Latino residents sue over Compton voting areas

MarendaBiz.com

COMPTON, Calif. — Two residents of the Compton Community College District sued the district Friday over its voting areas, charging the boundaries are preventing Latinos from fairly participating in governing board elections.

Alex and Luis Landeros, who are brothers and active in local Latino political affairs, filed the suit in Los Angeles County Superior Court on grounds that the district is violating the California Voting Rights Act of 2001, the U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment, and the California Education Code.

Genethia Hudley-Hayes, special trustee who is overseeing the district, did not immediately return a phone call seeking comment.

Attorney Joaquin Avila said the lawsuit seeks to change the way the college district's four voting areas are drawn because the current apportionment dilutes the Latino vote.

One voting area, which includes the city of Compton, elects two trustees on an at-large basis. Three other trustees are elected from single-member areas.

The suit seeks to have five, single-member areas, each representing a similar population based on the 2010 census, said Avila, a law professor at Seattle University who specializes in voting rights law.

Compton Community College lost state accreditation in 2005 and is now operated by El Camino Community College District, but retains its own board of trustees as it works to regain accreditation.

The Compton district comprises seven cities with sizeable Hispanic populations located southwest of downtown Los Angeles. One of the district's five trustees is Hispanic.

The lawsuit is similar to one Avila filed in December against the city of Compton on behalf of three Hispanic residents. The suit seeks to overturn Compton's system of at-large City Council elections in favor of a district election system that would more easily enable a Hispanic resident to win office.

Although the city is nearly 70 percent Latino, no Hispanic resident has been elected to the City Council or other offices.

A judge denied a request to delay the council elections to be held this month. A full trial is scheduled on the case next year, Avila said.

Avila said he is preparing a lawsuit against the Compton Unified School District board on similar grounds.

Rising demand, fewer classes cause El Camino summer session crowding

The Daily Breeze

By Rob Kuznia Staff Writer
Posted: 06/27/2011

Summer school is normally a low-key affair, but the first day of classes this week at El Camino College near Torrance was like a footrace, with many students losing out.

On Monday and Tuesday, they crammed into classrooms, standing for lack of seats in the hopes of taking the spot of a no-show.

In Peter Marcoux's English class, there were 20 overflow students. He admitted two, and that's only because Marcoux generously agreed to take two more students beyond the 35-student maximum.

"The first two days were kind of crazy around here," he said Thursday, while distributing a test to the students who were lucky enough to get into the class. "This summer is pretty bad."

With the state budget in shambles, summer school is fast becoming a luxury at California's community colleges.

Grappling with a $400 million budget cut - 7 percent of the entire system's coffers - as well as the grim possibility of having to double that amount, more and more community colleges are doing away with summer school altogether.

This year, three of the nine campuses in the Los Angeles Community College District - Harbor, Mission and West Los Angeles - have taken this extraordinary measure.

Meanwhile, a strong majority of California's 112 community colleges - including El Camino, which is not part of the Los Angeles district - has cut deeply into its summer-school classes. At El Camino, the number of course offerings for the summer has fallen 35 percent in two years.

In a cruel twist, as supply dwindles, demand at El Camino and beyond seems to be on the rise. The end result calls to mind an old adage: "The early bird gets the worm."

"Students have to be better prepared," said Francisco Arce, vice president of academic affairs at El Camino. "They can't wait until the last minute to register and enroll."

Historically, he said, at least 40 percent of the students have put off signing up for classes until inside of three weeks before the first day of class. Nowadays, such students lose out.

The ginned-up demand is partly attributable to a change on the horizon regarding student fees.

Beginning this fall, the $26-a-unit fee at the nation's most affordable community college system bumps up to $36, meaning this summer session is the final opportunity to take advantage of the lower rates.

English major Morgan Andersen decided to stretch her dollar by taking two summer school courses this year, thereby saving $70. (Community college courses typically comprise three or four units.)

"That money will go toward the book fund," said the 2009 graduate of Redondo Union High School.

Getting into the desired classes is toughest for fresh high school graduates.

That's because continuing students - meaning students who have already taken El Camino classes - are given first dibs. This summer, a full 80 percent of the enrollment at El Camino is composed of continuing students.

Another disadvantage for recent high school grads is they must jump through a series of hoops before enrolling. These include assessments, orientation and educational planning with a counselor.

To get in by this fall, Arce said, "they need to get moving."

Statewide, classroom seats are evaporating in the face of record demand.

Attendance at California's community colleges hit 2.9 million in 2008-09, an all-time high.

Officials had expected enrollment to rise again the following year, but budget cuts caused it to shrink instead, by 145,000 students. Further retrenchments for the 2011-12 school year will mean the loss of an additional 140,000 students, officials say.

As for the fee increases, they will offset the $400 million in cuts to the tune of $110 million.

However, college officials insist that if Gov. Jerry Brown's proposal to extend temporary tax increases does not come to fruition, the system could endure an additional $400 million in cuts.

In November, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office surveyed its campuses on summer school. At that point, 63 percent had cut summer session by at least 50 percent, said Paige Marlatt Dorr, the agency's director of communications. Four percent had done away with summer school altogether. But Dorr suspects those numbers increased after Brown released his proposed budget in January, which called for deep cuts to community colleges.

In any case, students are beginning to feel the results.

Andersen, the English major, couldn't help but notice the crush of students on that first day.

In one of her classes, about 45 students had crammed into the room, even though it contained just 20 seats, she said.

"I worry about getting classes and being able to get all my stuff done on time to be able to transfer (to a university) on schedule," she said. "And that's just here. Then it's even worse at Cal State."

Cardona, Keilty Capture Redondo Fourth of July Runs

July 6, 2011

Joseph Snyder
South Bay Sports Examiner

Just before recent El Camino College distance running record breaking standout David Cardona finished the 18th Annual Redondo Beach Village Runners Fourth of July 5-kilometer Run, he dashed past the store of the place he works at and that has the running club in which he a member of.

In fact, the Village Runners has a large number of the top distance runners in the South Bay, including high school and college, and other ages ranging from preschool through senior citizens.

About a month and a half ago, Cardona dominated the California state community college races with wins in the 1,500- and 5,000-meter runs and he holds ECC records in both of them: 3:47 in the 1,500 and 14:13 in the track 5,000. He also holds the second best all-time record at El Camino in the 3,000-meter steeplechase with a personal best time of 9:12.

Last fall, Cardona was also state four-mile cross country champion for the Warriors.

