheim, and Sarah Turner, “Increasing Time to Baccalaureate Degree in the United States,” *Education Finance and Policy* 7, 4 (2012): 375–424.

<sup>6</sup>Sandy Baum, Kristin Conklin, and Nate Johnson, “Stop Penalizing Poor College Students,” *New York Times* (November 12, 2013).



compromise the program's original commitment to college access by creating undue obstacles for low-income students in need of aid.

*Question 3.* Are benchmarks or expectations in financial aid programs effective at promoting student behaviors that lead to student success? Based on what is known from existing research, is the current structure of satisfactory academic progress for students in today's Federal student aid programs effective in promoting student progress? How could it be changed to provide better signals to recipients?

Answer 3. Little is known about whether financial aid *increases* access and there is a growing body of evidence that financial aid *improves* academic success. Previous research suggests that financial aid is positively associated with increased enrollment in postsecondary education.<sup>7</sup> Previous research also suggests it is positively associated with increased persistence.<sup>8</sup> There have been a few studies of the effect of financial aid on other student outcomes, such as the type of institution chosen by students (2-year versus 4-year), the composition of financial aid packages (grants versus loans), course-taking patterns, and completion, but the few findings that do exist are mixed.<sup>9</sup>

Yet empirical research across a number of fields provides evidence that incentives do work to align actual behavior with desired behavior, with positive relationships found between monetary incentives and a number of behaviors such as welfare exits, crime reduction, and smoking cessation.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps as a result, there has been a recent explosion of work applying incentive schemes in the field of secondary education to encourage students to increase time spent reading, test taking and test scores, course performance, and matriculation.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Susan Dynarski, "Hope for Whom" Financial Aid for the Middle Class and Its Impact on College Attendance," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 7,756 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2000); Susan Dynarski, "Does Aid Matter" Measuring the Effect of Student Aid on College Attendance and Completion," *American Economic Review* 93, 1 (2003); Christopher Cornwell, David B. Mustard, and Deepa J. Sridhar, "The Enrollment Effects of Merit-Based Financial Aid: Evidence from Georgia's Hope Program," *Journal of Labor Economics* 24, 4 (2006).

<sup>8</sup> Edward St. John, Shouping Hu, and Jeff Weber, "State Policy and the Affordability of Public Higher Education: The Influence of State Grants on Persistence in Indiana," *Research in Higher Education* 42 (2001); Susan Choy, *Access and Persistence: Findings from Ten Years of Longitudinal Research on Students* (Washington, DC: Center for Policy Analysis, American Council on Education, 2002); Eric Bettinger, "How Financial Aid Affects Persistence," in Caroline M. Hoxby (ed.), *College Choices: The Economics of Where to Go, When to Go, and How to Pay for It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> For a summary, see Don Hossler, Mary Ziskin, Jacob P.K. Gross, Sooyeon Kim, and Osman Cekic, "Student Aid and Its Role in Encouraging Persistence," in J. C. Smart (ed.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* (Netherlands: Springer Science + Business Media B.V., 2009). Also see Judith Scott-Clayton, "On Money and Motivation: A Quasi-Experimental Analysis of Financial Incentives for College Achievement," *Journal of Human Resources* 46, 3 (2011).

<sup>10</sup> For findings related to welfare exits, see Cynthia Miller, Virginia Knox, Patricia Auspos, Jo Anna Hunter, and Alan Orenstein, *Making Work and Work Pay: Implementation and 18-Month Impacts of the Minnesota Family Investment Program* (New York: MDRC, 1997); Winston Lin, Philip Robins, David Card, Kristen Harknett, and Susanna Lui-Gurr, *When Financial Incentives Encourage Work: Complete 18-Month Findings from the Self-Sufficiency Project* (Ottawa, Canada: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 1998); Charles Michalopoulos, Philip Robins, and David Card, *When Financial Work Incentives Pay for Themselves: Early Findings From the Self-Sufficiency Project's Applicant Study* (Ottawa, Canada: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 1999). For findings on crime, see Naci Mocan and R. Kaj Gittings, "The Impact of Incentives on Human Behavior: Can We Make It Disappear? The Case of the Death Penalty," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 12,631 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2006). For findings on smoking cessation, see Kevin Volpp, et al., "A Randomized, Controlled Trial of Financial Incentives for Smoking Cessation," *New England Journal of Medicine* 360, 7 (2009).

