Chapter 10
The Completion Agenda: The Unintended Consequences for Equity in Community Colleges

Jaime Lester

In 2009, President Obama stood on the steps of Macomb Community College in Michigan declaring, "But today I'm announcing the most significant down payment yet on reaching the goal of having the highest college graduation rate of any nation in the world. We're going to achieve this in the next 10 years" (Obama 2009). Named as the American Graduation Initiative, the Obama Administration called for five million additional graduates by 2020 to keep the United States on track as the world leader in education (Obama 2009). President Obama declared that community colleges are the sector of higher education that will achieve his goals: "We will not fill those jobs – or even keep those jobs here in America – without the training offered by community colleges" (Obama 2009). For the first time in many decades, a United States President called attention to the role of community colleges in creating an educated workforce though their many pathways to postsecondary education – certificates, continuing education, associates degrees, and transfer to four-year universities.

The attention to achieving the goals of the Obama Administration has largely focused on community colleges as these two-year institutions are seen as having the greatest potential for positive change, particularly among those students who have "some college." National statistics indicate that community colleges educate almost half of all undergraduate in the United States, totaling more than 8.2 million students (Phillippe and Mullin 2011). However, graduation rates as community colleges are historically low compared to four-year universities (Clotfelter et al. 2013).[1] Only 20 % of full-time community college students receive an associate's degree within 3 years (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems & Jobs for the Future 2007). In addition, community colleges enroll the vast majority

[1] These numbers are complicated by state and institutional policies that allow for transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions prior to receiving the associate's degree.

J. Lester, Ph.D. (✉)
Higher Education Program, George Mason University,
4400 University Dr. MS 1B3, Fairfax, VA 22030, USA
e-mail: Jlester2@gmu.edu

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of underrepresented students, those students from lower-income, first-generation, immigrant status, and minority groups (Bailey and Morest 2006; Cohen and Brawer 2003). Finally, community colleges, according to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, are flexible and affordable with the greatest potential for promoting change. The Obama Administration notes, "Working in partnership with states and communities, community colleges are well suited to promote the dual goal of academic and on-the-job preparedness for the next generation of American workers" (Obama 2009). A history of industry partnerships allows for a more seamless transition from education to the workforce.

The impact of the American Graduation Initiative is vast. Philanthropic organizations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation, took up the challenge to promote change in community colleges to reach completion goals through initiatives such as *Completion by Design* and *Achieving the Dream*. The goals of these philanthropic organizations complemented and surpassed the Obama Administration calling for an additional 23 million graduates by 2025. The motivation for promoting additional graduates is understandable given the low levels of college completion among college graduates. As Bailey (2012) describes, "According to this agenda [American Graduation Initiative], access to and opportunity for enrollment are no longer adequate: not only must colleges give students a chance to enroll, but students should also graduate or complete a degree" (p. 73). The logic of the completion focus is largely founded on recent research that states that the United States is currently projected to be, by 2018, at least three million college-educated workers short to meet projected demand (Carnevale et al. 2010). Additionally, recent research notes that only about half of full-time college students complete a postsecondary credential within 6 years of high school (Symonds et al. 2011).

Additional evidence of the impact of the American Graduation Initiative is found in a series of initiatives to include Complete to Compete, College Complete America, and Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training program. Each of these programs focuses on providing money to create training programs or new and better data collection methods to track student progress through state-level higher education data systems. Other proposed initiatives include a Race to the Top federal challenge by financially rewarding states that are willing to systematically change their higher education policies and practices and a Community College Career fund to support industry partnerships in high demand growth fields, both part of President Obama's proposed 2013 budget (White House 2013). In addition, policy makers and community college advocates also entered the conversation through advocacy for change within individual community colleges and in state and federal policies. Recently, the American Association for Community Colleges 21st-Century Initiative released a report titled "Reclaiming the American Dream: Community Colleges and the Nation's Future." The report stemming from an initiative with a goal strikingly similar to that of the American Graduation Initiative – "The overall goal of the initiative is to educate an additional 5 million students with degrees, certificates, or other credentials by 2020" (AACC 2012, p. v) – outlined seven recommendations for institutional transformation.

The recommendations focus on supporting student success via completion, collaboration with industry, redesigning developmental education, and supporting data-driven decision-making and transparency.

The attention to community colleges sheds light on the substantial role that community colleges play in the higher education sector and calls attention to their role in workforce development and economic development, activities that community colleges have been engaged for decades. More importantly, the American Graduation Initiative signals a dramatic shift in the public discourse and policy focus of the role of higher education. No longer a focus simply on creating access to higher education, public policy shifted to promoting success, or completion, as defined by successful completion of the requirements to receive a higher education certificate or degree. The attention on one side of the student experience equation or a balance scale – completion – may have a detrimental, but possibly unintended, consequence on educational access and opportunity as it relates to gender, race, and socioeconomic status. Historically, women and individuals of non-Caucasian racial or ethnic origins enroll in community colleges in disproportionately greater rates as compared to males and Caucasians. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2007) indicates that females are 59 % and minority groups 37 % of the community college population. These numbers are greater than those found at public four-year institutions that are 58 % female and 28 % minority. Moreover, over half of Black and Hispanic students who attend college do so at a community college (*Community College Fact Sheet* 2006). These percentages reflect gains leading to 1.7 million Hispanic and 2 million Black additional college students enrolling in community colleges (Cook and Cordova 2007). However, Conway (2009) found that Black and Hispanic students are less likely to persist as compared to other student groups and are at the greatest risk of academic failure (Bailey et al. 2005; Horn and Nevill 2006). Community colleges disproportionately serve less academically prepared students who are often from the lowest quintile of academic preparation (Adelman 2005).

Reasons for the disproportionate (as compared to national demographics) enrollment of women and underrepresented racial and ethnic groups who enroll in community colleges include the lower cost of tuition, need to complete developmental education courses, and increased family responsibilities, to name a few. Hardin (2008) found that housing, childcare, and a concern for student loan debt were among the biggest concerns for adult students. Those students with family responsibilities, a large majority of community college students, are more likely to experience stress from finances and childcare (Huff and Thorpe 1997; Ryder et al. 1994). Other studies describe the complex and multiple roles of female adult students who are often serving as the primary caretakers of aging family and children (Compton et al. 2006; Home 1998). These complex set of factors make lower cost and more flexible community colleges the only option for access to a postsecondary training, certificate, or degree. Promoting completion over the goals of open access provides less opportunity for those students who have the greatest need to pursue postsecondary education via the community college system.

The purpose of this chapter is to unravel the complex impact that recent completion-focused federal policy initiatives, state policies, and national discourse have on educational access for those students who historically enroll in community colleges. I argue that a focus on completion decreases access and limits educational opportunities removing the American higher education system as a source of social and economic equity. The potential to decrease access for specific student groups is not abstract and unfounded. Recent "priority enrollment" efforts on behalf of the California Community College System lead to decreasing access to those students who are categorized as less likely to complete given their past enrollment patterns. As noted in The Chronicle of Higher Education and other news outlets, California created a policy through their student success initiative to give students who have completed orientation, assessment tests, have less than 100 credits, and are in good academic standing priority during the registration process (Rivera 2012). The new policy is particularly problematic given the California Community Colleges are already turning away approximately 470,000 students per year due to classroom and teacher shortages (Gardner 2012). Porchea et al. (2010) found that higher levels of academic preparation are strong predictors from community college degree attainment and transfer. The probability of completion – degree attainment or transfer – increased as higher education grade point averages and standardized achievement scores rose. California's new policy will lead to greater completion rates because these higher qualified students will be at the front of the registration lines, but at what cost to equity? Nationally, Siqueiros (as quoted in Dolan 2005) indicated, "It is projected that between 2003 and 2018, 1.8 million students will be turned away from higher education. Of these 1.3 million will be Latinos trying to access the community colleges." The American Association for Community Colleges noted, "In policy conversations, there is a silent movement to redirect educational opportunity to those students deemed 'deserving'" (Mullin 2012, p. 4). Limiting college admissions will lead to "…greater social and economic inequity between students groups" (Bragg and Durham 2012, p. 107).

To begin, I present the analytic framework for the study to situate the critical analysis on federal, state, and institutional policies and initiatives that grew out of The Completion Agenda[2] and completion discourse. I then present the current data on the status on men and women with an emphasis on race/ethnicity in community colleges to understand the historical trends in enrollment and completion rates. In addition to a presentation of the data, I also provide literature on gender and race in community colleges to explore reasons for the enrollment and completion trends. The next section focuses on the assumptions and initiatives on federal, national, and state efforts concluding with recommendations of how to rethink the completion focus to account for equity.

[2] Throughout this chapter, I will use The Completion Agenda to refer to the American Graduation Initiative as well as similar efforts on behalf of the philanthropic organizations and state initiatives. In this regard, The Completion Agenda is a broader reference than the federal American Graduation Initiative.

Analytic Framework: Educational Equity

The analytic framework used in the chapter is grounded in the work of feminist policy analysis that places gender at the center of analysis as a basic organizing principle. The goals of feminist policy analysis is "…to critique or deconstruct conventional theories and explanations and reveal the gender biases (as well as racial, sexual, social class biases) inherent in commonly accepted theories, constructs, methodologies and concepts…" (Bensimon and Marshall 1997, p. 6). Bensimon and Marshall (1997) argue that studies using a feminist critical policy analysis perspective must (1) pose gender as a fundamental category, (2) be concerned with a local and contextual analysis of difference, (3) collect data on the lived experience of women, (4) have a goal to transform institutions, and (5) have an interventionist strategy. Feminist policy studies work from the premise that gender is a central and fundamental category that shapes human experience and must be placed front and center, not take a gender-blind perspective. In addition, this perspective focuses on women (or other social identity groups) and their experiences alone, not in comparison to the dominant group. Finally, feminist policy analysis is a changed focused perspective; studies need to seek to not just disseminate findings but develop strategies to work for change within dominant cultures and contexts.

Research using a feminist critical policy primarily focuses on the mechanisms that develop and maintain power conditions. Early studies in education focused on curriculum, teacher training, and educational policy related to teenage pregnancy (Adams 1997; Hollingsworth 1997; Pillow 1997; Yates 1997). In higher education, researchers examined Title IX, affirmative action, and tenure and promotion (Acker and Feuerverger 1997; Glazer 1997; Stromquist 1997). Shaw (2004) examined the welfare system to show both the intended and unintended effects on women. She found that using a critical feminist policy perspective reveals that the often celebrated success in welfare reform is shortsighted, only focusing on reducing the number of women on welfare and does not support long-term economic stability. Shaw states, "Women who receive welfare are not, by and large, able to pursue education and training, and those who do have a tenuous hold on the educational process" (p. 74).