Two years ago, Cardona recorded what many observers feel is the best ever South Bay time of 4:09.91 in the 1,600-meter run that led him to a fourth place finish in the 1,600-meter run at the California State Prep Track and Field Championships right before he graduated from North Torrance High.

Last Monday, Cardona showed thousands of South Bay running fans what he can do, just about a month before he is to leave to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo to compete on the Mustangs' cross country and track and field team on a full scholarship there.

The 19-year-old Torrance resident easily won the 3.1-mile race where much of it was the view of the Pacific Ocean at 15 minutes and 20.1 seconds, to defeat 28-year-old runner-up runner-up Noah Kaufman of Culver City, who was second clocking 15:57.

With just mostly a fun race, Cardona was not at his best, saving it for the fall cross country season and the spring track season at Cal Poly.

"I am seeking to break 14 minutes in the 5K," Cardona said on one of his goals for four-year university track and field.

This is one of the races Cardona is using to train for the upcoming college cross country season and he is running for a college which is usually among the tops in the NCAA Division I.

Placing third in the race was 31-year-old Justin Patananan of Palmdale in 16:00.4.

For the women, 24-year-old Torrance resident Alison Keilty captured her field timing 17:18.6, topping one of the South Bay distance running standouts, 41-year-old Nathalie Higley from Redondo Beach, who placed second in 17:46.9. Keilty's 17:18.6 is one of the best ever for the Redondo Fourth of July 5K since it started in 1994.

Taking third was Tiffanie Marley from Lake Hughes clocking 18:02.8.

Top 10 Overall Finishers:

Male: 1. David Cardona, 19, Torrance, 15:20.1; 2. Noah Kaufman, 28, Culver City, 15:57; 3. Justin Patnannan, 31, Palmdale, 16:00.4; 4. Michael Sevier, 32, Redondo Beach, 16:05.9; 5. Justin Uan, 16, Palos Verdes, 16:21; 6. Sean Kennedy, 27, Venice, 16:21.9; 7. Joe Robinson, 24, Hermosa Beach, 16:33.4; 8. Eric Palmer, 27, Monterey, 16:40.4; 9. Jon Macniel, 25, Diamond Bar, 16:46.3; 10. Lino Almeida, 25, Manhattan Beach, 16:49.8.

Female: 1. Alison Keilty, 24, Torrance, 17:18.6; 2. Nathalie Higley, 41, Redondo Beach, 17:46.9; 3. Tiffanie Marley, 28, Lake Hughes, 18:02.8; 4. Alison Atkinson, 44, Manhattan Beach, 18:29.9; 5. Emily Anderson, 34, El Segundo, 19:02.2; 6. Debbie Richardon, 48, Palos Verdes, 19:12.2; 7. Lindsey Young, 27, Redondo Beach, 19:39.4; 8. Anna Riedl, 15, 19:41.5; 9. Tamar Gamliel, 31, Redondo Beach, 19:57.6; 10. Susan Mitchell, 36, Venice, 20:13.3.

California school districts push for changes to education bill
The Sacramento Bee

July 1, 2011

A budget-related bill that Gov. **Jerry Brown** signed Thursday has sparked a division within the education community as school districts push to reverse new protections for teachers.

Lawmakers rushed Assembly Bill 114 to the Senate floor and passed it out of both houses in the final 45 minutes of session Tuesday night, as we reported Thursday. The bill protects teachers from further layoffs in the new fiscal year. It also requires districts to ignore the possibility they could lose $1.5 billion in classroom funding in December -- equal to about $250 per student -- as well as $248 million in school bus money.

Teachers say those protections ensure stability through the school year and prevent districts from preparing for the worst when they don't have to. District officials say those requirements handcuff their ability to plan for a midyear reduction. They are also frustrated by a provision that suspends requirements that districts show how they balance their budgets for three years.

Two groups that represent school districts sent letters this week to Brown. **School Services of California**, which advises districts across the state on fiscal matters, wrote that the budget itself is unstable and that AB 114 "adds insult to injury by gutting these critical fiscal oversight provisions, and we believe, will put hundreds of school districts at risk of insolvency in the future."

The California School Boards Association penned a letter Thursday to the governor, urging him to clean up the bill with subsequent legislation.

In the letter, the group suggests it may consider legal action against the state for possibly underfunding **Proposition 98** through a sales tax shift to counties. Many school officials believe an undercurrent of AB 114 was that the **California Teachers Association** could have challenged the state if lawmakers had not protected teachers and offered to repay schools $2.1 billion in future years.

"The version of the bill that was voted on was never heard in any committee, nor was it made available for public review and comment, leaving those responsible for the fiscal solvency of local school districts at a loss," CSBA said in a release.

In response, Assembly Republican Leader **Connie Conway**, R-Tulare, issued a letter Thursday that agreed with CSBA's complaints, noting, "In our view, there are many troubling provisions in AB 114 that inappropriately reduced school funding and restricted the flexibility of independently elected school boards."

Conway did not say whether she would propose legislation to roll them back, though any GOP attempt would likely fall flat given that the two parties did not work together on the budget.

Not all school fiscal representatives were angry. **Kevin Gordon**, a veteran schools lobbyist, said, "I would prefer that this would not be a part of the bill, but if it was what was necessary to get us a budget without cuts in (funding) to schools this year, in the entire context of what we've been through, this is language we need to live with."

Democratic leaders who crafted the budget downplayed the concerns.

Brown said in his signing message that districts should "take all reasonable steps to balance their budgets and to maintain positive cash balances." While AB 114 requires districts to assume they will receive the same funding level they did last fiscal year, Brown suggested they could still institute cuts if they were short on funding for other reasons, such as less money from the federal government or enrollment declines.

Senate President Pro Tem **Darrell Steinberg**, D-Sacramento, embraced the bill during a Senate floor session.

"If the charge is that we went out of our way to avoid (having) more teachers lose their jobs and avoid class size increases, guilty as charged," he said.

Community colleges consider cutting off repeat course-takers
California Watch
July 11, 2011 | **Erica Perez**

The California Community Colleges Board of Governors today will consider a policy change that would free up more spaces for new students by limiting the number of times students can repeat certain courses on the state's dime.

Community Colleges Chancellor Jack Scott's **proposed policy [PDF]** would cut off state funding to community colleges for students who take the same course more than three times. Students could get state funding for a fourth repeat of the class with a successful appeal. It's a move Scott has been mulling for several months as a way to manage the system's increasingly limited resources. In 2009-10, the state's community colleges had to turn away 140,000 students because of course reductions resulting from state budget cuts.