<sup>11</sup> For incentives used to encourage private school attendance, see Joshua Angrist, Eric Bettinger, Erik Bloom, Elizabeth King, and Michael Kremer, "Vouchers for Private Schooling in Colombia: Evidence from a Randomized Natural Experiment," *American Economic Review* 92, 5 (2002). For incentives used to increase test scores, see Eric Bettinger, "Paying to Learn: The Effect of Financial Incentives on Elementary School Test Scores," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 94, 3 (2012); Kirabo Jackson, "The Effects of an Incentive-Based High-School Intervention on College Outcomes," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 15,722 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010); Nuria Rodriguez-Planas, "Longer-term Impacts of Mentoring, Educational Services, and Incentives to Learn: Evidence from a Randomized Trial in the United States" (MOVE, IZA and FEDEA working paper, 2010). For incentives to increase attendance, see Michael Kremer, Edward Miguel, and Rebecca Thornton, "Incentives To Learn," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 91, 3 (2009); Amanda Pallais, "Taking a Chance on College: Is the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship Program a Winner?" *Jour-*

While the findings from these studies have been mixed, the underlying theory is potentially powerful: With the correct incentive scheme, it may be possible to induce a change in behavior to produce desired educational outcomes without costly monitoring, which will benefit both students and society in the long run. However, there are also potential downsides, in that incentive schemes may induce undesirable behaviors such as cheating.<sup>12</sup> There is a considerable body of literature in the field of psychology that suggests that monetary incentives could result in *decreases* in the desired behavior because of the destruction of intrinsic motivation.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the design and implementation of incentives must be done carefully. The best evaluation approach to disentangle alternative explanations is a randomized controlled trial.

To date, no randomized controlled trials have been conducted to evaluate the efficacy of the implementation of satisfactory academic progress (SAP), which is required to maintain any title IV Federal aid (including Pell Grants). As you know, SAP entails three components: passing 60 percent of courses attempted (to demonstrate academic progress), earning a grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.0 in these courses (to demonstrate academic performance), and, if these first two components are violated, increasing performance during an academic probation semester to be returned to good standing.<sup>14</sup> While these criteria appear straightforward, in practice students may fail for several terms before their eligibility is restricted, as 2-year institutions are only required to check SAP annually for students in 2-year programs (though they can check more frequently). In addition, students may continue to be in violation of SAP, lose their title IV eligibility, and yet remain enrolled if the costs of tuition and fees are very low.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the incentive scheme under SAP may be weak in inducing students to alter their behavior.

Several recent studies have been conducted—all employing rigorous experimental designs—to evaluate the effect on academic progress of a particular type of incentive scheme that we term *incentive-based grants*. Incentive-based grants are defined as *additional* financial aid to students that is *contingent* on academic performance. These grants are in addition to aid that students would typically receive based on their institutions' provision of financial aid, and therefore represent a net addition. In some instances, the grants—which do not need to be repaid—are intended to provide students with supplemental resources while simultaneously giving them an incentive to meet performance benchmarks. In other instances, the grants are only intended to motivate students to be more academically productive. In contrast, pure need-based aid provides students with resources to attend college while requiring that they meet minimal performance benchmarks. Nine randomized controlled trial studies demonstrate that incentive-based grants result in a larger proportion of students meeting academic benchmarks, a greater number of credits earned, and modest effects on GPA in the first year.<sup>16</sup>

While these studies do not show that making SAP requirements more noticeable to students will have effects on its own, the theory of change seems pertinent to any changes in the SAP requirements. That is, since many students are not aware of an institution's SAP requirements, and since institutions typically evaluate SAP progress at the end of each academic year (so students do not know if they are at risk of failing to meet the standards), making the requirements salient—as in the studies—could improve performance. This change could be accomplished through interventions that draw on findings from the fields of behavioral economics and psy-

---

*nal of Human Resources* 34, 1 (2009). For incentives to increase test scores, attendance, and reading, see Roland Fryer, "Financial Incentives and Student Achievement: Evidence from Randomized Trials," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126 (2011). For incentives to graduate high school, see Joshua Angrist and Victor Lavy, "The Effects of High Stakes High School Achievement Awards: Evidence from a Randomized Trial," *American Economic Review* 99, 4 (2009).