Other studies in higher education use a critical policy approach, and while these studies do not specifically come from a feminist perspective, they provide additional support for the robustness of examining policy, not as a neutral but a value-laden set of discourses that shape power conditions. Chase and colleagues (2012) examined statewide transfer policies with a focus on equity and identified that historical charters and transfer provisions can restrict the transfer options for career and technical education students in community colleges, particularly in limiting what are considered transferable course credits. They noted that state policy documents are largely "color blind," but focus accountability documents on underrepresented students, illustrating a disconnect in policies that govern transfer and desired higher education outcomes. Other studies examined university documents with a focus on discourses related to gender and race. Allan (2003) reviewed university women's commission

reports noting that women are positioned as victims, outsiders to the university, and in need of professional development. Iverson (2007) examined university diversity policies arguing that diversity plans created a discourse that positioned students of color as "at risk" and outsiders to the university. Each of these studies, through research using critical policy analysis, reveals alternative perspectives and impacts of seemingly "neutral" policies.

A few caveats on feminist policy analysis are in order. First, the analysis in this chapter does not focus exclusively on formal policies nor does it account for institutional culture. The Completion Agenda and shifts in discourse to college student success have led to a series of initiatives that represent philanthropic efforts, state initiatives, and a few policies, such as the priority enrollment policy in California. Feminist policy analysis is used to ground the analysis in critical theory with a focus on the impact of policy discourse and subsequent changes on certain demographic groups who are historically disempowered in American society. The intention is to illuminate how an androcentric – a "neutral" – perspective on completion ignores the erosion of access (and therefore even the possibility of completion) for these historically disempowered groups. Second, feminist critical policy analysis notably does not focus solely on women and gender. As Bensimon and Marshall (1997) address throughout their seminal article, other social identity groups and the intersection of these identities are included within this perspective. Third, the data collected for this analysis does not come directly from the lived experience of women or other social identities group; rather, the data and information is gathered from a variety of sources (i.e., policy documents, reports, websites, research studies) to address the potential for reducing educational equity by focusing squarely on student completion over and above access and student learning.

Importantly, this chapter is also founded in the work on educational equity and community colleges articulated by Bailey and Morest (2006) in their book *Defending the Community College Equity Agenda*. Bailey and colleagues argue that recent shifts in educational funding, introduction of new technologies, and rise in for-profit education, among other recent trends, threaten the role of community colleges as providers of educational equity realized through an open access admission policy that provides a postsecondary education and upward economic mobility for all individuals. Their analysis foreshadows The Completion Agenda by calling attention to a policy and discursive movement toward a focus on collegiate success and provides a framework to examine equity stating, "The overall concept of higher education equity involves three parts: equity in college preparation, access to college, and success in reaching college goals" (Bailey and Morest 2006, p. 2) to bring together access, completion, and academic preparation. They argue that these three parts of equity are crucial to getting students into college with the proper academic preparation and helping them to overcome barriers to achieve their postsecondary goals. Each of these parts work together to promote community college student success and all require equal focus. Their work calls attention to the low levels of completion rates for community college students and calls for more attention to student success. At the same time, they acknowledge that "This suggests that, if privatization

of higher education funding increased the concentration of low-income students in community colleges, if nothing else changed, greater reliance on community college would probably lead to a more inequitable system" (p. 268).

Both critical feminist policy analysis and Bailey and Morest's (2006) equity framework for community college illuminate the importance of examining discourse and policy with a critical lens that focuses on social equity gained through higher education. While each framework is distinct in its perspective, these two frameworks together frame the analysis in this study with a focus on gender, race/ethnicity, and social class and how these demographic characteristics are impacted, albeit oftentimes unintentionally, by policy discourse and how that impact can directly impact the equity values and ideals embedded within the mission and history of community colleges.

Community College Students

Community colleges are the gateway to higher education for many students. Goldrick-Rab (2010) and Bragg and Durham (2012) point out that many of the students who attend community colleges feel as if they are the only viable choice and would not attend college at all if not for community colleges. The purpose of this section is twofold. First, I present data to support the assertion that specific demographic groups, namely, women, underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, and individuals from lower socioeconomic status, enroll in community colleges in disproportionate numbers as compared to four-year institutions. Second, I present research that explains why these groups enroll in community colleges and to illustrate the potential detrimental impacts of these groups if access to community colleges is decreased due to state and institutional policies that result from a federal and philanthropic completion agenda.

Demographic Characteristics

A main driver for students to access community colleges as their first, and sometimes only, higher education institution is due to their demographic characteristics highly correlated with situational factors (i.e., family responsibilities, socioeconomic status). Community college students tend to be older, attend part time, and are from families with lower socioeconomic status. Over 45 % of community college students are over the age of 24 and 63 % attend part time, as opposed to 22 % part time at four-year colleges (Cohen and Brawer 2003). Community college students, as stated in the introduction, also tend to disproportionately represent demographic groups historically underrepresented in higher education. These demographic groups are detailed below.

Table 10.1 Degrees conferred by gender from 1970 to 2005

Date degree conferred	Associate's degree		Bachelor's degree		Master's degree		First professional degree		Doctoral degree	
	% male	% female	% male	% female	% male	% female	% male	% female	% male	% female
1970	57	43	58	43	60	40	94	6	86	14
1994	40	60	45	55	45	55	59	41	61	39
2005	38	62	42	58	40	60	50	50	51	49

Source: NCES (2007)

Table 10.2 Degrees conferred by gender in 2005–2006

Field of study	Associate's degree		Bachelor's degree		Master's degree		Doctoral degree	
	% male	% female	% male	% female	% male	% female	% male	% female
Computer and information sciences	72	28	79	21	73	27	78	22
Engineering	85	15	81	19	77	23	80	20
Education	15	85	21	79	23	77	35	65
Health professions and related clinical sciences	15	85	14	86	21	79	27	73
Psychology	23	77	23	77	21	79	27	73

Source: NCES (2007)

Gender

At first glance, the student population at community colleges mirrors the national demographics in higher education; female students make up approximately 62 % of community colleges and 58 % four-year universities (NCES 2007). As shown in Table 10.1, numbers of male and female students reach parity in professional and doctoral degrees.

Disaggregating the statistics by degree completion, however, begins to show a more complex picture of gender disparities across the academy, disparities that illustrate segregation that exists within academic disciplines and the specific pressures (i.e., disruptive attendance patterns, masculinity) that lead to lower enrollment and college completion for male students. While women are larger in number than men in undergraduate and graduate enrollment and have a slightly higher representation in community colleges, their degree completion in specific fields of study illustrate the perpetuation of male and female majority disciplines. Table 10.2 compares the degrees conferred for the fields of study that show the largest gender disparities in 2005.

In addition to the fields of study in Table 10.2, community colleges also have a variety of vocationally oriented programs that have significant gender disparities.

Women represent 96 % of the degrees conferred in family and consumer services, but only 5 % of mechanics and repair technologies (NCES 2007). Stratification in specific academic disciplines has a long-term impact on economic opportunities and income potential. Noted in a recent report by the American Association of University Women (St. Rose and Hill 2013), "Scientific technical, health, and math fields over the highest economic returns. Unfortunately, except for health fields, where women dominate, these top-paying fields are nontraditional for women" (p. 32). In addition, Deutsch and Schmertz (2011) found in a study of adult women returning to college, a significant population at community colleges, that women viewed postsecondary education as a gateway to high paying jobs; yet, their economic position and choice of field placed added burdens that distracted them from coursework.

Research does show that women are more likely to persist in higher education, one reason that women tend to outnumber men overall in enrollment and degree completion at all levels of postsecondary education (Kim and Sedlacek 1996; Voorhees 1986). However, female student success is mediated by several factors to include immigrant, marital, and parental status. Recent research on immigrant community college students found that female immigrant students are less likely to persist, possibly due to increased family responsibilities connected to cultural norms of daughters taking care of parents or other domestic responsibilities (Conway 2009; Olivas et al. 1986). Moreover, being married and being a parent negatively impacts transfer (Wang 2012). Female student parents are less likely to complete their educational goals, often due to increased childcare responsibilities that pull them away from coursework and engaging in educational activities (Miller et al. 2011). Other studies on student transfer support Wang and others' findings related to the impact of demographics on community college student transfer (see Dougherty and Kienzl 2006; Roksa 2006).

A conflicting set of studies (see Ewert 2012; Goldrick-Rab 2006) point to the complexity of the male gap in college enrollment and completion, calling attention to the reasons that a male gap has widened over the last decade. These studies conclude that male community college students are more likely to take time off, or stop out temporarily from college enrollment, and attend college part time. Ewert (2012) in a study of disrupted attendance patterns found that male students are less likely to graduate because they have more disruptions which limit persistence to degree completion. Male students were also less likely to graduate because they were less academically prepared. Ewert's findings confirm the hypothesis of several scholars who stated that taking time off from college and enrolling part time extends time to degree completion and limits social and academic engagement, reducing the likelihood of college completion for male students and helping to explain the gender gap (Goldrick-Rab 2006; Jacobs and King 2002; King 2003; Laird and Cruce 2009).

Another factor found in the literature for the gender gap in college enrollment and completion among college men is masculinity. Harris (2010) in his work on the impact of masculinity on male college student success found that men arrive on campus having been socialized to traditional notions of masculinity. Those male students who perform in accordance to masculine cultural and contextual definitions equated masculinity with being respected by other males, feeling confident,

and having physical prowess. Men who performed within these traditional notions of masculinity were more privileged than those that did not. These findings are particularly important given that male students are found to engage in masculine identity development, transcending and redefining masculinity according to their beliefs and values (Edwards and Jones 2009). Being in an environment that allows for such exploration and redefinition has a positive impact on male student identity development and a greater likelihood for college completion. Yet, privileging traditional notions of masculinity creates a dominant culture that reduces diversity and opportunities to explore individual masculine identity development. As Harris (2010) explains, "Meaningful and sustained cross-cultural interaction among men who represent diverse backgrounds, identities, and experiences challenged prevailing assumptions about masculinities and motivated the participants to consider new meanings" (p. 314).

Related to masculinity is men's participation in varsity and intramural sports. Ewert's (2012) study on male college students found that the gender gap would be even greater if not for male higher rates of participation in sports. According to Ewert, "Participation in sports helps to socially integrate men into the college community and may facilitate persistence to graduation by fostering support and developing a commitment to the institution and to earning a degree. Gender segregation in college major does not contribute to the gender gap in graduation" (p. 828). Yet, Harris (2010) found that participation in precollege athletics reinforced traditional notions of masculinity particularly by connecting masculinity to physical toughness, prowess, and aggression. These ideas about masculinity continued in college as explained by Harris, "This characterization stemmed from the assumption that men who embodied traditional masculinities, notably fraternity members and male student–athletes, were privileged and maintained a higher social status than did the other men on campus who did not hold membership in these groups" (p. 309.)