Proponents say allowing students to repeat courses multiple times limits the number of seats available to new students, is an inefficient use of state funding and doesn't serve students well.

"We are now in an era where we are having to ration education," Scott said. "I wish we weren't in that era."

Under the current rules, students can withdraw from the same course up to four times with the state footing the bill. On top of that, students can get state funding to repeat the same course up to two more times to improve a bad grade. As a result, in 2009-10, the state paid for more than 33,000 students to repeat a single course more than five times, **according to a 2010 report** from Inside Higher Ed.

"At a time when we are having such difficulty in providing enough courses for students, we just don't feel it's right to have somebody to repeat a course four, five, six times, and then individuals who are seeking it for the first time can't get in," Scott said.

An analysis from the chancellor's office indicates that the most-repeated courses in the system are physical education, music, math, dance and English – in that order.

The rules up for consideration today won't apply to physical education or performing and visual arts classes. But Scott said he plans to present a separate regulatory proposal to deal with enrollment limits on activity courses in the fall.

The main targets of the policy change will be course repeats in math and English "gateway" courses needed for students to move to the next level.

The chancellor's office analyzed enrollment records from 1992-93 through 2009-10 and found that the more times a student repeats the same English or math class, the less likely he or she is to successfully complete it. As the charts below show, 65 percent of students who took an English class passed the first time around. Fifty percent of students taking an English class for the second time passed, and just more than 30 percent taking the same English class for the sixth time or more got passing grades.

Part of the goal of limiting course repeats, Scott said, is to provide an incentive for students to pass the class sooner.

The chancellor's office took a different approach from what was recommended earlier this year in a report from the Legislative Analyst's Office. **That report** suggested the colleges create a cap on the number of state-subsidized units students could rack up.

Allyson Joye, a professor of English as a second language at American River College in Sacramento, said in a written comment to the chancellor's office that she supports the proposal.

"As a professor, I get quite frustrated when I see that some students repeat a class 2-3 times and/or enroll in and then withdraw from a class several times. Most importantly, this denies access to other students and should not be allowed for that reason alone," she wrote. "As a taxpayer, I cannot support a policy that encourages such a waste of our tax dollars."

But Leslie Smith, associate vice chancellor of government relations for City College of San Francisco, said the number of students who repeat English and math courses is very small.

Smith said that on average at City College, about 1 percent of students who enroll in English classes – 53 students – repeat the same class four or more times.

"The policy is hitting exactly the people that we say we want to keep in college and get a break," Smith said. "While it's a small percentage of the population that needs these chances, it really doesn't keep out (a lot of) other students."

But Scott said average citizens would be "amazed" to know their tax dollars were subsidizing students who were repeating courses four or more times.

"I don't care how small a population it is," he said. "They are taking up a seat."

If the Board of Governors approves the proposed policy change, there will be a 15-day public comment period. After that, the chancellor can file the regulations, which would be adopted after 30 days.

Student repeats and withdrawals from same course

These charts, provided by the chancellor's office, show all credit course enrollment records reported in English and math from 1992-93 through 2009-10.

ENGLISH				
	Grade A, B, C, P	**Grade D, F**	**Drop/WD**	**Total Enrollments**
1st Enrollment	6,846,046	1,541,778	2,076,682	10,464,506
	65.42%	14.73%	19.85%	
2nd Enrollment	658,915	272,862	377,506	1,309,283
	50.33%	20.84%	28.83%	
3rd Enrollment	116,546	56,994	86,056	259,596
	44.90%	21.95%	33.15%	
4th Enrollment	23,872	12,831	22,290	58,993
	40.47%	21.75%	37.78%	
5th Enrollment	5,671	3,316	6,635	15,622
	36.30%	21.23%	42.47%	
6th+ Enrollment	2,366	1,574	3,514	7,454
	31.74%	21.12%	47.14%	

MATH				
	Grade A, B, C, P	**Grade D, F**	**Drop/WD**	**Total Enrollments**
1st Enrollment	5,915,078	2,000,264	2,689,648	10,604,990
	55.78%	18.86%	25.36%	
2nd Enrollment	853,473	480,896	559,087	1,893,456
	45.07%	25.40%	29.53%	
3rd Enrollment	179,461	117,651	139,881	436,993
	41.07%	26.92%	32.01%	
4th Enrollment	39,990	29,762	38,963	108,715
	36.78%	27.38%	35.84%	
5th Enrollment	10,039	8,311	12,155	30,505
	32.91%	27.24%	39.85%	
6th+ Enrollment	4,325	4,291	7,349	15,965
	27.09%	26.88%	46.03%	

At Two-Year Colleges, Less Scrutiny Equals Less Athletic Equality

New York Times

GENDER GAMES
By KATIE THOMAS
Published: July 16, 2011

Los Angeles Southwest College has a new athletic field house and football stadium, but almost no female athletes.

Women make up more than two-thirds of students at this community college in the city's South Central neighborhood, but less than a quarter of its athletes. The college's decision to suspend the track team this year left women who wanted to play a sport with a single option: basketball.

Henry Washington, the college's athletic director and head football coach, acknowledges that his program is most likely violating federal law by failing to offer enough roster spots to women. But he said many of the female students are also juggling jobs and child care, and do not have time to play sports. Then there is the question of money. "I just keep my fingers crossed that we can keep what we have," he said.

Pensacola State College in Florida has suffered through its share of budget cuts, and athletic officials have long faced the thorny question of how much interest there is at a college that devotes an entire campus to health sciences programs, where students tend to be older, overwhelmingly female and, supposedly, less eager to play sports.

But there is no shortage of women playing sports at Pensacola. The college invests about $1 million a year in the athletics program, and coaches scour the state and beyond for talented female players. The women's basketball team won the state championship this year.

Bill Hamilton, the Pensacola athletic director, said his success had not come without struggle. But abiding by the law is a priority. "We don't do things around here because it's easy," he said. "We do things because it's right."

The situation at Los Angeles Southwest, without question, more closely represents the norm among community colleges around the country. Even as they play an increasingly vital role in American higher education — enrolling more than eight million students nationwide last fall, a 20 percent jump since the fall of 2007, just before the start of the recession — community colleges are routinely failing to provide enough athletic opportunities to women, as required under Title IX, the federal law banning sex discrimination in education. Many community colleges offer an array of options for men but just a single team for women. And dozens of colleges over the years had no women on their athletic rosters, according to federal education statistics.