<sup>12</sup> For evidence of cheating among teachers in response to an incentive to increase test scores, see Brian Jacob and Steven Levitt, "Rotten Apples: An Investigation of the Prevalence and Predictors of Teacher Cheating," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118, 3 (2003).

<sup>13</sup> Edward L. Deci, Richard Koestner, and Richard M. Ryan, "Extrinsic Rewards and Intrinsic Motivation in Education: Reconsidered Once Again," *Review of Educational Research* 71, 1 (2001); Bruno S. Frey and Reto Jegen, "Motivation Crowding Theory," *Journal of Economic Surveys* 15, 5 (2001); Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> For specific details, see Chapter 1 in U.S. Department of Education, *Federal Student Aid Handbook 2012–13* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> For evidence of this phenomenon in California, see Sue Scrivener, Colleen Sommo, and Herbert Collado, *Getting Back on Track: Effects of a Community College Program for Probationary Students* (New York: MDRC, 2009) for evidence of this in California.

<sup>16</sup> For a review of these studies, see Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, "Incentivizing Success: Lessons from Experimenting with Incentive-Based Grants," PP. 101–26 in Andrew Kelly and Sara Goldrick-Rab (eds.), *Reinventing Financial Aid* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2014).

chology regarding the deliberate crafting of messages and the effective delivery of information. Such changes could involve reminders to the parents of freshmen, reminders with aid disbursement, or the reserving of some portion of aid to be disbursed along the lines of incentive-based grants. Another innovation in financial aid could have institutions implement an early notification system, so that students have the opportunity to change their behavior if they are at risk of failing to meet SAP standards. While such systems are often labeled as student success strategies, they can have sizable implications for financial aid as well. Georgia State University's predictive analytics intervention is a well-known example of this type of intervention.

*Question 4.* Why is it important that students complete their degree or certificate?

Answer 4. Most students who attend college aspire to attain a degree or certificate—so low rates of completion, which are especially prevalent at community colleges, “reflect widespread failure, disappointment, frustration, and thwarted potential among the millions of students who do not achieve their educational goals.”<sup>17</sup>

In addition, earning a degree is positively associated with better life outcomes including, but not limited to, improved economics and health, increased civic participation, decreased use of the criminal justice system, and decreased reliance on public benefits.<sup>18</sup> Although more difficult to determine definitively, most evidence suggests that, on average, degree or certificate completion is a cause of improved life outcomes in these realms.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, for society, related benefits are accrued in terms of the economic benefits of an educated, internationally competitive workforce (including increased tax revenues), reduced poverty, and decreased criminal justice and social service costs.

SENATOR CASSIDY

*Question 1.* I am a father of a child who is dyslexic. As any proud father, I want the best for her and to see her succeed academically and in life. As such, research from the National Center for Learning Disabilities shows that students with learning disabilities—such as dyslexia—value a college education and most want to attend either a 2-year or 4-year postsecondary education program.<sup>20</sup>

While 68 percent of students with learning disabilities are graduating high school with a regular diploma—a statistic that is too low but has risen over time<sup>21</sup>—these students continue to lag behind their peers in entering and completing college. Just 34 percent of such students completed a 4-year degree compared to 51 percent of students without disabilities.<sup>22</sup>

- As your organizations reviewed reasons for students not succeeding in college and as part of your development of initiatives to help such students succeed, what considerations were given to students who had learning differences?

- If we really want students with learning disabilities to have access to postsecondary education, what are colleges and universities doing to educate their faculty about the needs of these college students? What are colleges and universities doing in general to accommodate these students?

Answer 1. Thank you for asking these important questions. We want to provide you with an accurate and thoughtful answer, but, unfortunately, MDRC does not have expertise on these specific topics. However, other researchers may have more knowledge on this issue and we encourage you to make contact with them:

- Debra Neubert, Ph.D., University of Maryland, College Park, Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education (CHSE) Division, [dneubert@umd.edu](mailto:dneubert@umd.edu). Dr. Neubert has expertise in transition services and secondary education, transition assessment, and technology in classrooms and communities.

- Susan De La Paz, Ph.D., University of Maryland, College Park, [sdelapaz@umd.edu](mailto:sdelapaz@umd.edu).