Race/Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status

Understanding community college students requires disaggregating data by race and ethnicity which reveals additional disparities in college access among community college student population. African American, Native American, and Hispanic students represent over 34 % of the total student population at community colleges compared to 24 % at four-year universities (see Table 10.3). Students from historically underrepresented groups tend to enroll in community colleges due to their accessibility, lower cost, and access to developmental education.

Despite the ability to access community colleges, Black and Hispanic students are at greater risk than Caucasian students for not completing the degree or transfer, a primary reason for a focus on completion over access. As seen in Table 10.4, all community college students complete at rates far lower than their four-year counterparts with wide gaps between White and Black and Hispanic students within each higher education institutional type. Approximately 12 % of Black and 16 % of Hispanic community college students complete a certificate or associate's degree

Table 10.3 Enrollment rates by race in the United States

Race	Two-year public colleges	All four-year colleges
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.1 %	.8 %
Asian	5.2 %	5.4 %
Black or African American	15.2 %	13.2 %
Hispanic or Latino	18.1 %	11 %
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.3 %	0.3 %
White	51.2 %	57.7 %
Two or more races	2 %	2.1 %
Unknown	5.7 %	6.7 %

Source: NCES (2012)

Table 10.4 Percent completed in 2007 cohort by race in the United States

Race	2007 cohort two-year public colleges	2003 cohort four-year public colleges
American Indian/Alaska Native	17.4	37.1
Asian	25.6	65.8
Black or African American	11.9	38.6
Hispanic or Latino	16	46.9
White	23	58.6
Nonresident alien	25.4	56.2
Total	20.4	55.7

Source: NCES (2012)
Note: Percent completed for community colleges is a certificate or associate's degree within 150 % of normal time. Percent completed for four-year is bachelor's degree within 6 years of start

compared to 23 % of White students. These numbers can be slightly misleading given that students may not achieve a certificate or associate's degree before transferring to a four-year university. Accounting for this caveat, gaps among racial groups are also wide within four-year universities.

For many of these reasons, Black students enter community college less prepared than their peers and must travel a greater distance to achieve their educational goals (Greene et al. 2008). Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be first-generation students (first in their families to attend college), attend college academically underprepared, need financial assistance, work full time, and have multiple family responsibilities, all known factors to negatively contribute to degree completion (Bailey et al. 2005; Horn and Premo 1995; Núñez and Cuccaro-Alamin 1998). Other studies identified the level of engagement and academic work required for Black students to be successful. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) notes that academically underprepared students are more likely to write more papers, work harder, and talk about career plans, all measures of student engagement on the CCSSE national survey (CCSSE 2005). The CCSSE findings parallel other studies that note Black and Hispanic students are more

engaged in substantive education activities, such as putting more effort into course assignments, involvement in course discussions, and using library services (Swigart and Murrell 2001). Black and Hispanic students had to work harder to achieve a high level of engagement as compared to their White counterparts suggesting that they have a distance to travel to be academically successful (Greene et al. 2008; Kuh et al. 2007).

Community colleges serve as the first option for a postsecondary degree for individuals from lower socioeconomic status. Bailey and Morest (2006) found that the majority (63.5 %) of community college students have a household income of less than $50,000 compared to 51.7 % at four-year universities. Other studies indicated that socioeconomic stratification has increased in community colleges. In a recent report by The Century Foundation (2013), data notes that "In 1982, students from the top socioeconomic quarter of the population made up 24 percent of the students at community colleges; by 2006, that had dropped to 16 percent" (p. 19). This is particularly important given that over 30 % of community college students also have dependent children compared to 13 % at four-year universities. Melguizo et al. (2008) note that low-income students chose community colleges because they do not preclude living at home and having a full- or part-time job. College tuition is currently at an all-time high in the United States, but community colleges tend to offer significantly lower tuition rates. According to the US Department of Education (2009), the average tuition per year with room and board at public four-year universities is $15,918 compared to $8,085 at community colleges. The amount of money award by the Pell Grant, federal funds given to students who demonstrate financial need, is $5,550 per year for the maximum award. In academic year 2006–2007, over 20 % of community college students received a Pell Award with over 80 % of those families with a total income of $20,000 or less (U.S. Department of Education 2009). The relationship between race and ethnicity and socioeconomic status is strong. Blacks and Hispanics are overrepresented in the lower strata of the socioeconomic hierarchy (Bahr 2010; Bailey and Morest 2006; Kerckhoff et al. 2001). Lower-income students are found to struggle with college completion and are less likely to leave community college before having obtained a degree or transferring to a four-year institution (Ishitani 2006; Porchea et al. 2010).

Academic Preparation and Situational Factors

Lower academic preparation is also a distinct characteristic of community college students. Community college students have lower levels of academic preparation and achievement in high school which often leads to needing developmental education (Bailey and Alfonso 2005). Parsad et al. (2003) identified that over 42 % of community college students require developmental education in mathematics or English. Rates for four-year students are generally lower than 20 %. Adelman (2005) found that approximately 60 % of community college students require at least 1 year of developmental education. Rates for developmental education are related to race. Black and Hispanic students exhibit a disproportionate need for

developmental education with African American students being twice as likely as Caucasian students to enroll in one (or more) developmental courses (Wirt et al. 2004). Adelman (2006) discovered that 46 % of Black students and 51 % of Hispanic students earn credits in developmental math compared to 31 % of Caucasian students. Bahr (2010) established that Black and Hispanic students are more likely to enroll in arithmetic while Caucasian students enroll in intermediate algebra or geometry. African American students are also less likely to persist in developmental education (Wirt et al. 2004). Inadequate math preparation is found to have an impact on student transfer because many articulation agreements among community colleges and four-year universities require high levels of math completion to transfer (Conway 2009).

While the reasons for lower levels of academic achievement among community college students are highly complex and variable, several situational factors contribute to achievement. Community college students generally tend to be more "at risk" than four-year students due to their more likely status as financially independent, single parents, attending college part time, and working full time (Hoachlander et al. 2003; Horn and Nevill 2006; Bailey and Morest 2006). Porchea et al. (2010) found that "…situational factors that were significantly predictive of obtaining a degree or transferring (rather than dropping out) included full-time enrollment, higher degree expectations, and fewer planned hours worked" (p. 771). Students who attended community college full time were more likely to obtain a degree regardless of whether or not they transferred. Other situational factors include level of financial aid received, distance from home to college, and parents with a college education (Adelman 2005). Parental education, a shorter distance to college, and more financial aid all positively correlate with student persistence.

Another set of significant findings concerns student engagement with the collegiate experience. Cohen and Brawer (2003) note that community college students tend to live off campus and have limited opportunities to engage in social and academic activities. Each of these variables is known to support student success via student engagement measures (Kuh et al. 2005). The Community College Survey of Student Engagement consistently finds that community college students engage in campus life primarily through classroom-based interactions such as contributing to class discussions and making class presentations. Community college students generally do not work with peers outside of class, work with instructors on activities other than coursework, or talked to instructors about career plans (CCSSE 2012). CCSSE also finds that only about half of students have discussions with faculty outside of class and use career and counseling services.

A final set of considerations for student success in community college concerns institutional factors. Porchea et al. (2010) found in a robust study of community college student success that greater enrollment and in-state tuition predicted transfer to a four-year college without first obtaining a degree. Other studies examined the impact of part-time versus full-time faculty. While Porchea et al. (2010) identified that more full-time faculty did not predict degree attainment, other studies noted that large numbers of part-time faculty decreased persistence rates (Eagan and Jaeger 2008). The degree to which part-time faculty impact persistence is unclear; other institutional characteristics

impact student transfer to include support programs for transfer, quality of academic advising, and learning communities (Bloom and Sommo 2005; Shaw and London 2001; Ward-Roof and Cawthon 2004). Studies also indicate that the presence of a "transfer culture" is important to supporting and increasing the number of students who transfer. The transfer culture includes learning communities, support services, and high expectations (Shaw and London 2001).

Institutional and cultural barriers are also factors that specifically impact Black and Hispanic students (Harris and Kayes 1996; Rendon 1994; Zamani 2000). Research on underrepresented students in four-year universities identifies non-inclusive campus climates that are unfriendly to Black and Hispanic students. Unfriendly climates are created when students report having limited relationships with faculty and classroom practices that assume a dominant White culture (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Schwitzer et al. 1999). Ancis et al. (2000) found that Black students feel prejudicial treatment from faculty more than White students and White faculty may use pedagogical approaches that do not address diverse learning styles or acknowledge culture (Sanchez 2000). These cultures have a negative impact on student persistence and can impact academic achievement, social experiences, and institutional commitment (Cabrera et al. 1999; Townsend 1994). Several researchers suggest that disparities in academic achievement among White, Black, and Hispanic students are due to different levels of academic preparation combined with institutional barriers (Hudson 2003; Szelenyi 2001).

In summary, community college students are more "at risk" than their four-year counterparts due to demographic and situational factors that complicate financing, attending, and balancing collegiate expectations. In the next section, I review recent policy shifts and discourses on gender and race within the federal and state governments and community colleges to further illustrate the impact of a completion agenda on these specific groups of community college students who more frequently see community colleges as the *only* gateway to a postsecondary education.

Impact of Recent Policy Shifts on State and Federal Level and Institutional Changes

The Obama Administration Completion Agenda resulted in a handful of programs, initiatives, and policy changes on the federal, state, and institutional levels with a clear focus on promoting college completion. The central argument of this chapter is that these programs and initiatives will unintentionally, by virtue of focusing on completion over access, have a negative impact on educational opportunities for women and historically unrepresented groups that see community colleges as their gateway to higher learning and economic potential. In this section, I present several case studies of programs and initiatives analyzed using critical policy analysis to illustrate the relationship between a singular completion focus on erosion of college access.

The first part of this section focuses on the logic behind The Completion Agenda, specifically a focus on graduation and a lack of discourse on learning outcomes.

The second part of this section identifies and discusses specific federal, national, and state initiatives that are attempting to support individual institutions improve their practices to create additional completions of certificates, degrees, and transfers. This multilevel approach exposes the impact of The Completion Agenda across multiple policy sectors – federal, state, and individual institutions.