No one disputes that community colleges face distinct challenges, with a lack of money paramount. But Pensacola, one of the rare exceptions among community colleges, offers evidence that the demands of the law can be met.

In many ways, Los Angeles Southwest's struggles — and Pensacola's success — echo the conversations that took place decades ago at elite four-year colleges and major public universities.

"People who say they can't find students who are interested or they can't recruit, it sounds very much like what I heard 30 years ago, 40 years ago in the 1970s," said Carol Kashow, the athletic director at Hostos Community College in the Bronx. "That's the reason for Title IX, so there can't be an excuse to not give opportunities."

But community colleges have rarely been scrutinized. That may change as an influx of recent high school graduates have entered community colleges, seeing them as an affordable alternative to four-year universities. This shift in the student body — already majority female — could lead to heightened demands from students who could well expect and even legally demand the opportunity to participate in sports.

"While some of our states and regions have seen the handwriting on the wall, many are still sitting in the dark," Karen Sykes, a former president of the National Junior College Athletic Association, warned officials at a meeting several years ago. Sykes said "it was only a matter of time" before community colleges would come under scrutiny for their shortcomings.

Because community colleges have a mandate to educate all comers, they have a special obligation to offer women a legitimate shot at playing sports, said Jaime Lester, an assistant professor at George Mason University who has studied gender issues at community colleges. "It's crucial to hold these democratic institutions — these bastions of people's colleges — up to that level of scrutiny," Lester said. "If we don't hold them up, why should we hold anyone else up?"

Nontraditional Students

Henry Washington has served as athletic director at Los Angeles Southwest College for 27 years, and each year, he said, women's basketball faces the same challenge: the team starts out with a roster of 12 players only to dwindle to five or six by the end of the season.
"Sometimes they're not motivated, they may have a child," he said. "There are all kinds of obstacles that are getting in the way of trying to even keep teams."

It is a common refrain among athletic directors at community colleges: women, they say, do not sign up for sports. While the economic recession has expanded the pool of traditional-age students, men and women who attend community colleges do not fit the typical mold of student-athletes. They tend to be older, and almost half of all community college students work more than 25 hours a week, according to federal education statistics.

But federal statistics show few differences between the men and women who attend these colleges: the men work, too, and tend not to be any younger.

And yet the men, despite similar hardships or responsibilities, still manage to play sports in significant numbers.

Those who lament the lack of athletic options for women at community colleges note that women are losing out on something that is more than some idealistic abstraction. A growing body of research has shown that participating in athletics can have a positive effect on health and self-esteem as well as academics and one’s professional career, benefits as valuable to community college students as to those at more affluent four-year colleges.

Sykes, the former junior college athletic association president, questioned whether some members were making a genuine effort. Some community colleges “were willing to make a halfhearted effort and then willing to accept the consequences,” she said.

Some argue that community colleges should do more to market their athletic programs to their demographic, either by rearranging practice schedules or by offering sports, such as bowling, golf or tennis, that might appeal to older students.

“If institutions and community colleges wanted to really provide those opportunities to women, and if there was some value in that from their perspective, they would find a way to do it,” said Frank Harris III, an assistant professor at San Diego State University.

Even Washington, the Los Angeles Southwest athletic director, said he did not accept the excuse that women at his college and others like it were not interested in sports. “One thing I did learn is that if you hire a woman full time to recruit women,” he said, “then the outcome would probably be a little different.”

But because of his college’s financial situation, he said, all of his coaches work part time.

Washington said surveys of local high schools have shown that potential students are interested in playing women’s soccer and softball, but that his plan to add softball had been delayed by budget troubles. California has cut nearly $400 million in aid to community colleges over the past two years, and recently cut another $400 million in financing for the next academic year. The reductions led Los Angeles Southwest to cancel 200 classes over the past two years.

Jack E. Daniels III, the president of Los Angeles Southwest, said he was aware of the need to add women’s teams. But the college’s financial situation is so dire, he is considering eliminating the entire athletic program, which currently costs about $300,000 a year.

“Right now, it’s probably a 50-50 proposition,” Daniels said. The new field house and football stadium were built using bonds approved by voters several years ago, when the economy was flush and “there was no indication of any financial downturn,” he said.

Community colleges indisputably have struggled in recent years as they deal with the dual challenges of increased enrollment and cuts by state legislatures. But critics note that the colleges’ problems predate the economic downturn.
“Before the downfall, everybody had lots of money and lots of students,” said Diane Milutinovich, who has filed several federal complaints against community colleges alleging violations of Title IX. “Why didn’t they do the right thing then? Now, when times are tough, it’s the women who are bearing the brunt.”
Finding a Balance

In many ways, Pensacola fits the profile of a typical community college. More than 40 changed according to correction by president Meadows/ktpercent of its students receive federal student aid, most have jobs outside school, and many of the college’s female students are single parents, said Ed Meadows, the president of the college. And like other community colleges, Pensacola has struggled in the economic downturn. Its budget has been cut about 18 percent over the past three years because of decreases in state financing.

“It’s tough,” Hamilton, the athletic director, said, adding, “We’re losing some positions and tightening our belts.”

Still, Pensacola has found a way to preserve sports programs, and women at the moment make up some 56 percent of the college’s athletes.

The athletic budget of $1 million, for example, pays for men’s and women’s basketball teams as well as baseball, softball and women’s volleyball. Many athletes receive scholarships for tuition and books. Some are given housing and stipends for meals.

Hamilton’s coaches visit tournaments across the country, attend camps at four-year colleges and pore over scouting reports. Filling female rosters “isn’t something we do by luck, it’s by design,” Hamilton said.

Brenda Pena, the softball coach, sent her assistant to Colorado in June to recruit at a tournament that drew more than 100 teams nationwide. Although her team finished last in its conference this year, she said, Pensacola has a reputation for fielding strong teams and for helping its students transfer to four-year colleges. As a result, Pena said, she is able to avoid the obstacle of attracting players from an older, less engaged student body by instead recruiting students straight from high school.

“We have plenty of people,” she said. “We have girls that are dying to play.”

In addition to being bound by Title IX, a Florida law holds all public schools to a high standard of providing equal opportunities to men and women, and the issue is closely monitored by the state community college system, Hamilton and other athletic officials said. “My president wants to know when he goes home tonight that athletics won’t be a problem,” Hamilton said. “That’s the rules, and we play by the rules.”