<sup>17</sup>Bailey, Thomas R., Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins, *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>18</sup>See U.S. Census Bureau, “The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings” (Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, 2002); Sandy Baum, Jennifer Ma, and Kathleen Payea, “Education Pays: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society” (Washington, DC: College Board, 2013).

<sup>19</sup>Thomas S. Dee, “Are There Returns to Civic Engagement?” *Journal of Public Economics* 88 (2004): 1,697–1,720.

<sup>20</sup><http://www.ncl.org/reports-and-studies/2014-state-of-ld/>.

<sup>21</sup><http://www.ncl.org/reports-and-studies/diplomas-at-risk-a-critical-look-at-the-high-school-graduation-rate/>.

<sup>22</sup><http://www.nlts2.org>.

- Jo M. Hendrickson, Ph.D., University of Iowa, executive director of UI REACH (Realizing Educational and Career Hopes), [jo-hendrickson@uiowa.edu](mailto:jo-hendrickson@uiowa.edu).

*Question 2a.* The U.S. Department of Education’s College Navigator, an online tool to provide parents and prospective students with information about colleges falls short in collecting information about services available to students with learning disabilities. A random review of the profiles of 400 institutions of higher education in the College Navigator revealed that only six provided any information to students and the public about services available for students with learning disabilities at that college.<sup>23</sup> When information is not provided to parents and students, it’s difficult to make informed decisions about which college to attend.

How do colleges communicate with prospective and enrolled students about the types of services and supports offered for students with learning disabilities, such as students with dyslexia?

*Answer 2a.* Unfortunately, MDRC does not have expertise on this specific topic. However, the researchers named above may be able to provide assistance.

*Question 2b.* Overall, how do colleges work with the K–12 educational system to support a seamless transition from high school to postsecondary education for students with learning differences, such as students with dyslexia? If colleges and universities do not work with K–12 educational systems for such students, is this something Congress should consider as we reauthorize the Higher Education Act?

*Answer 2b.* Generally, there is wide variation in the extent to which K–12 and college systems collaborate. Some systems do not collaborate at all, while other “collaborations” do not entail meaningful, shared programs or action behind the label of collaboration. As a result, “seamless” transitions are not the norm for the majority of students. It seems reasonable, then, to presume there also is variation in whether and how much K–12 districts and colleges collaborate in support of students with learning difficulties. We might hope that there is a formal hand-off from a support/Special Education staff member at a high school to a designated college staff member charged with supporting such students, but we do not know whether that happens. MDRC has evaluated models like P-TECH, which are designed to help students make smooth transitions between secondary and postsecondary schools, but these models do not specifically target students with special needs or learning challenges (even though some students enroll with individual educational plans, or IEPs).

As you know, IEPs allow for transition plans for students from high school to work/college. There are colleges that specialize in helping students with learning disabilities make the transition from high school to college. Landmark College ([www.landmark.edu](http://www.landmark.edu)) is one such institution. Since MDRC does not have expertise on this specific topic, we encourage you to make contact with Noel Gregg at the University of Georgia ([nregg@uga.edu](mailto:nregg@uga.edu)) or Jennifer Windstorm at the University of Georgia ([jhl@uga.edu](mailto:jhl@uga.edu)).

#### SENATOR COLLINS

*Question 1.* The various forms of Federal financial aid have helped increase college access. I am concerned, however, that there is little Federal effort to increase awareness among students about college costs, debt, and repayment, and that students can become discouraged from completing their degrees if they feel overwhelmed by cost.

Husson University in Bangor, ME, where I worked prior to my election to the Senate, requires all freshmen students to enroll in a one-credit student success seminar, which includes financial literacy and other essential skills development. In your view, what forms of financial counseling are most effective? Are there Federal impediments to increasing student financial awareness?

*Answer 1.* MDRC has conducted research that speaks to parts of this question, but more research that is rigorous is needed to identify effective financial counseling approaches. MDRC did evaluate a Student Success Course at Guilford Community College. This evaluation did not look specifically at financial literacy or other outcomes related to college financing, but it did find that the course positively affected students’ self-management, interdependence, self-awareness, interest in lifelong learning, emotional intelligence, and engagement in college, among students with low levels of these attributes.<sup>24</sup> These results suggest that such courses may be a

<sup>23</sup>NCLD conducted review in January 2014.