Assumptions of The Completion Agenda

Focus on Graduation

The major driver of The Completion Agenda and subsequent initiatives and programs is a focus on graduation. The Completion Agenda and the Gates and Lumina Foundation are both calling for millions of additional graduates within the next decade. The National Center for Education Statistics established the standard method for counting graduation rates which is done by calculating the total number of completers within 150 % of the normal time divided by cohort. Completers are students who received a formal award, such as a degree, diploma, or certificate. A cohort is defined as "the number of students entering the institution as full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students in a particular year (cohort)" (NCES 2013). Logically, 150 % of the normal time is 6 years for students at four-year universities and 3 years for those students entering community colleges. Cohorts consist of only full-time, first time in college students.

While calculating graduation rates seems like a simple matter of finding a numerator and denominator, understanding who and how individuals graduate is much more complex in the community college system. Community college students enroll in college with a variety of goals including interest in taking a one-time interest course, such as photography; taking a short-term retraining course, such as for a new computer program; earning a vocational certificate, such as in welding; earning an associate's degree, such as in nursing; and transferring to a four-year university. Counting students as degree seeking requires the student to either declare a specific educational goal verbally or via an online survey or enroll in programs that have degree-seeking outcomes. Reporting education goals via surveys often leads to community college students overreporting their educational goals. Moreover, each of the educational options does not necessarily result in a "graduation" or a measureable outcome according to current accounting methods. For example, a student may take a few courses in computer software and technology, receive the training he/she requires, and then leave before completing the requirements for a certificate. To complicate the picture even further, a student may intend to transfer to a four-year university but find that the few additional courses to receive the associate's degree does not count in the transfer process and, therefore, transfer before completing the full requirements for the associate's degree (Offenstein and Shulock 2009). Another issue is with the full-time status requirement. National data indicates that 66 % of community college students attend part time (Bailey and Morest 2006).

Focusing on the graduate rate requires full-time enrollment unless NCES accounting practices are altered. These students would not be counted in the graduation rate.

Troubling results emerge when using graduation measures to examine student success and institutional effectiveness. Bailey and colleagues (2006) in an analysis of graduate rates using the Student-Right-To-Know data and institutional characteristics found that institutional size, expenditures on instruction, and student demographics have a strong relationship with graduation rates. Community colleges of a larger size and who spend less on instruction tend to have lower graduation rates. Similarly, community colleges with more minority, female, and part-time students also tend to have lower graduation rates. The difficulty over graduation rates as measured in the Student-Right-To-Know measure is summarized by Bailey and colleagues (2006): "The published SRK rates do paint an overly negative and restrictive picture of community college performance; nevertheless, there is potentially important information in the wide variation among institutions and states in those rates, even if rates for all colleges are low" (p. 495) (AtD).

In the context of the goals outlined by the American Graduation Initiative, community colleges are likely to be at a disadvantage in reaching 2020 or 2025 goals. Additionally, decreased state funding for instructional expenditures, particularly for those community colleges that serve minority, female, and part-time students, will continue to be shown as underachieving institutions, a distinction that has negative contextual meaning in light of accountability movements in K-12 educational reform.

Additionally, problems arise when focusing on graduation and achieving the scale of eight million plus graduates. Bailey (2012) conducted an in-depth analysis to understand if community colleges have the capacity to achieve the completion goals set out by the Obama Administration and other philanthropic organizations. He found that community colleges would need to increase enrollment by 5–10 % each year and dramatically increase graduation rates. Increasing capacity to this degree has many financial constraints particularly given that state budgets are hampered by multiple and competing priorities (i.e., transportation, retirement funds, and health care) resulting in lower appropriations for public higher education. Starting with graduation rates is a more feasible strategy; yet, Bailey (2012) argues in his analysis of the role of community colleges in promoting The Completion Agenda:

> An additional problem with graduation rates is that they are closely related to race and SES. Black, Hispanic, and low-income students complete at much lower rates than while middle-class students. For example, while 29.5 percent of white community college entrants complete a bachelor's degree or associate's degree, only 16.5 percent of black entrants do. The disparity is only slightly less for Hispanic students (p. 85).

A focus on completion via graduation rates privileges White and higher-income students who are already more likely to receive a degree or certificate "counted in" the current NCES standards. This is particularly significant given that initiatives, such as California's priority enrollment, place emphasis on predictors for completion that will privilege those students who are already likely to complete – a fraction of the population at many community colleges.

Another strategy is to increase certificate programs to promote completion rates. However, this is a short-term fix as certificates will not count toward bachelor degree

attainment, a goal within The Completion Agenda. Looking at transfer and possibly adding in a transfer rate as part of a graduation rate also does not solve the disparities for lower-income students and students from underrepresented groups. Wang (2012) notes that "Black students were 23.4 % less likely to transfer compared to White students. One quintile increase in SES was associated with 7 % more likelihood of transferring" (p. 864).… "Students who were parents were 33.1 % less likely to transfer compared to students without children" (p. 865). Wang concludes that sorting by class seems to exist in community colleges with lower-income students being discouraged from transfer programs. Although Wang does not suggest that sorting in community colleges occurs due to "cooling out," several studies note that community colleges may encourage students to enroll in less rigorous programs with outcomes that are lower than their aspirations to provide higher institutional completion rates (Grubb 1989).

A focus on graduation rates is a complex issue that requires reform on federal, state, and institutional levels to address funding, capacity, and inequities among student success rates. Without a conversation of inequity, students who are less likely to complete and increase graduation rates are more likely to be shut out of the system as seen in the case of California's priority enrollment. Research on graduation rates consistently identifies that graduation rates will increase with selectivity; highly academic prepared students are more likely to complete college (Goenner and Snaith 2004; Mortenson 1997; Porter 2000). As Bailey and colleagues (2006) argue, "Yet, as indicated, attempting to improve graduation rates by becoming more selective would violate one underlying mission of the colleges" (p. 499). As Bensimon and Marshall (1997) call for, policy must not be androcentric, but focus specifically on all social identity groups to find those assumptions and practices that perpetuate inequities.

Completion Over Learning

Related to The Completion Agenda's focus on graduation as the sole indicator of success is learning or the lack of measurement and accountability associated with student learning. A singular focus on graduation places emphasis on receiving a credential which is simply collecting a set of credits in specific predetermined areas of knowledge with a passing grade. Student learning, as primarily defined by the American Association of College and Universities (AAC&U), focuses on specific learning outcomes, such as knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, personal and social responsibility, and integrative learning (AAC&U 2013). Each of these learning outcomes has a set of specific descriptions and rubrics established to support the integration into academic degrees, departments, and individual courses. AAC&U argues that "Today, and in the years to come, college graduates need higher levels of learning and knowledge as well as strong intellectual and practical skills to navigate this more demanding environment successfully and responsibly" (AAC&U 2013, para. 2).

Much of the work of AAC&U is built on recent compelling data that suggests that students who receive a bachelor's degree do not necessarily have significant

gains in critical thinking and other measures of learning. Arum et al. (2011) found in a study of student learning that more than 35 % of college students are making minimal or no gains in their critical thinking and writing skills over their 4 years in college. Slightly more recent data reports that 45 % of students in four-year universities did not report significant improvement in learning during the first 2 years of college as measured by the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), a measure of critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, and writing (Arum and Roksa 2011). Gains in student learning across racial/ethnic groups showed significant inequality. Arum and Roksa (2011) found that Black students entered higher education with lower CLA scores and experienced fewer gains over time. Black students gained only 7 points in CLA scores compared to 41 points for White students. Looking at other measures of student learning, Arum and Roska found that less than 10 % of students who attended predominately non-White high schools received high scores on the SAT/ACT test and were less likely to have high grade point averages. Arum and Roska conclude, "There are significant differences in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills when comparing groups of students from different family backgrounds and racial/ethnic groups" (p. 122).

Another area of significance related to learning is the role of diversity experiences in the classroom; often ignored by initiatives that promote overall assessments via learning outcomes and degree qualification. The in-class experience seems to be left to individual instructors with little to no guidance on the importance of and integration of diversity within curriculum. Moreover, all students regardless of their race/ethnic background and gender identity experience gain from having diverse students in the classroom and engaging in discussions related to diversity (Milem 2003). The impact of diversity experiences cannot be underestimated as several studies note that experiences with diversity are "liberalizing, motivating, and eye opening" (Sax 2008, p. 234). For college men in particular, Harris (2010) finds, concurring with Sax (2008), that college men who have "Meaningful and sustained cross-cultural interaction among men who represent diverse backgrounds, identities, and experiences challenged prevailing assumptions about masculinities and motivated the participants to consider new meanings" (p. 314).

While there is no comprehensive evidence on student learning in community colleges, or arguably in four-year institutions, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement collects data from over 710 two-year colleges on several learning-related variables that help to understand student learning, albeit limited. For the benchmark of academic challenge which includes ten survey items that address the nature and amount of assigned academic work, the complexity of cognitive tasks presented to students, and the standards faculty members use to evaluate student performance, over half of all community college student responses in 2012 reported working harder than expected to meet instructors expectations (CCSSE 2012). The majority of students also noted that their coursework emphasized organizing ideas, applying theories and concepts to practical problems, and presenting information in new ways. Yet, 9 % of students report *never* writing a paper for their courses. Another CCSSE benchmark, active and collaborative learning, includes seven measures related to contributing to class discussions, group peer work, and

course presentation. Over 50 % of community college students in 2012 reported asking questions or contributing to course discussions, making a class presentation, and discussed course ideas outside of class with others. Differences across racial/ethnic and gender do exist across CCSSE benchmarks. In a study of one suburban community college, Sontam and Gabriel (2012) noted that females, in general, expend more effort in their studies and find their coursework challenging and intellectually stimulating. These results are confirmed in a similar study by Lammers et al. (2005).

The lack of learning is compounded by dissatisfaction from employers who report not seeing the critical thinking skills necessary in today's employment context from college graduates. Carol Geary Schneider (2010), President of AAC&U, has noted that "success in today's workplace requires achievement in at least six new areas of knowledge and skill development, which have been added to the already ambitious learning portfolio required in earlier eras" ("Employers are asking for more, not less," para. 1). Following the learning outcomes established by AAC&U, Schneider (2010) argues that employers are looking for employees with communication skills, broad knowledge of science and history, and analytic reasoning. Additionally, employers emphasize the need for global knowledge, cultural competence, and teamwork skills. Hart Research Associates (2009) in a survey of employers found that only approximately 25 % of respondents believe that college graduates are prepared for today's global economy.