Still, Hamilton is not necessarily a fan of Title IX. He blames the law for the elimination of the men’s golf team in the 1990s, because one way of complying is showing that the percentage of female athletes is proportionate to the women’s share of the student body. Even today, Hamilton said, he must keep the rosters of men’s teams small because women make up more than half of Pensacola’s enrollment.

But despite his misgivings about the application of the law, he said colleges must provide opportunities to women if they hope to fulfill their mission to educate students through participation in sports. That is especially true at community colleges, he said.

“The kids down here, they are trying to crawl up on that first ledge of success in society’s eyes,” Hamilton said. “The more people of either gender that you can get into athletics, I think you help society tremendously.”

Loans and the Deficit
Inside Higher Ed

July 18, 2011
WASHINGTON — For much of the last decade, the federal student loan programs served as a piggy bank as Congress looked for money to cut or redistribute for other purposes.

The “profits” from lending existed mainly because the revenues produced (as borrowers with high interest rates repaid their loans) significantly exceeded what it cost the banks and the government to make the loans.

But because significant proportions of the programs’ profits flowed to banks and other lenders, slashing them – to increase spending on grants to students, or even to pay down the federal deficit – was often portrayed as taking money from “fat cat” companies to give to needy students, as Congress did when it poured tens of billions of dollars into the Pell Grant Program in 2010.

Today, the federal student loan program still produces significant profits – and as politicians here scour the federal budget for ways to cut the deficit as part of negotiations over increasing the federal debt limit, the student loan program is once again on the hit list. But now that the government itself is the sole provider of federal student loans, those revenues are flowing into the federal treasury, and it is clearer than ever before that the “profits” that would be redirected to deficit reduction and other purposes are coming from the borrowers themselves. And that gives the proposed transfer a slightly different look than it had when the profits that were being tapped were being taken away from banks and other lenders.

"The federal government is making a lot of money on students and on parents," says Becky Timmons, assistant vice president for government relations at the American Council on Education. "There’s a risk of almost treating students like an ATM machine."

For decades, the federal government has made loans to students to encourage college-going. Students (or parents) borrow government funds and repay them over time with interest -- some with the government covering the interest payments while the students are in college, others not. For many years, the government used a system of banks, other financial institutions, and state and nonprofit agencies to lend and guarantee the loans. Beginning in 1993, the government began making and servicing some of the loans itself; in 2010, the entire system became government-run.

The revenues from the loan program have often helped to finance government spending on other forms of student aid, but the savings have been applied to the deficit since at least 2005, when lender subsidies were cut by $15 billion by the Republican House of Representatives during the “budget reconciliation” process. At the time, Democrats condemned the move as a “raid on student aid,” arguing that the student loan programs should not be cut at all and that, if they were, the savings should be redirected into other areas of financial aid.

In 2007, in the College Cost Reduction and Access Act, lender subsidies were cut again, that time by $18 billion. Much of that money went to other financial aid programs, including lowering the interest rate on subsidized student loans. But because the bill was also passed using budget reconciliation, which requires that the measure reduce the government's deficit, some of the savings were not put back into student aid, said Mark Kantrowitz, the publisher of Finaid.org.

In 2010, the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act eliminated bank-based lending entirely, for a savings of about $67 billion in subsidies over 10 years. While about two-thirds of that revenue went to increasing the Pell Grant to its current $5,550 maximum level, about $20 billion was redirected to reduce the deficit.

"$20 billion is a substantial amount of money," Kantrowitz said. "It's the amount of the [current] funding shortfall in the Pell Grant program. If it weren't for this, we wouldn't have a funding shortfall in the Pell Grant program. We wouldn't be in the financial difficulties with student aid that we have."

Ending bank-based lending also ended the last source of politically easy subsidies to cut: it "scraped the bottom of the barrel," Kantrowitz said. Revenue that had previously been diffused among student lenders, loan servicers and other companies now flowed overwhelmingly to the federal government. In the meantime, the Pell Grant Program exploded, with more recipients as a result of the recession and bigger grants resulting from funding increases and eligibility changes. The program grew so big that even many supporters say it now needs to be reformed.

But the perceived need to find areas in the budget to cut is growing, not shrinking. With no lender subsidies left, and few places to find new money to continue supporting the growing Pell Grant Program, legislators (and the Obama administration itself) have begun proposing eliminating subsidies that previously went to students instead. The president's 2012 budget called for ending subsidized Stafford loans for graduate students, as well as transforming the Perkins loan program, which serves a relatively small number of low-income undergraduate students, into unsubsidized loans. The savings from both changes would be used to fund Pell Grants.

But more recent proposals would have the government hold on to the savings rather than spend them. The most recent proposal, from Republicans in the tense, secretive negotiations over increasing the federal debt ceiling by Aug. 2, would reportedly end all subsidized Stafford loans. The $46 billion in savings would be used to pay down the deficit. Some students could owe as much as $9,000 more in federal loans by graduation under the proposal, said Pauline Abernathy, vice president of the Institute for College Access and Success.

"In the past, proposals have been made of this nature, but they have been rejected," Abernathy said of using the savings solely for deficit reduction. "Even after recent increases in the maximum Pell Grant, it will cover less than a third of the cost of attending a four-year college next year, which is actually the smallest share in the history of the program."

Much of the tension between loan revenues and grant expenditures springs from the shift away from bank-based lending. The federal government borrows money for student loans at a far lower rate than is available on the market, and, while the interest rate on student loans is often below the market rate, there is still a gap that swings in the government's favor. In the past, lenders pocketed much of the difference. Now that the government is the sole lender, it has made more transparent the extent to which the federal student loan process earns significant money from student loan borrowers (mostly middle-class families) that goes to support other students or achieve other federal goals.

The current student loan interest rate, 3.4 percent, is about as low as it has ever been -- the end of a five-year gradual decrease that began as a campaign promise when Democrats gained control of the House of Representatives in 2006. Next year, the rate will return to its previous level, doubling to 6.8 percent.

If subsidized loans for undergraduate students are eliminated, and if the interest rate goes up to 6.8 percent, some students could end up owing a third more by graduation than they would if they borrowed now, Kantrowitz said. "You’re talking about an additional $9,000 in debt on top of everything else," he said. "That starts getting to the point where students will routinely be overborrowing."

Given the current political environment, that increase in how much students pay and the government takes in is unlikely to be accompanied by a significant increase in need-based grants. Many advocates say they are simply hoping that the Pell Grants are not cut back to pre-recession levels.