<sup>24</sup>See Elizabeth Zachry Rutschow, Dan Cullinan, and Rashida Welbeck, *Keeping Students On Course: An Impact Study of a Student Success Course at Guilford Technical Community College* (New York, MDRC, 2012).

good way to improve related outcomes such as financial literacy (although the evaluation did not find evidence that the course positively affected students' academic achievement).

MDRC is also evaluating a new program, called Aid Like A Paycheck, which distributes students' financial aid refunds on a biweekly basis.<sup>25</sup> One goal is to spread out students' income more evenly across the semester in order to help them better manage their finances. MDRC is also leading a large project to apply insights from behavioral science to social services programs: the Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency project, sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>26</sup> The studies in this project have demonstrated that low-cost behavioral interventions, such as crafting messages and providing information, can meaningfully change behaviors. Similar efforts to increase financial literacy are also worth exploring.

SENATOR ENZI

*Question 1.* Could you please tell us about the efforts that Institutions of Higher Education are making to accommodate retraining for adults to change careers by attending school part-time, especially in an economy as changing as ours?

Answer 1. In general, community colleges are particularly well-suited to serve this population and about half of all students work at least part-time while attending such institutions. While 4-year institutions also offer services and programs to working adults seeking to upgrade their skills, community colleges serve such students in many ways:

- Community colleges offer short-term and long-term certificate programs in hundreds of occupations, allowing workers to acquire industry-recognized or college-provided certificates while still working.
- Community colleges offer classes during the evening so that adults who work during the day can pursue training and education at night.
- Community colleges collaborate with local employers to provide customized training for incumbent workers.
- Community colleges are “eligible training providers” for Workforce Investment Act funding and often work closely with the local One-Stop Career Centers to serve the needs of dislocated and unemployed workers who have low incomes and who are therefore eligible for Workforce Investment Act funding that can pay for tuition and living costs.
- Community colleges are becoming increasingly active in providing training for apprenticeship programs, which allow people to work and earn while at the same time learning new skills.
- Community colleges have low costs and open admission, and are located at convenient locations throughout the country, affording easy access to low income, working adults.
- Community colleges are often the main providers of Adult Basic Education and English Language Learner programs that serve a particularly vulnerable population with low academic skills.

SENATOR MURRAY

*Question 1.* Poverty and financial need can have a profound impact on students' ability to succeed. Research shows that high-achieving students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to complete than high-achieving students from families with higher incomes, even when controlling for their academic preparation at the time of enrollment.

Are there opportunities for postsecondary institutions, including community colleges and traditional 4-year colleges, to develop counseling and support services specifically geared toward meeting the unique needs of high-achieving, first-generation students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and ensuring that they are successful?

Please describe how such initiatives might work and the benefits they could bring to this demographic of students.

Answer 1. Many opportunities exist for postsecondary institutions to develop counseling and support services that target low-income, high-achieving, first-generation students with the intent of ensuring their success. A number of postsecondary institutions have developed and implemented a wide range of programs and other

<sup>25</sup> See [www.mdrc.org/project/aid-paycheck#overview](http://www.mdrc.org/project/aid-paycheck#overview).

<sup>26</sup> See [www.mdrc.org/project/behavioral-interventions-advance-self-sufficiency-project#overview](http://www.mdrc.org/project/behavioral-interventions-advance-self-sufficiency-project#overview).

forms of support to help this group of students in their transition on college campuses. Below we provide a few examples.

**Lansing Community College** students who are enrolled in the federally funded TRIO program have access to student support services that include academic advising, tutoring, educational development plans, student development courses, cultural events, and campus visits. To learn more, visit [www.lcc.edu/trio](http://www.lcc.edu/trio).

The **University of Cincinnati** offers students access to first-generation themed housing, which is complemented by advising and other forms of support. To learn more, visit <http://www.uc.edu/gen-1-theme-house.html> and see the 2009 *New York Times* feature story “Second Home for First-Gens”<sup>27</sup>

**Clemson University** operates the FIRST Generation Student Success Program, which offers living learning communities, peer and alumni mentoring, study-skills and time-management workshops, and career-exploration opportunities for first-generation students. To learn more, visit <http://www.clemson.edu/academics/programs/first>.