Policy makers seem to assume that all students who cross some "finish line" have actually learned what they need to compete successfully in the global economy and contribute to rebuilding our democratic society. Abundant data suggest that this assumption is simply false (Arum and Roksa 2011; Pascarella et al. 2011; AAC&U 2005; Hart Research Associates 2009). Gary Rhoades (2012) argues that The Completion Agenda is incomplete and "Worse still, the completion agenda is counterproductive. In regard to educational quality, the completion agenda is compromising the learning agenda" (para. 3). Taking graduation rates and student learning together, we can see the potential issues with The Completion Agenda and other significant initiatives. The Completion Agenda does not address learning nor the discrepancies that exist across racial/ethnic and gender groups. Rather, The Completion Agenda places focus on student outcomes, generally understood as acquiring a credential, with little to no regard for learning and even less focus on differences across groups of students in academic majors or vocational training.

The focus on graduation rates and a lack of discourse on learning frames the assumptions of The Completion Agenda and places the subsequent initiatives within that discursive context. Practically speaking, the initiatives are built on assumptions regarding credentials (or vocationalism) to personal and national economic gain, a belief that learning does occur during and is signaled by credentialing, and little regard for barriers to and differences within student groups. This is not to suggest that initiatives have not considered equity. In the next section of this chapter, I present several initiatives that have emerged as significant to achieving the goals of The Completion Agenda. While some of these initiatives specifically address inequities and disparities in educational success, others take a more androcentric approach.

Effects of The Completion Agenda

The assumptions embedded in The Completion Agenda are found throughout recent initiatives in federal, state, and system-wide efforts related to community college student success. In this section, I outline several initiatives with attention to how a focus on graduation and vocationalism frame the logic of innovation and the recognition, or lack thereof, of the impact that large-scale initiatives have on specific student groups. What I argue is that a focus on economic outcomes via graduation rates argued in relationship to a need for a more educated workforce, a lack of discussion on learning and learning outcomes, and a "color- and gender-blind" approach to student success has unintended consequences by not addressing or reducing the barriers that students of color and women in community colleges experience. To accomplish this goal, I use a critical feminist policy analysis framework to review documents, websites, and other information on each of the initiatives organized by federal, national, state, and institutional levels.

Federal Initiatives

After President Obama's 2009 address at Macomb Community College in Michigan, a concerted effort was made to provide federal funding to support efforts of community colleges to increase postsecondary attainment and promote workforce development. Initially, federal funds totaling $12 billion were connected to the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act (SAFRA) designed to overhaul the student loan system from a private to public entity. After years of political wrangling, a version of SAFRA that created a new federal student loan system was passed in both the house and senate under the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act but did not include the $12 billion dollars for community colleges. Arguably, an alternative funding model was established to promote some support for community college reform under the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program through the Department of Labor. The TAACCCT grant invests in community college and industry partnerships beginning with $500 million and eventually totaling $1.5 billion in 2013, a small amount in comparison to the initial $12 billion. The focus of the grants are on training models to assist with partnerships with local employers, development of new data systems to track student employment and earning, and development of new online technologies for job training materials that are available in an open source format (U.S. Department of Labor 2012, 2013). These grants have supported community colleges across the nation in most of the states.

Another related federal initiative is the Skills for America's Future initiative which brings together companies and community colleges to help workers gain new skills. This initiative began with the 2010 White House Summit on Community Colleges hosted by the Obama Administration and in collaboration with business and industry as well as several philanthropic partners. The Skills for America's

Future initiative focuses on improving industry partnerships with community colleges to "build a nation-wide network to maximize workforce development strategies, job training programs, and job placements" (The White House n.d.). Established partnerships stemming from the initiative include the Manufacturing Extension Partnership, SkillsUSA, National Association of Manufacturers, and the Society of Manufacturing Engineers. Many efforts on behalf of the partnerships focus on helping at-risk students receive credentials, mentorship programs, certification programs, curricular development, and working with high schools.

Of note within the category of federal initiatives are the changes to the Pell Grant program. In 2009, the Obama Administration successfully increased the federal Pell Grant to $5,500, the first increase in over 20 years. This change was somewhat difficult to establish due to the increase in appropriations required to sustain the Pell Grant program. Over 35 % of all, or nine million, undergraduates receive the Pell Grant each year with a significant cost to the Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education 2009). Expenditures on Pell Grants changed from $8 billion in 2000 to $35 billion in 2010 representing over half of the Department of Education budget, making Pell Grants the single biggest expense to higher education.

Despite these concerns, the Pell Grant has a positive and dramatic impact on student access to college. As an example, in summer 2010 the Pell Grant dramatically impacted enrollments in community colleges. Katsinas (2011) and colleagues found enrollment increases by 20 % at community colleges nationwide. Of those students, 96 % received Pell Grant funds as compared to only 52 % the summer prior when no additional summer Pell money was offered. The need for summer funding is further evidenced by the number of Pell recipients that also take on student loans. Katsinas (2011) found that Pell recipients are twice as likely to take out loans as non-Pell recipients, suggesting that the gap in funding between lower-income and higher-income students is growing and that the Pell Grant is supplementing, not substituting for tuition costs for lower-income students. This is not surprising given the data on college tuition. The National Center for Education Statistics (2012) reports that college tuition rose 42 % at public and 32 % at private institutions from 2000 to 2010 with average annual current dollar prices for undergraduate tuition, room, and board estimated to be $13,600 at public institutions and $36,300 at private not-for-profit institutions.

Within both the multiple federal funding efforts and Pell Grant changes, the discourse is consistent with The Completion Agenda. The focus is primarily on economic development with the community college as the central sector in post-secondary education that can promote workforce development locally thereby decreasing unemployment and establishing a more educated workforce. In a press release from 2013, the connection between economic development and education is clear:

> "Building a well-educated workforce is critical to achieving President Obama's priority of growing the economy from the middle class out," said acting Secretary of Labor Seth D. Harris. "Funding additional grantees will allow thousands more workers around the country to acquire world-class skills in top occupations."

> "Equipping our nation's students with the skills they need is one of the best investments we can make to keep our economy growing," said Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "This third round of funding will build on the work of earlier grantees by strengthening partnerships between institutions and employers so students develop the skills and attain the credentials they need for jobs in high-need fields now and in the future."

In each of these quotes, words such as "economy," "skills," and "partnerships" to promote job attainment are consistent with the message from the Obama Administration and the efforts of philanthropic organizations. However, this discourse assumes a level playing field or a meritocracy within higher education that allows for any student, regardless of background, to achieve skills. No discussion of the barriers for women and other underrepresented groups occurs in the context of economic growth, skill development, and job attainment.

The federal efforts are also inclusive of similar partners in particular philanthropic organizations that tend to fund research and practical programs that support the connection between job attainment, skill development, and local economies. In the Skills for America's Future initiative (The Aspen Institute n.d.), the partners listed include the following: the Manufacturing Institute has partnered with leading manufacturing firms, the Gates Foundation, and the Lumina Foundation, and key players in education and training including ACT, the Society of Manufacturing Engineers, the American Welding Society, the National Institute of Metalworking Skills, and the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council. This will allow students and workers to access this manufacturing credentials and pathways in community colleges in 30 states as a for-credit program of study. The list of partners intentionally alters the focus on responsibility away from the federal government to specific business and industry partnerships to promote student success. In fact, several of the programs listed on press releases are to support at-risk students who are less likely to complete necessary job-related certificates. The focus moves away from TRIO Programs, Summer Bridge Programs, and potentially Pell Grants as federal initiatives to support lower-income and underrepresented students to business and industry as the primary funders and partners in student success.

Finally, critical analysis of these federal initiatives reveals a lack of interest in acknowledging and addressing social economic inequities across US income groups (United States Census Bureau 2010). The summer Pell Grant program existed for a brief 3 years before it was cut by consistent political attacks on the program under the guise of federal economic responsibility. However, the Pell Grant is consistently under review with politicians expressing concerns about the continued revenue growth required to fund the program (Field 2011; New America Foundation n.d.). Each year, politicians express a desire to decrease the Pell Grant allowed amount without offsetting tuition costs. Without the Pell Grant lower-income students will be unable to access a postsecondary education. Additional inequity from a lack of education correlated with lifetime earning potential will continue exacerbating the already increasing income gap among student populations.

National Efforts

Achieving the Dream

In 2004, the Lumina Foundation and multiple partners invested in higher education issues created the Achieving the Dream: Community College Count (AtD) initiative to close achievement gaps and promote student success in the United States though institutional change, public policy, engaging the public, and generating new knowledge. To achieve these goals, AtD has built a vast network with institutional-based teams to promote evidenced-based decision-making to close achievement gaps and accelerate student success nationwide. As of 2013, 15 states and nearly 200 community colleges are engaged in the AtD project representing a vast number of individuals and great potential for institutional level change. The process involved in AtD is institutionally based with teams at individual institutions that undergo a process of five steps – commit to improving student outcomes; use data to prioritize actions; engage stakeholders to help develop a plan; implement, evaluate, and improve strategies; and establish a culture of continuous improvement – to promote student success by achieving a certificate or degree. The goal is for community colleges to create a culture of evidence by disaggregating institutional level data by multiple student demographics and identify points of intervention as well as strategies to support student success at those intervention points. Other efforts to impact policy and provide knowledge include disseminating information to individual colleges and partners and providing catalyst grants, among other initiatives.

Unlike other federal and national initiatives, AtD specifically addresses the needs of low income and student of color as seen in the mission statement: "Achieving the Dream is a national reform network dedicated to community college student success and completion; focused primarily on helping low-income students and students of color complete their education and obtain market-valued credentials" and "A commitment to equity ensures that institutions focus on achieving high rates of success and completion for all students, especially those who have traditionally faced the most significant barriers to achievement" (Achieving the Dream n.d.). This focus places students who are historically underrepresented and have the greatest barriers to a postsecondary degree at the center of the initiative. However, AtD much like other federal and national initiatives justifies its work under the assumptions of vocationalism or credentialing under the discourse of economic success. The "challenge" as framed by AtD is "For the first time in U.S. history, the current generation of college-age Americans will be less educated than their parents' generation, yet our workplaces require higher-level skills than ever before" (Achieving the Dream n.d., para. 1). Another concern in the discourse of AtD is a continued focus on outcomes or pathway measures. The Lumina Foundation is a major player in The Completion Agenda with similar goals to the American Graduation Initiative for additional college graduates; therefore, the measurements promoted within the initiative include traditional outcome measures connected to graduation: "developmental education and college-level 'gatekeeper' (introductory) courses, grades, persistence, and completion of credentials" (MDRC 2011, p. 1).

Suggesting the AtD simply panders to national discourse based on economic assumptions simplifies their initiative. AtD also values education for the sake of democracy: "A healthy economy and democracy depend upon an educated citizenry, and increasingly, because of rapidly changing demographics and record levels of poverty, that means creating the conditions for more low-income students and students of color to attain postsecondary credentials" (Achieving the Dream n.d.). In this regard, AtD justifies the need for reform under the principles of economic need and workforce development but identifies values that speak to the historical role of education and higher education as promoting learning to participate in a democracy. AtD also situates the role of higher education in a democracy alongside equity. As one of the five principles of the initiative, AtD presents promising practices that support college success for low income and students of color, such as the Capital Community College: Black and Latino Male Resource Center which has substantially increased retention for male students.