But the pending increase in the interest rate is likely to exacerbate the perception among students and families – a perception with a strong basis in reality -- that their payments are subsidizing other government priorities. That is especially true to the extent that federal policy makers stay on their current track of believing that reducing the deficit is more important than spending on financial aid.

President Obama and some lawmakers in each party are reluctant to impose significant cutbacks on the Pell Grant Program, but they seem willing to trade away many other financial aid benefits for students – including the in-school interest rate subsidy -- to protect Pell.

Though the proposal to end subsidized loans drew immediate criticism from advocacy groups and financial aid experts, who say such savings should be directed toward other financial aid programs and not used to pay down the deficit, the subsidized student loans typically have not had the same vocal constituency and support that Pell Grants have.

Their benefits are more opaque: the loans' interest rates affect how much students owe after they leave college, but are less likely to determine whether they can afford to attend at all. There is little evidence that they affect college completion rates. And though a cut in Pell Grants would immediately be noticeable, changes in the interest rate, or in subsidies for borrowers, might not be, said Jason Delisle, director of the Federal Education Budget Project at the New America Foundation. A report from the College Board's Rethinking Student Aid panel backed ending the in-school subsidy, although it said the savings should be redirected to Pell Grants.

"It’s a very sort of roundabout way of accomplishing a policy goal which is not really explicit, which is trying to lower the cost of college education for students," Delisle said. "It doesn’t change how much they can borrow, it just changes what they end up with in the end. It’s also not very transparent.... Most students aren’t quite aware of what’s happening, that they’re getting this benefit or how much it is. If it’s taken away, will they know?"

Even if interest subsidies were to be eliminated, he added, the loans are still a better deal for students than what they might get on the private market. They often go to students with poor credit and no qualified co-signer; if they were borrowing from banks, these students might not be able to get loans at all, or would have to pay high interest rates.

The same is true for the interest rate's increase to 6.8 percent, he said, adding that by a conservative estimate it will save the government $15 billion to $20 billion over 10 years. “That’s a big subsidy when you’re lending to a student at that kind of rate,” Delisle said. “It’s a subsidy the taxpayers are being asked to bear by effectively saying, 'Given the loan, given the risks, given the going rate, we’re going to lend at less than that.' ”

Whether borrowers and their families will see it that way when the interest rates go up remains to be seen. The entirely government-run lending program is still new – only a year of issuing all federal student loans – and, as the costs and benefits of that approach become clearer, some changes might be made, Timmons said.

“We’ve only got a couple of years’ experience with direct lending in an economic environment unlike any other we’ve ever seen in our lifetimes,” she said. “I think once there’s some experience with the government running [all] direct lending, people will need to sit down and see if policy adjustments are necessary to make sure rational policy is being achieved.”

The renewal of the Higher Education Act in 2013 might be a good time to tackle those questions, she said, adding that a key one would be “determining what is a reasonable amount of administrative overhead without being a serious profit-making engine.”

The risk, of course, is that in deficit-minded times, a program that is a profit-making engine might be considered more rational than most.

— Libby A. Nelson and **Doug Lederman**

More Default Danger Ahead
Inside Higher Ed

July 18, 2011
BOSTON -- For student aid administrators, few factors are as seemingly unpredictable -- and as important -- as the cohort default rate, which measures how many students default on their loans in the first years after graduation.

Next year, when the government starts measuring the percentage of student borrowers who default on their loans in the first three years after entering repayment, rather than the two currently used for measurement, those rates, which help determine which colleges' students are eligible for federal financial aid programs, are expected to increase for many institutions.

At the annual conference of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, which began here on Sunday, college financial aid officers discussed ways to prevent students from defaulting and the factors that might lead them to stop making payments on their loans. While they recommended several strategies, including financial literacy classes, advising students to borrow as little as possible and requiring counseling sessions for those who are borrowing a large amount of money, they also said that many of the factors that go into defaults are ultimately outside of institutions' control -- except for one.

Students who complete college are far less likely to default than are those who drop out, said Jacob Gross, policy and planning research analyst at the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission. "The most important thing we can do to help students not default is to help them finish their credential," Gross said at one of two default-rate sessions Sunday.

The other factors that go into loan defaults are complicated and frequently interrelated, he said: low-income and minority students are more likely to default than white students or those from wealthy families. Students at for-profit colleges or colleges where they study for less than four years are at higher risk as well. Single parents, or those who are separated, divorced or widowed, are less likely to pay back their loans.

And, in a statistic that several financial aid officers said was surprising, older students (at least those seeking bachelor's or associate degrees) are more likely than younger students to default.

A study in West Virginia found that students who received Pell Grants were more likely to default at four-year institutions, but not at two-year colleges. Among community colleges, those with a high proportion of minority students also had higher default rates, but the opposite was true at four-year institutions. The findings highlighted the complicated nature of measuring default, and the only consistent statistic was the relationship between graduation rates and default rates, Gross said.

At both sessions, financial aid officers said they were frustrated by the regulations and the task of dealing with students who -- despite what the administrators say are their best efforts -- sometimes don't grasp that loans must be repaid.

Adding to that frustration was the fact that many factors that make students likely to default are hard to change: race, ethnicity, income, family circumstances. “There isn’t a lot you can do in your day-to-day work” to deal with those structural issues, Gross said. The presenters tried to focus on achievable goals.

Students should be discouraged from borrowing more than they need, especially in unsubsidized or private loans, said Kathy Bialk, director of student aid and financial assistance at Marshall University. She also said colleges should be “discreet” about private loan options to ensure that few students take advantage of them.

At a separate session, Angie Hovatter, the director of financial aid at Frostburg State University, suggested more extreme steps that institutions could take, including mandatory counseling for students who want to borrow more than $30,000 or a “bare-bones budget” that would lead students to believe they need less money for college life than they actually would, leading them to borrow less.

Student aid administrators present at both sessions said during the discussions that, given the relationship between default rates and graduation rates, the rest of the faculty and administrators should be involved in stopping student defaults.

The shift to three-year default rates next year will highlight problems, even at institutions that think they are doing well, Bialk said. “The three-year rates will display realities,” she said.

— Libby A. Nelson

Memorial service Friday for ECC journalism teacher Jolene Combs

Daily Breeze

From staff reports
Posted: 07/18/2011

A memorial service for longtime El Camino College journalism instructor Jolene Combs has been set for Friday.

The service will be at 3 p.m. at Riviera United Methodist Church, 375 Palos Verdes Blvd., Redondo Beach.