Housed in the Academic Resource Center, **Loyola Marymount University** offers a First to Go Scholars Program (which has its own mission statement and learning outcomes). Program features include a Scholars Program for first year-students, learning communities, academic immersion programs, faculty and staff mentors, a job-shadowing experience with faculty and staff members, and a one-credit writing workshop and first-gen voices student journal. To learn more, visit <http://academics.lmu.edu/arc/programs/wesupport/firsttogocommunity/firsttogoscholarsprogram>.

In 2011, the **University of Kentucky** developed the Office of First Generation Initiatives to “lead campus-wide efforts to recruit, retain and graduate more first generation students.” According to its website, the office delivers a comprehensive set of collaborative services that includes but is not limited to specific programs for students in their first year, sophomore, junior, and senior years of college; scholarship support; and “living-learning communities” that combine course work with residential programs.

The university’s website reports many benefits for students who participate in the living-learning community. Students,

“get better grades—in the first fall semester 3.26 GPA, compared to 2.80 for peers not in a Living-Learning environment. In addition, students in the Living-Learning Program stay in school; 88.4 percent more return for their sophomore year, compared to 80.8 percent for their cohort peers. Students are also more likely to adjust more successfully to the academic demands of college, declare a major in their freshman year and find their academic work more interesting. Participating in a living learning community, which incurs no additional cost, helps keep students on track toward graduation by helping them connect with advisors, professors and other staff.”

To learn more, visit: Office of First Generation Initiatives: [www.uky.edu/academy/1G](http://www.uky.edu/academy/1G); or First Generation Living Learning Community: <http://uknow.uky.edu/content/students-live-and-learn-uk>.

Some of the Nation’s most selective colleges have also recognized the need to support first-generation students, and some, including **Harvard University**, begin in the recruitment phase. Harvard University’s Admissions Office created the Harvard First Generation Program, which focuses on “directing college awareness to future first generation college students.” The program is staffed by coordinators who provide support and information as high school students begin to navigate the college application process. Once enrolled, students have access to a first-generation tutor (adviser), a specific student union for first-generation students, and an alumni special interest group that is focused on helping first-generation students make a smooth transition at the university. To learn more, visit:

- Harvard First Generation Program: <https://college.harvard.edu/admissions/hear-our-students/first-generation-students>;
  - Harvard First Gen Student Union: [www.hcs.harvard.edu/firstgen/](http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/firstgen/);
  - Harvard First Generation Alumni: [www.firstgenerationharvardalumni.com/](http://www.firstgenerationharvardalumni.com/); or
- The *New York Times* article “First Generation Students Unite”: or
- [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/education/edlife/first-generation-students-unite.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/education/edlife/first-generation-students-unite.html?_r=0).

**Duke University** reports that in 2009, the university created the 1G Network, an informal collaboration among the Academic Resource Center, Counseling and Psychological Services, and other offices to offer a pre-orientation workshop, advis-

<sup>27</sup>Dana Jennings, “Second Home for First-Gens,” *New York Times* (July 20, 2009).

ing, peer mentoring, and social opportunities for its approximately 500 first-generation undergraduates. Throughout the year, 1G students are invited to community dinners and faculty networking sessions, as well as informal get-togethers. Five years later, in 2014, Duke created a university-level financial aid position—a director of outreach and access—to cater to low-income and first-generation applicants. To learn more, visit: <http://dukemagazine.duke.edu/article/blazing-trail> and [www.dukechronicle.com/article/2014/09/new-position-created-support-first-generation-students](http://www.dukechronicle.com/article/2014/09/new-position-created-support-first-generation-students).

The division of Undergraduate Retention in the Office of Undergraduate Education at the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill** promotes the success of its “Carolina First” students through a website (<http://firstgeneration.unc.edu>) that features the personal stories of students (as well as faculty and staff members) who are (or were at one time) first-generation students. The website also includes links to campus services and resources.

These are just a few of the types of support that are being implemented in the Nation’s 2- and 4-year colleges for low-income, moderate- and high-achieving, first-generation students. While these initiatives vary widely in scope, they share a common set of goals to:

- fill information gaps that students have about the college experience and what is expected of them academically and socially;
- reduce students’ feelings of isolation and disengagement by creating opportunities for them to become integrated in the academic life of the institution and by encouraging their participation in the overall college/university culture;
- increase students’ network by connecting them to on-campus and off-campus resources;
- recognize students’ existing social capital and build upon it;
- reduce student attrition rates;
- increase student retention rates;
- increase graduation rates; and
- promote awareness of the unique needs of first-generation students among an institution’s faculty, staff and administration.