Despite the ideals and amount of financial resources dedicated to AtD, an evaluation conducted by MDRC (2011) of the first 26 colleges engaged in the initiative found very little change in overall student outcomes. While a modest change was identified in students completing gatekeeper English courses, developmental course completion remained the same. Additionally, colleges did institute a range of change strategies, but those initiatives remained isolated and small in scale. MDRC (2011) noted, "a majority of these reforms reached less than 10 percent of their intended target populations" (p. iii). Other findings were slightly more optimistic noting that evaluation of programs and a stronger culture of evidence was found on many of the college campuses that influenced more transparency in student success and a greater investment in institutional research departments. One of the challenges MDRC identified related to equity is the lack of oversight and leadership on behalf of AtD. MDRC (2011) noted, "However, rather than provide coaching or facilitation to support colleges' development of an equity-based agenda, the initiative tended to rely on the colleges' own capacity for and interest in pursuing those efforts" (p. 12). Given that equity can be a challenging topic that requires reflection on personal biases, a lack of support for campus-based teams will likely not lead to focusing on specific student populations and deconstructing those institutional barriers that lead to inequitable outcomes across student groups. In fact, some institutional teams "tended to encourage colleges to develop interventions aimed at large groups of students rather than boutique programs for certain groups" (p. 23).

Achieving the Dream, unlike other initiatives analyzed in this section, began with a specific focus and set of values to support low income and students of color in community colleges. Their discourse consistently included a focus on equity, and their process was ideally outlined to help individual institutions with coaches and facilitators to promote disaggregating data by race/ethnicity, income status, and other student characteristics. Realizing those ideals has proven a significant challenge except for a few examples across the initial set of participating colleges. A major reason for the lack of success is the assumptions embedded within the initiative, particularly a focus on credentials and outcome measures framed in the larger context of The Completion Agenda. Framing success by pathways or outcome measures

continues to support the long-standing notion that good inputs equal good outputs, meaning that academically prepared students without significant barriers are more likely to be successful in completion measures and thus pathway measures. The question remains as to what measures would be best to examine equity.

Completion by Design

Another wide-scale national initiative of importance is Completion by Design. Funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Completion by Design "seeks to raise community college completion rates for large numbers of students while containing college costs, maintaining open access, and ensuring the quality of college programs and credentials" (Venezia et al. 2011, p. 31). Their goals are to increase the number and percentage of college students receiving a credential through system redesign, not smaller-scale interventions that often have difficulty in scaling up to serve large numbers of students. Four states – Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas – are involved in the project, representing 20 community colleges that collectively serve 250,000 students. Each state has a cadre of individuals who represent multiple constituent groups on campuses to support data collection, research, and all reform efforts.

The assumptions embedded in the Completion by Design initiative are grounded in a belief that students require support during their education pathway, of the connection between education and economic vitality, and the need to reshape community colleges to focus on supporting students through a pathway to graduation. The focus is on the pathways noted as, "Completion pathways are defined as integrated sets of institutional policies, practices, and programs that are intentionally designed to maximize students' progress at each point of their community college experience" (Venezia et al. 2011, p. 3). Students, according to research done on behalf of the initiative, desire to receive "transparent, accessible, accurate, and timely information" (Nodine et al. 2012, p. 1). Institutions can support students through a well-defined program of study, integration of support services in instruction, tracking student progress and developing intervention process, monitoring student learning, and outreach efforts to non-completers, those students who are no longer enrolled in college.

There is a focus on competencies and learning outcomes clearly defined throughout the Completion by Design documents; yet, the focus is on defining competencies to support student progress as defined by completion (such as partnering with K-12 schools to define entry-level competencies) and to offer credit for work-related experiences. Their efforts, while important in moving beyond simple graduation or completion rates, pander to discourse of vocationalism by offering that student success is defined by achieving hard skills as opposed to critical thinking or other soft skills. These assumptions are driven by a need to decrease student time to a degree or a credential and churn out more graduates in a shorter amount of time, thereby increasing efficiency and productivity, terms often used in economic efficiency models.

This is seen in organizational and economic discourse of efficiency and productivity. Partnering institutions are required to use existing revenue, not additional monies, by finding efficiencies and increasing productivity while maintaining open access. Quality is also paramount to their efforts and should be maintained or strengthened in individual college redesign. Contrary to the ideals of the initiative, the Gates Foundation is providing grants over a five-year period to support colleges. They also acknowledge outright that colleges "require additional supports if they are to succeed" (p. 29), but appear to focus on finding revenues within the current college budget, presumably by creating more fiscal efficiencies through other process, such as use of online education and a redesign of developmental education. This discourse is aligned with much of the funded research and efforts of the Gates Foundation.

In addition to a focus on vocationalism, the Completion by Design initiative acknowledges the importance of instruction in deep student learning but does not account for student culture or individual student needs. Students are generally cast as a monolithic group that requires additional support and tracking to progress successfully through a program of study. The integration of faculty and instruction within the process is laudable and does help to bridge the gap between learning and a focus on graduation rates, but does not appear to account for the specific instructional barriers that exist for English as a second language (ESL) students, for example, and cultural differences across racial/ethnic groups. Cultural differences that assume students need to assimilate into defined organizational process, practices, and logic are well defined in the literature as barriers to student success.

In several documents authored by the Completion by Design initiative, race/ethnicity and income status are referenced, albeit briefly. In the Changing Course: A Guide to Increasing Student Completion in Community Colleges (Nodine et al. 2011) report, the authors acknowledge that "Among black and Hispanic students first enrolled in 2005, completion rates were significantly lower, with about 12 percent and 16 percent respectively, earning a credential within three years" (p. 3). The report makes the connection between low-income and nontraditional students and economic opportunity by equating well-paying jobs to education and income status. Finally, low-income students are referenced as having limited knowledge about college and lack financial support. While acknowledging the individual challenges and barriers to collegiate success for different demographic groups in community colleges is important and well documented in the research, the discourse casts students are having a deficit, characteristics and circumstances that require some form of remediation.

In each of the two initiatives – Achieving the Dream and Completion by Design – their efforts were sparked and built on the assumptions embedded in The Completion Agenda. A focus on long-standing outcome measures, principally graduation rates and those pathway measures that lead to graduation, frames a need to support completion as a local and national economic concern, not a need for social equity. The concerns and barriers of female, lower-income, and non-White racial/ethnic groups are rarely addressed and when done so, in the case of Achieving the Dream, result in little progress. These influential initiatives with significant

financial backing continue the discursive trends which will lead to a greater focus on completion over and above access.

State and Institutional Efforts

Developmental Education

An area that quickly emerged as in need of attention after the announcement of The Completion Agenda was developmental education. Also referred to as remedial education, developmental education includes below-college-level courses and competencies, typically in English and mathematics, that students need to achieve in order to move into college-level work. Developmental education course are typically not transfer credit bearing and do not count toward completion of certificates or degrees in postsecondary education. Requirements for developmental education are often determined based on placement tests that may or may not, depending on the policies at individual institutions, be required before a student can register for college-level work. These developmental courses include topics such as arithmetic, basic algebra, and writing and reading improvement. These courses are offered in a multilevel sequence with students beginning at their entry level within the sequence.

One of the many reasons that developmental education came to the attention of policy makers and institutional leaders is the high numbers of students who place in developmental education courses via the placement tests. Nationally, over 40 % of first- and second-year community college students enrolled in at least one remedial course (Horn and Nevill 2006). Other studies with a small sample of community colleges show higher percentages. In the Achieving the Dream database, about 59 % of the sample enrolled in at least one developmental course. The rates for developmental enrollment disaggregated by student demographics show even more concerning trends. Regardless of the subject, female, young, Black, and Hispanic students tend to need more levels of developmental education. Melguizo (2009) in a study of developmental education and race at community colleges found that almost 60 % of students in remedial courses are African American and Latino/a. Moreover, Black male students are found to have lower odds of progressing through developmental sequences, particularly those who start at two or three levels below college-level courses. Finally, developmental students with greater need were more likely to enroll in colleges that were urban, large, certificate-oriented, and serving high proportions of minority students, particularly Hispanic and economically disadvantaged populations (Melguizo et al. 2008). Vocational areas also have an impact of developmental course need with students in vocational areas requiring more remediation than those in nonvocational programs.

In addition to the disproportionate impact of developmental education needs on students from specific demographic groups, there are documented negative consequences for individuals and institutions. First, students often "get stuck" in developmental education, taking the same course multiple times without receiving

a passing grade that would allow them to continue to credit bearing, college courses. Without a passing grade, students are ineligible to begin their collegiate educational goals. Bailey et al. (2010) found in a study of developmental education that 29 % of students who took developmental math and 16 % in development English discontinued enrollment in developmental sequences after failing or withdrawing from a remedial course. For other students, failing a course did not appear to have an impact on retention. In the same study, approximately 10 % of students exited the developmental sequence having not failed a course. As Bailey and colleagues note:

> Thus if one combines the number of students who never enrolled with those who exited between courses, more students did not complete their sequence because they did not enroll in the first or a subsequent course than because they failed a course. For example, for reading, 30 percent never enrolled, and 8 percent left between courses, while only 16 percent failed or withdrew from a course (Bailey et al. 2010, p. 260).

Other studies in Florida and Texas found that remediation did not have a positive impact on college credit accumulation, completion, or degree attainment, calling into question the need for such courses for even those students who successfully complete developmental course sequences (Calcagno and Long 2008; Martorell and McFarlin 2007).

Second, enrollment in developmental education is costly for students. While community college tuition is often low, particularly in comparison to four-year institutions, the cost of developmental education must include the time spent taking the noncredit bearing and nontransferable courses (Melguizo 2009). Kolajo (2004) found that the average time to degree for students who enrolled in developmental education courses was two semesters longer. Other studies confirm that time to degree for students who place into developmental courses is significantly longer than those who do not (Bailey et al. 2010; Melguizo 2009). These findings are not surprising since developmental education requires additional course taking and thus additional time; yet, the most striking reality is that students who are the least academically prepared and have the greatest academic challenges are spending more time and money to complete a degree. Furthermore, the more time that a student spends in course taking, the more opportunities for life circumstances to create disruptions in enrollment. Developmental students are found to become frustrated and leave college at greater rates than students not requiring developmental education (Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum 2002; Rosenbaum 2001).