Combs, 69, of Rolling Hills Estates died Wednesday of a heart attack while undergoing treatment for pneumonia.

Combs taught journalism, yearbook and English classes at Redondo Union High School in Redondo Beach beginning in 1970. In 1984, she moved to El Camino, where she taught journalism and advised the student publications, including the Warwhoop and Union newspapers.

Jolene Combs came to El Camino College as a journalism professor in 1984, teaching classes and advising student publications, including the Warwhoop newspaper, which later became The Union.

U. of Alaska Researcher Presses More-Inclusive Approach to Measuring Student Achievement

The Chronicle of Higher Education

July 17, 2011

By Ryan Brown

Measured against commonly used definitions of student success, the University of Alaska at Anchorage performs poorly. Its most recent graduation rate is only 24.6 percent, and a quarter of its full-time students don't return after their first year.

But when Gary A. Rice, associate vice provost for institutional research, looks at those numbers, he doesn't see a lagging university. He sees statistics that fail to reflect the experiences of the campus's students.

The graduation rate, for example: Because the federal government tells colleges to count only full-time students who never transfer, Anchorage's graduation figures take into account only 5 percent of students enrolled on its campus. Nineteen out of every 20 students there aren't included in the official numbers; some attended part time, some took longer than six years to graduate, some transferred into or out of the university, and some never intended to get a degree at all.

That the federal data, often used to measure colleges' performance, render 95 percent of a university's students invisible is a constant frustration for Mr. Rice, who has spent 10 years at Anchorage crunching its federally required graduation-rate numbers and explaining their limits. So he decided to design a new way to capture student achievement—and lack thereof—at his university.

"Over the years, I realized that the traditional metric was a really antiquated way to hold higher education accountable," he says. "So basically I said, It's time to build a better mousetrap."

The result is something he calls the Student Learning Progress Model, a tracking system that follows all entering students for 10 years. The program monitors not only whether and when they graduate during that period, but also their academic performance and enrollment history along the way. One of its more unusual elements is its formula for measuring student success among nondegree-seeking students, factoring in the percentage of courses that each student passes.

Mr. Rice says the model, which he developed at Anchorage and is being tested at 19 other colleges and universities this year, gives a more holistic picture of student achievement than the official government data. It gets to the heart of one of higher education's longstanding questions, he says: Are universities really helping students to learn?

"We have to see student success as a process and not just an all-or-none situation," says Mr. Rice.

The Old Mousetrap

For more than two decades, one of the few standardized ways to measure student achievement in American colleges and universities has been their federally reported graduation rates.

That gold standard dates back to 1990, when Congress passed the Student Right-to-Know Act, requiring that colleges release data each year on how many students have left campus with degrees, and specifying how to measure that.

To standardize the data, the law narrowed the group that colleges were to track to full-time undergraduates who enrolled in the fall as freshmen and never transferred. The graduation rate that colleges were required to calculate was the number of those students who completed a degree within 150 percent of the normal completion time—six years for a bachelor's degree, three years for an associate degree.

But that system of measurement is far from comprehensive. According to one estimate, federal graduation-rate data fail to include up to half of students enrolled in colleges across the country. At many institutions that enroll large numbers of adults and other nontraditional students, the guidelines have long generated befuddling numbers that reveal little about the populations those colleges serve.

"The danger of simple numbers is that when you have institutions with very different missions, a simple comparison is frequently wrong or at least misleading," says Gary R. Pike, executive director of information management and institutional research and an associate professor of higher education and student affairs at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis.

For example, at Black Hills State University, in South Dakota, many students are military personnel at the nearby Ellsworth Air Force Base. The transience of military life means that most of those students don't stay put long enough to finish a degree, says Erin J. Holmes, the university's director of institutional research and assessment.

When Black Hills reports its six-year graduation rate, which is now 30 percent, it can't claim any of the Air Force personnel who started their college careers there but finished at other colleges, or any who enrolled at Black Hills as transfer students and then earned degrees. In fact, only 15 percent of Black Hills students are counted in the federally reported graduation rate.

When Ms. Holmes heard about the Student Learning Progress Model that Mr. Rice had developed at Anchorage, she immediately applied to participate in the testing.

"The old models just weren't getting at who we are serving as an institution," she says.

2-Year Measures of Success

If graduation rates have historically been a contentious subject, however, they remain one of the few widely available and standardized yardsticks for assessing student achievement. Mr. Rice, however, would like to see the most commonly used metrics better reflect what all students are achieving.

"Higher education wasn't created in the first place just so students could get degrees," he says. "It was created to give students advanced knowledge."

Better measures will require colleges to track every student who walks in their doors, he says, and will recognize that many students won't follow the traditional four-year path to a diploma.

He designed the model to flag every student who enrolls each fall at Anchorage, from those in its two-year programs through those in graduate programs, and to track each student's progress toward particular learning goals for 10 years—a period that he says accommodates the extended time frame it takes many students to finish a degree.

For full- or part-time students aiming for a degree, that means looking at how many semesters they enroll in classes, and how many intermediate goals they achieve along the way (such as earning an associate degree leading to a bachelor's), in addition to whether they eventually earn a diploma. For students who enroll with no intention of earning a degree, Mr. Rice has another way of measuring students' success: simply looking at how many of their courses they pass.

Tracking transfer students is another obstacle that Mr. Rice dealt with. Unlike standard graduation-rate calculations, the Student Learning Progress Model also follows for 10 years students who transfer into an institution. To follow those who move to other colleges, he instructs institutional researchers using his model to collect information from the National Student Clearinghouse database to find out how the students fare after they leave.

What happens to transfer students is an especially important question for community colleges, which view students' moving into four-year institutions as a victory on par with graduation. Martha Oburn, executive director of institutional research and innovation at Houston Community College, says she signed on to test the Student Learning Progress Model as a way to tell a more complete story about what happens to the 75,000 students who pour into her system's classrooms each semester.

"Community colleges really have trouble getting the message out about their mission and successes," she says. "It's very hard for us to find accountability methods that actually work for us."

The U.S. Education Department has convened a panel to look at new ways of measuring success at two-year institutions. At a meeting in June of the department's Committee on Measures of Student Success, the educators, policy makers, and consultants who make up the panel emphasized the need to find ways to make alternate types of achievement a standard form of measurement. Those alternatives include course-completion rates and intermediate progress markers such as finishing general-education requirements. The panel also encouraged an expanded time frame for measuring graduation rates.