While these programs seem promising, there is little definitive evidence on whether they improve student outcomes. One program with such rigorous evidence is the City University of New York’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), a program that covers any tuition and fees not covered by need-based financial aid, covers public transportation costs, and provides additional financial assistance for textbooks combined with a rich package of intensive student services and other reforms. In its early years, ASAP targeted students who had no developmental education needs. While this group had some students who may not be considered “high-achieving,” the positive graduation outcomes obtained for this group (in addition to other student types) suggests that the program may also be highly beneficial for high-achieving, first-generation students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

#### SENATOR WARREN

*Question 1.* Do colleges have enough incentives to improve student success?

Answer 1. Colleges may not have sufficient incentives to improve student success, although this likely varies by institution type. Where incentives are not strong enough, the performance-based funding/outcomes-based funding approach to incentives, as discussed in the Senate hearing, is risky. This approach may help, it may hurt, or it may have neutral effects. However, we believe that performance funding is likely to punish many effective institutions and reward many ineffective institutions, potentially undermining its intentions.

Broadly speaking, there are at least three ways for colleges to improve institutional outcomes (for example, graduation rates):

- (1) Improve institutional effectiveness;
- (2) Select students who are more likely to graduate; and
- (3) Lower institutional standards to achieve desired outcomes.

The main goal of performance funding should be to provide incentives for the first strategy while avoiding the other two. The typical solution suggested to protect against colleges using the second strategy is to use input-adjusted outcomes (where outcomes are adjusted to account for differences in student demographics), and the typical solution suggested to protect against the third is to rely on accreditors. While these solutions may mitigate concerns, they will not eliminate them, and it is unclear whether they will diminish them significantly.

Two major obstacles to comparing colleges' relative effectiveness are: (1) institutions serve different types of students, and (2) generally, there are not standardized outcomes in higher education. As discussed during the hearing, there are ways to mitigate (although not eliminate) concerns about the first obstacle. For example, institutions could receive bonus points for serving low-income students whose likelihood of succeeding is, on average, lower than their higher income counterparts.<sup>28</sup> Making adjustments like this may make cross-institutional comparisons fairer, but such approaches will not result in apples-to-apples comparisons. For example, the low-income students attending open-access 4-year colleges are not the same as the low-income students attending elite 4-year colleges. Making such adjustments based on measured characteristics will only partially address the fact that institutions serve different types of students with different propensities to succeed.

The even bigger challenge is that proposed outcomes for performance funding are not standardized, making cross-institutional comparisons ambiguous at best, and meaningless at worst. For example, consider a common performance-funding outcome like degree completion. Little is known about how much variation exists across institutions in the difficulty of earning a degree. One reason for this is that we cannot disentangle *difficulty of earning a degree* from *institutional effectiveness*. To make the point clear, even if College X and College Y both serve students who look identical upon their entrance, comparing their graduation rates does *not* enable one to know whether (a) one college is more effective than the other or (b) one college simply has higher standards than the other.

While it may be impossible to quantify how much variation in *difficulty of earning a degree* there is in higher education, research in K–12 education can provide some guidance. An analogous situation has been carefully examined in K–12 schools, where States are required to report the percentages of students achieving proficiency in reading and mathematics on statewide exams. Importantly, each State administers a unique State exam with unique content and a unique proficiency cut score (much as each college can be thought of as having its own unique requirements to graduate and its own unique stringency to meet those graduation requirements).

Because the State exams are different, one might wonder whether there is utility in making cross-State comparisons in proficiency rates on these State exams, in order to determine which States have the highest achieving students. The U.S. Department of Education commissioned a paper to examine this issue taking advantage of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a national standardized exam that allows for valid cross-State comparisons.<sup>29</sup> The general conclusion of the study is that, "The observed heterogeneity in States' reported percent proficient can be largely attributed to differences in the stringency of their standards."

In other words, the study found that if you compare the percentage proficient in one State with the percentage proficient in another State using an outcome that is not standardized across States, differences largely have to do with the stringency of standards. Simply put: It may be invalid to use nonstandardized outcomes, like college graduation rates, to make cross-institutional comparisons.