Third, developmental education is costly for taxpayers and individual community colleges. Most four-year institutions discontinued offering remedial courses years ago, pushing the responsibility of developmental education to community colleges. Studies find that developmental programs use sizable public resources. A recent study calculated that remediation is costing $1.9–2.3 billion dollars at community colleges and another $500 million at four-year colleges (Strong American Schools 2008). State reports cite expenditures in the tens of millions of dollars (ADHE n.d.; FOPPA 2006; OBR 2006).

Due to a lack of student success and the economic feasibility of continuing developmental education at individual institutions, several states have taken nationwide leadership roles in redesigning developmental education offerings. Here, I present the work of Virginia to analyze their efforts with a focus on the potential unintended consequences for students of color and female students.

In 2009, the Virginia Community Colleges issued a report titled "The Turning Point: Developmental Education in Virginia's Community College." The focus of this report was on increasing the number of credentials completed by students by 50 % by 2015. Developmental education in English, mathematics, and reading was viewed as the primary driver in preventing student success as noted in recent data that shows that over half of students place in one developmental course (VCCS 2010). The goals of the taskforce and future efforts by Virginia Community Colleges included reducing the need for developmental education, reducing time to complete for those who need developmental education to 1 year, and to increase the number of transfer or graduating students who start in developmental education. The Developmental Education Task Force (DETF) set out a series of 8 activities to achieve these goals, one of which was the complete redesign of developmental English, mathematics, and reading. The redesign, as noted in the report, must include redesigning content, course sequencing, alternative delivery methods, and student support. The report also outlined a series of additional recommendations to include partnering with K-12 schools, collecting accurate data, accountability mechanisms, and a review of policies.

A second report was issued in 2010 titled "The Critical Point: Redesigning Developmental Mathematics in Virginia's Community Colleges," recommending a specific refocus of developmental mathematics across the 23 community colleges in the Commonwealth with a clear plan of how to proceed, including developing web-based developmental courses with separate curricular tracks for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, business administration, liberal arts, and career and technical education (VCCS 2010). The redesign would include revising the content of the curriculum, establishing 16 one credit-hour courses, creating web-based delivery methods, investigating early-alert tracking systems, and conducting research to evaluate the new mathematics developmental program. Their efforts included seeking input from faculty across the colleges though surveys, weblogs, and other means of informal communication. Resulting from their efforts currently is a new developmental mathematics program throughout the community college system. Preliminary data is unavailable to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

A critical analysis of the commonwealth's reports reveal a few themes related to external pressures or influences and the role of race/ethnicity and gender. The first important consideration in these reports and the subsequent work on DETF is the framing of the external pressures. In The Turning Point report, the authors state, "Roots of this widespread focus to improve student success are found in the VCCS's participation in the Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count (AtD) Initiative" (n.d., p. 9). The focus on AtD and the VCCS efforts is rooted in logic that "business as usual" will not support student success and the completion goals set

out by the Lumina Foundation, funders of AtD, as well as the American Graduation Initiative. In fact, the same report goes on to note that:

> It is imperative that community colleges and other higher education institutions in the Commonwealth significantly increase their degree production in the coming decade if Virginia is to remain a competitive force in the global economy. Institutions must respond to this national call for more degrees without sacrificing the academic integrity of the college experience (p. 10).

Other external pressures outlined specifically in The Critical Point report are the National Governors Association, the Spellings Commission Report of 2006, and the American Graduation Initiative. Each of these organizations argued a need to address remediation with a call for states and individual colleges to find new methods to support student success in developmental education. Furthermore, the report outlines the work of The Lumina Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, National Center for Academic Transformation, and the American Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges in piloting new developmental mathematics efforts. The logic of the work of VCCS is rooted in the national discourse on college completion providing the necessary drivers to push for curricular and policy changes across the community college system. As discussed throughout this chapter, the influence of The Completion Agenda and philanthropic organizations is strong by providing the logic and arguments as well as grant funding in the case of philanthropic organizations.

In addition, the level of discourse appeals to a general belief in student success without any recognition of the complexity of student life and the barriers associated with student success, specifically for students from traditionally underrepresented student groups. The glossing over of barriers and the simplification of barriers to getting stuck in the curricular aspects of developmental education does not even begin to address the significant barriers that students encounter before and during their course taking at community colleges.

The second important theme regards the absence of discourse related to students groups. One of the reports does acknowledge that community colleges as compared to four-year universities serve more underrepresented populations and place the responsibility on community colleges to increase the attainment rate of those student populations (VCCS 2009, p. 10). Data presented throughout documents underscores the lack of student success in developmental education, specifically noting statistics that indicated 60 % of students take one developmental course and 44 % took more than one (VCCS 2009, p. 7). In each of these statistics including the national and Virginia system-wide numbers, the data is not disaggregated by race/ethnicity or gender ignoring the significant differences in student success across these student demographic groups. Perhaps this data was included in discussions and professional development with faculty; yet as Chase et al. (2012) point out in their critical review of multiple state documents, taking a "color-blind" (and I would add a gender-blind) approach to student outcomes obscures the tensions between ideologies of affirmative action and economic drivers that push for additional credentialing. Essentially, a focus on education equity and access is eroded when policies, practices, and justification found in arguments laden with economic outcomes as indicated by traditional student success outcome measures (i.e., graduation rates)

dominate. The work of VCCS is commendable in pushing toward change and attempting to promote student success in an area of great concern, but more attention to the need for access and equity would help to uncover disparities and potential barriers to student success that are not accounted for in their efforts.

California Student Success Initiative

Over the last five decades, California has led state-level higher education policy with its California Master Plan that outlined a distinct and progressive role for a three-tiered postsecondary system consisting of local, community-based community colleges, state institutions, and research universities to support educational and economic development in California. Due to a variety of factors but primarily initiated by fiscal concerns, California engaged in a variety of reforms that eroded the Master Plan, dramatically decreased funding for higher education, and has, recently, led to a series of new initiatives that do away with the philosophy of the Master Plan to "provide educational opportunity to qualified students at a minimum cost to the taxpayer" (State of California 1960, p. xii). The focus of this section is on the California Student Success Initiative as it serves as the framework of many commissions and political conversations to overhaul specific aspects of California's higher education system and is an example of the unintended consequences promoted by The Completion Agenda.

Currently, California Community Colleges enroll approximately 2.6 million students in 112 community colleges which represent 25 % of all community colleges in the United States (California Community College Student Success Task Force 2012). California Community Colleges educate a significant number of California nurses, firefighters, and law enforcement personnel. However, concerns arise when looking at data on student success, a primary consideration fueling success initiatives across the country (California Community College Student Success Task Force 2012). A report by the California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force notes that only 54 % of community college students achieve a credential as defined by a degree or certificate. Of those students who start in developmental education, only half or less receive a degree or certificate, and transfer rates are well below 50 % for all students and less for students of African American or Latino decent. For these reasons and other political discourses, the California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force as well as individual politicians and policy makers are pushing for reforms to increase student success within community colleges.

One of those efforts is focused on priority enrollment. As part of the Task Force's overall perspective on student success being connected to structured educational plans, one of the many recommendations is to establish priority enrollment policies which allow students in good academic standing, with fewer than 120 credits, and an educational plan to register for courses before the general student population. As noted in the report, "Student progress toward meeting individual educational goals will be rewarded with priority enrollment into courses and continued eligibility for financial aid" (California Community College Student Success Task Force 2012, p. 8). This recommendation is envisioned based on a desire to restructure "…the community college

system to provide students with more structure and guidance to encourage better choices and increase their probability of success" (California Community College Student Success Task Force 2012, p. 7). The major concern and potential unintended consequences of such a policy is that students who are predisposed due to age, gender, race/ethnicity, parental education, family responsibilities, and knowledge of postsecondary education will be more likely to complete the requirements to receive priority enrollment. Female students and those from historically underrepresented groups tend to have a series of barriers that place them in developmental education that often stalls their progress or are more likely to stop out due to family responsibilities. With California turning away over 450,000 students each year due to a lack of seats in classrooms (Rivera 2012), those students with the most barriers are less likely to receive priority enrollment and have access to courses; they will simply fall into the group of student who are turned away.

Related to priority enrollment is an effort to limit the number of credits that a student can accumulate. A *Los Angeles Times* article (Rivera 2012) reports on Governor Brown's initiative to cap credits on "state-subsidized classes at 90 units, requiring students who exceed that to pay the full cost of instruction, about $190 per semester unit versus $46 per unit. In the 2009–2010 academic year, nearly 120,000 students had earned 90 units or more" (Rivera 2012). As reported in the article, one of the concerns is that a penalty that may occur for specific students who have a double major, want to explore multiple academic or vocational programs, or who are returning to college to retrain for a new job. Each of these groups could accumulate well over 90 credits throughout their lifetime and would be left to pay almost four times for each course unit.

The two states highlighted represent significant changes in community colleges with an emphasis on addressing a lack of student progress and completion in developmental education and progress toward measurable goals, such as transfer or completing a degree or certificate. Each of these initiatives, similar to the national philanthropic efforts, are sparked by external pressures signaling a need for community colleges to serve as economic drivers locally and nationally in the United States. Due to these influences, each state also built their efforts on the embedded assumptions in The Completion Agenda with little to no regard for inequities caused to female students and students of color. Whether it be creating priority enrollment, distance education, or new placement exams, a lack of deep reflection and data disaggregated by student social demographics will unintentionally lead to reduced access to community colleges specifically for those underrepresented students who generally do not result in completions as defined by graduation rates and pathway measures.

Recommendations for Research and Policy

In order to address the unintended consequences of The Completion Agenda on both female students and students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, a series of policy considerations and new research are needed to reframe discourse

and provide the empirical data for change. Considering policy changes is significant because as Conway (2009) states, "Yet even though community colleges are the least expensive option in higher education, as legislators become more concerned about funding costs, community colleges will be under increasing accountability pressures and may be forced to turn away the least prepared students as they attempt to bolster retention, transfer, and graduation rates" (p. 323). Without attention to The Completion Agenda and ways to integrate equity within the federal and national discourse, initiatives such as the California's priority enrollment will lead to a dismantling of the community college access mission creating an imbalance in the access and completion equation and scale. In this section, I outline several policy considerations as well as suggestions for new research.

Recommendations for Policy

The first consideration for policy is to *place equity central to national and federal discourse on college success*. As stated throughout this chapter, The Completion Agenda has framed college success as an act of credentialing for eligibility for jobs, thereby increasing the education levels of individuals in the United States. Support for vocationalism is widespread and built on economic assumptions of the role of higher education and has moved away from higher education as a social or public good. The discourse is seen across initiatives from statewide efforts in Virginia and California to national initiatives in Completion by Design and Achieving the Dream. Given the level of influence, little change is possible without a concerted effort to include as central to success equity which will require acknowledgement of sexism and racism in American culture and the relationship between social inequities and socioeconomic class. Understanding student barriers that directly impact the relative ability for historically underrepresented groups to access and to complete college is the first step to identifying how state and federal policies or philanthropic initiatives can influence student success for all students and how student success differs across student groups. Assuming that all students exist in monolithic categories will lead to increasing racial/ethnic and gender stratification in the United States.

