

Community College, The Unfinished Revolution

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Overview:

The article points to low completion rates of public community colleges and provides actions that have the potential to improve student outcomes that community colleges could adapt from private two-year colleges.

College Comparisons:

- Private 2-year colleges (including for profit and nonprofit) have higher completion rates than public 2-year colleges (51% compared to 34%).
- Public and private 2-year colleges have considerable overlap in student characteristics-- both enroll more students with lower grades and large numbers of low-income and minority students who did poorly in high school.
- There is little student overlap between the characteristics of 2-year college students and 4-year students.

Private 2-Year Colleges Excel at:

- Assuming students don't have the know-how to direct their own progress and shift the responsibility to the institutions by offering a "package deal" plan for attaining an explicit career goal. Schedules are compressed into structured curriculum.
- Helping their students access federal and state financial aid.
- Offering group advisory meetings and foster peer support.
- Teaching "soft skills" such as attendance, punctuality, self-presentation and communication, and work habits.
- Building relationships and trust with the business community.
- Offering job-search preparation, career advising, and resume and interview workshops, and help graduates find jobs.

The Authors Propose the Following Actions for Public 2-Year Colleges:

- Offer highly structured programs to attain explicit career goals within a distinct time frame. Where colleges are in close proximity, specialize by individual college.
- Expand procedures to inform students guide choices and prevent mistakes, such as intake advising for choosing programs, frequent mandatory advising, group advising, peer cohorts and student information systems.
- Teach social skills and work habits more systematically. Consider implementing mandatory attendance rules and dress codes.
- Strengthen and systematize employer relationships with colleges by providing time and rewards for faculty to develop these contacts or employ job-placement staff.