Below is a plot of the data from that U.S. Department of Education-commissioned paper.<sup>30</sup> On the x-axis is each State in the United States. The y-axis shows the percentage of fourth-graders meeting proficiency standards using their State's math test (the leftmost bar, in gray) and the NAEP (the rightmost bar, in black). Although each State's test is designed to measure mathematics achievement, the tests are different and the proficiency definitions are different. NAEP also measures mathematics achievement, but unlike the State exams, all students in the country take the same test using the same definition of proficiency. There is almost no relationship between the percentage proficient on NAEP and the percentage proficient using the State test. Massachusetts exemplifies the problem: Looking at the NAEP scores, Massachusetts has the highest-achieving fourth-graders in the country. However, because Massachusetts' State test is extremely difficult, the State ranks fourth from the bottom on the percentage of students passing their own statewide exam. If K–12 education implemented performance funding based on the percentage pro-

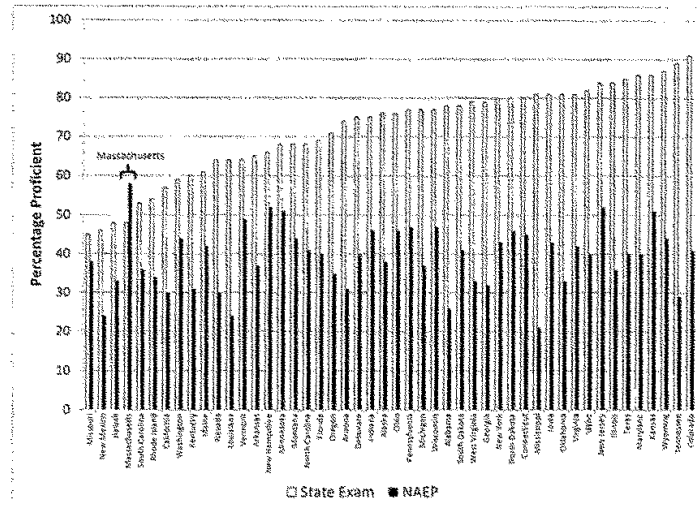
<sup>28</sup> A number of States already have such adjustments. See Martha Snyder, *Driving Better Outcomes: Typology and Principles to Inform Outcomes-Based Funding Models* (Washington, DC: HCM Strategists, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *Mapping 2005 State Proficiency Standards onto the NAEP Scales (NCES 2007-482)*, U.S. Department of Education, (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Chart is derived by MDRC based on numbers from [http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/statemapping/2007\\_naep\\_state\\_table.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/statemapping/2007_naep_state_table.asp).



ficient on State exams, Massachusetts—the State with the highest-achieving students—would be penalized.



This example illustrates that rewarding or punishing colleges based on their *relative effectiveness* is going to be problematic. Performance funding could penalize those operating in the desired direction while rewarding others who may not merit the resources, as no standard exists to measure relative performance adequately.

As a result, we can say that there are several reasons to be cautious about performance-based funding in higher education. We cannot determine institutions' relative effectiveness, so rewards will only be connected loosely with institutional effectiveness and will mostly be doled out at random. Moreover, there is concern that performance funding may suffer from unintended consequences, like providing incentives to “cream” students and to lower standards, although well-crafted safeguards could help. Despite these issues, it is nonetheless possible, but unknown, that performance-based funding could have an overall positive effect by increasing focus and attention on outcomes rather than enrollment rates.

Alternative approaches to provide incentives for improvement may offer similar benefits, but bear less risk. For example, government entities could provide incentives for institutions to replicate programs with strong evidence of effectiveness from randomized controlled trials (for example, CUNY's ASAP). Simultaneously, they could provide incentives for institutions to participate in randomized controlled trial evaluations to add to the knowledge base concerning effective practices. One example of this general approach is the First in the World competition, which offered validation grants to colleges willing to replicate programs with a proven record of accomplishment and which requires rigorous independent evaluation for grant recipients.

*Question 2.* What policies would give for-profit colleges an incentive to improve outcomes for their students?

*Answer 2.* Thank you for asking this important question. We want to provide you with an accurate and thoughtful answer, but, unfortunately, MDRC does not have expertise on this specific topic. However, we suggest that you make contact with Dr. James Rosenbaum, Professor of Sociology, and Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University ([j-rosenbaum@northwestern.edu](mailto:j-rosenbaum@northwestern.edu)).

[Whereupon, at 11:30 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]