The second recommendation concerns measuring college student outcomes. To frame discourse around equity requires a *move beyond traditional outcome measures* that focus on graduation rates. Several issues are related to graduation rates in particular. Federal definitions of graduation rates of 150 % do not account for the vast majority of students who take longer to complete their credentials. Moreover, students who are in noncredit courses are often excluded from these numbers creating additional focus on those students who are on a traditional academic pathway. Career and technical education and developmental education students are left out of these calculations and are, therefore, inappropriate for community colleges who serve large numbers of students outside a traditional academic path. As seen in the work of Achieving the Dream, a philosophy and vision that focuses on equity is incomplete and incongruent with traditional outcome measures. To understand

equity, we have to look at how students of different demographic groups are moving forward (or not) in a college environment, not assume that credentialing is the goal or a realistic option given the parameters of graduation rates. Another option is to measure student success through pathways, but this method is arguably just parsing graduation rates into smaller bits, not considering new methods for understanding student success. For example, measuring when students reach 30 credits as suggested in California's Student Success Initiative just captures a step toward graduation that is ultimately measured by reaching a total number of credits in a specific timeframe.

Of note in conversations and discourse around outcome measures needs to be a focus on student learning. AAC&U has multiple rubrics, metrics, and opportunities to consider new methods for capturing student learning. A focus away from graduation allows for institutions to track students as they learn material regardless of their eventual outcome. Perhaps students who learn material and are able to apply that knowledge to their jobs or get a new job achieved their goal regardless of the fact that they did not receive a certificate or degree. To do so would likely capture the nuances in student goals and success that would provide additional information on how to achieve equity and how we should define equity in higher education.

Related to changing definitions and assumptions around outcome measures is to *examine the impact of state-level policies before implementation*. Referring specifically to those initiatives on the state and institutional level, an examination of the impact disaggregating the data by race/ethnicity, gender, and social class, among other student demographics, is needed to project and question whether or not policies are androcentric and generic. Chase et al. (2012) in a study of transfer policies in seven states argued, "legislative statutes and regulations concerning transfer are written in a 'color-blind' manner. From a critical perspective, the fact that the legislation does not recognize and explicitly seek to remediate the impact of racism on minoritized groups has contributed to intractable racial-ethnic inequities in postsecondary participation and outcomes" (p. 30). For example, the California Student Success Initiative's priority enrollment will have a detrimental impact on female students as well as students from underrepresented groups due to their historical enrollment behavior associated with barriers to college going. Simple data analysis on the system level that identifies correlations between credit hours, attending orientation, and stopping or dropping out of college would show that priority enrollment will advantage those students with less social and economic barriers. Being more aware of the importance of disaggregating data and thoroughly understanding impact across student groups may alter the policies and implementation efforts to sustain access for all individuals.

Related to state and national initiatives is the need to *give individual institutions authority to define student outcomes and the flexibility to alter policies* to fit community needs. Community colleges were built to serve local community interests. Research on rural community colleges, for example, identities significant differences in community relations and student needs in rural areas (Eddy and Murray 2007). Giving individual institutions the purview to identify student outcomes that measure the success of their specific student population as well as the relationship

with local workforce development will assist in the ability to focus on equity and promote local economic growth, a concern according to federal and national discourse in The Completion Agenda. These outcome measures may be job placement, economic development, and skill development as opposed to graduation rates. In addition, individual colleges need flexibility in policies due to their differing student populations and the needs of those populations. For example, some community colleges are located in urban areas with larger numbers of students of color and lower-income students, while others are in suburban and more affluent areas. How initiatives to promote student success are tailored to meet the needs of the local community will dramatically differ. As found in AtD, a lack of support on the institutional level to consider equity will likely not lead to consistent and deep level examination and subsequent change. Any initiative that is seeking to address equity, regardless of how equity is defined, must be intentional and provide the support necessary to question implicit biases and facilitate discussion. If equity was easily discussed and addressed in higher education, intervention would be unnecessary and student data would not show such stark inequities.

Recommendation for Research

Coupled with policy considerations is a need for *empirical research that addresses current and future policy relevant concerns*. Knowledge about student success is often limited with significant gaps in the collective understanding of what factors impact student access and success. Institutions are often unsure about where intervention points exist to support and promote student success. More research is needed to know how to support student success and successful intervention strategies that lead to retention across student groups. Again, the focus is not on understanding students as monolithic groups but the diversity within and across students. Studies need to consider what barriers students from different demographic groups experience in career and technical fields in addition to traditional academic programs and the role of academic advising. In addition, transcript level analysis coupled with student report and direct observation can assist with understanding where students tend to drop or stop out and the structures that would assist them to retain. Other studies need to address the role of financial aid and how federal financial aid, including the Pell Grant, could support retention efforts in summer and winter sessions.

Related to more research on learning outcomes is a need *to understand multiple student pathways*. Increasingly, students are attending multiple institutions of higher education before receiving a credential. No longer is the assumption of a linear path in and out of four-year institution or starting at a two-year institution and transferring the "typical" student pathway. What we need to better understand is the impact of student movement across institutions and what impact some college has on student success. Studies need to understand the impact of student engagement and persistence when attending multiple institutions simultaneously or on a pathway to degree completion. These studies would need to examine articulation agreements,

credit transfer, and whether or not students of different demographic groups require engagement through academic and social integration. In addition, the role of part-time faculty is inconclusive in the literature. Do students understand the faculty part-time versus full-time structure and does it impact their success? These are just a few studies to consider.

More research is also needed on *new student success measures*. Increasingly, states are looking at performance-based funding models where additional state funding is provided to those institutions that meet student outcomes thresholds defined by graduation rates and other traditional student outcome measures. Without significant research that identifies the issues with using these measures in a community college environment and alternative, validated measures, community colleges may experience reduced funding. Examining those performance-based funding models and providing alternative measures are highly significant to individual community colleges in the future. This research could, for example, focus on the relative impact across student groups of some college rather than completing a degree. As already stated, examining job skills obtained, learning that occurred, and individual economic benefits are just a few opportunities for alternative outcomes measures. This area of research also needs to consider new learning outcomes.

Needed in future research is to examine the *impact of initiatives* the potentially negatively impact specific students groups which challenges community college access. Throughout this chapter, I argue that given the known barriers to student success in community colleges and the trends of enrollment and completion for historically underrepresented groups, The Completion Agenda will negatively, yet unintentionally, impact female students and students of color. What is now needed is empirical data with rigorous research methodologies that interrogates this argument and identifies the local, state, and national impact of specific initiatives. These studies need to identify the short-term impact, such as an inability to access new online developmental education courses or the accurate placement of new developmental placement tests. They also need to identify the long-term impact, such as the rate of college going for student groups disaggregated by race and ethnicity and whether or not access is an ideal or practically realized when courses are closed during priority enrollment or course registration periods. These studies may also focus on new learning outcome measures to help design and implement new measures of student success. Arum and Roksa (2011) used the college learning assessment to understand learning outcomes, but questions still remain as to the most appropriate measures that capture learning.

Another fruitful area of research concerns the need to understand *how to expand successful smaller-scale programs*. As noted in the MDRC (2011) report on Achieving the Dream, scaling up effective local programs continues to be a barrier to organizational change. Change needs to occur in conversations of calculation of graduation rates, barriers to completion for specific social identity groups, and adoption of new and innovative practices that scale-up successful programs and promote organizational change. Change on the institutional level, as Bailey (2012) states, "Innovative programs will clearly need to be part of any ambitious strategy, but they will need to be accompanied by broader and more comprehensive organizational

changes" (p. 94). Most small-scale programs are human resource concentrated with low academic counselor to student ratios and living and learning communities that provide opportunities for academic and social engagement, known predictors of college student success. In a resource-limited environment, such as a community college, scaling up these programs is difficult if not impossible. Research needs to identity new and innovative mechanisms to create more opportunities for high touch programming for community college students while identifying how and if new technologies can be utilized to support student success. Moreover, more research is needed on organizational change to identify specific practices to support change.

Conclusion

Rhoades (2012) stated in a critique of The Completion Agenda:

> Educational policy at both the federal and state levels has been emphasizing workforce development, credentials, and the terminal tracks of community colleges. The result is that these institutions, which have long been instruments of upward social mobility, are being turned into dead ends for students who seek ultimately to obtain baccalaureate degrees. The completion agenda will increase already substantial college achievement gaps between social classes and ethnic groups.

The argument of this chapter is directly aligned with the sentiment in Rhoades' quote and extends his argument with a focus on national, state, and individual initiatives that rely on the assumptions of The Completion Agenda and continue to ignore social and economic inequity. The relationship between access and completion are inextricably linked. Completion and access sit on each side of a balance scale with equity being when both are equally weighted. Access to higher education provides the opportunity for completion and must be a focus to promote success for students who are the least likely to result in completions. Yet, no emphasis on completion lends to something akin to the current public discourse of a lack of graduation among those who gain access to higher education. Goldrick-Rab (2010) argues, "If the definition of college success shifts from access to completion without recognizing that access and success are inextricably linked, community colleges are vulnerable to criticism and possibly reduced public support." Continuing to discuss completion without an emphasis on its relation to access places community colleges in an impossible bind where they are forced to tip the scale in favor of inappropriate completion measures gained by reducing access to those students who are most likely to complete. As Mullin (2012) argues, community colleges are in a conundrum with attempting to focus on completion:

> Community college leaders are faced with focusing either on (a) increasing completion rates using the traditional measures (i.e., attainment of associate and bachelor's degrees) established by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in international comparisons or (b) getting people back to work with certificates and industry credentials that are not counted as a success measure in international comparisons. Focusing solely on the former narrowly defines success while overlooking the needs and achievements of a significant number of people, whereas focusing solely on the latter will not

> increase the international ranking of the United States. Community colleges are therefore in the difficult position of balancing two completion agendas: the person's need to return to work and the nation's desire to be a world leader in terms of a narrowly defined set of outcomes. (p. 3)

To address these concerns, a changing of perspective and federal or national public discourse is needed alongside practical efforts to intentionally examine the implications of completion measures, establishment of programs, and new state or institutional policies on students of different demographic groups, particularly female students and those from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. Only then can the ideals of Bailey's and Morest's (2006) equity framework for community colleges be realized.

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