"The Alaska model is addressing a lot of the issues we're looking at," says Linda M. Thor, a member of the committee and chancellor of the Foothill-De Anza Community College District, in California. "It really seems designed to focus on the student and not to try and have a one-size-fits-all style of measurement."

But, Ms. Thor points out, much of the information that the Student Learning Progress Model studies is old hat to institutional researchers. None of its data points—enrollment, class completion, transfer information—is a new or unique measure of student progress.

"What's more novel," says Mr. Pike, of Indiana-Purdue, "is grouping all these elements together."

Mr. Rice says he designed the model to use data to which institutional researchers would already have access. The "paradigm shift," as he calls it, is how those data are being used in new ways to measure student success.

Overselling?

Even simply reorganizing and regrouping existing figures, however, can be a time-intensive process for institutional researchers. At some colleges, they may already be stretched too thin to tackle the work the model demands. "Not all institutions have the resources for this," Ms. Thor says. "They're going in the right direction, but I'm not sure if it's scalable."

Robert K. Toutkoushian, a professor at the Institute of Higher Education at the University of Georgia and editor in chief of the journal Research in Higher Education, says Mr. Rice "may be overselling" the newness of his strategy. In fact, Mr. Toutkoushian argues, "student-learning progress" itself is something of a misnomer. Finding out how many courses students finished or how long it took them to graduate doesn't actually tell you how much their knowledge or abilities expanded, he says. At best, those figures can be used to extrapolate from the hard data of grades how much learning—a nebulous concept—has occurred.

The researchers at Alaska "are critical of graduation rates because they don't measure learning directly, but then neither does this model," Mr. Toutkoushian says.

Mr. Rice acknowledges that grades are an imperfect way of measuring how much someone learns, but he says that "until a better metric is established, this is what we've got."

Sandra E. Elman, president of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, which accredits the University of Alaska at Anchorage, says she believes the model has "great potential" as a tool for accreditors to assess a college or university's success with student learning. "It's comprehensive, it's inclusive, and it's systematic," she says. "It could be a very effective model to supplement what universities are already doing."

For Mary Ann Coughlin, assistant vice president for academic affairs at Springfield College, in Massachusetts, the best asset of the student-learning-progress framework is that it lets her look at the "footprints" that different kinds of students leave at the college.

As at the other institutions participating in the Alaska model's test, she broke her students into different subpopulations that she could follow over time and compare with the student body at large. That way, she says, she can see how athletes or older students, for instance, perform compared with their peers.

"It helps us look at the type of support we give our students," she says, "and to identify students who are at risk—or not—for completing their degrees."

The 19 institutions outside Alaska using the Student Learning Progress Model will finish their testing at the end of this calendar year. From there, Mr. Rice says, it's up to them where to go next. Several institutions say they will begin by dispersing the data as widely as possible to their administrators, trustees, and others.

"We want it to be part of the conversation," says Ms. Oburn, in Houston. "We want it to impact decision-making because if it doesn't, frankly, why bother?"

Online and Incomplete

Inside Higher Ed

July 19, 2011
Online education is all the rage with politicians looking for ways to expand the capacity of public colleges to educate more students -- on a budget. Tim Pawlenty, the Republican presidential candidate, pushed online education while he was governor of Minnesota. Rick Perry, the Texas governor who may soon become a Republican presidential candidate, has suggested that web-based instruction could be the key to offering degrees to students that are much less expensive than those in the state today.

But a new study urges caution to those who believe that online education is a panacea for educating more community college students. The study finds that students who enrolled in online courses -- controlling for various factors that tend to predict success -- were more likely to fail or drop out of the courses than were those who took the same courses in person. Notably, there was not a gap in completion between those enrolled in hybrid and in-person courses.

Further, the students who took online courses early in their community college careers were slightly but statistically significantly less likely than were other students to come back for subsequent terms. And students who took higher shares of coursework online than did their peers were slightly but statistically significantly less likely either to finish a degree or certificate or to transfer to a four-year institution.

The study was by Di Xu and Shanna Smith Jaggars of the Community College Research Center at Teachers College of Columbia University. Their analysis is based on a large cohort -- the 51,000 students who entered community and technical colleges in Washington State in 2004. And the study is similar to one on students in Virginia, adding to the researchers' belief that the trends are real and potentially troublesome in that increasing numbers of community college students are enrolling online.

The study notes that enrollments of community college students in online courses have grown at a rapid pace, from just over 700,000 in 1997-98 to 5 million in 2006-7, with every indication that the numbers have continued to soar. And the authors note that there are good reasons for community colleges to embrace online education, especially "to accommodate the need for flexibility among their student population, many of whom hold part- or full-time jobs."

In keeping with that theme, the authors don't suggest any abandonment of online education. Rather, they urge community colleges in Washington State and elsewhere to consider steps that would improve the chances of success of some online students (while encouraging others to try face-to-face instruction). Among the recommendations:

- Require students to take an assessment of their readiness for online instruction. (Washington State encourages, but does not require such participation.) Further, the assessment might do more, the authors write, for students who are found to be unlikely to succeed. For instance, it might automatically point them to courses they could take in person.
- Add training for faculty members on online pedagogy.

- Improve student support services. The authors note that many community colleges offer around-the-clock technical support for online students, but offer tutoring and academic online services only during limited hours. The same scheduling reasons that encourage community college students to enroll online mean that they need flexible hours on a range of services, the authors write.

— Scott Jaschik

Community college students struggle with online courses
California Watch

July 20, 2011 | **Erica Perez**

As California's community colleges add more online classes to their offerings, a new report from the Community College Research Center has found that students are more likely to fail or withdraw from online courses than from traditional ones.

The report, which comes from the Teachers College at Columbia University and was written by Di Xu and Shanna Smith Jaggars, recommends that colleges bolster support systems to increase students' success rates in these classes.

While several reports have compared students' performance in online classes against traditional formats, **this report** focuses exclusively on community colleges and adjusts its analysis for student qualities. The study, covered this week in **Inside Higher Ed** and **The Chronicle of Higher Education**, tracked community college students for nearly five years in Washington state, and its findings are similar to those of an earlier study by the same authors in Virginia.

The authors found that students who participated in online courses had lower success rates even after controlling for certain characteristics that tend to influence students' success, including their previous academic performance and the number of hours they worked while taking classes. Overall, online course completion rates were 8 percentage points lower than face-to-face rates, they found.

The gap in success rates was even bigger for remedial English and math classes, which saw online course success rates that were 12 percentage points lower than completion rates for the face-to-face equivalents.

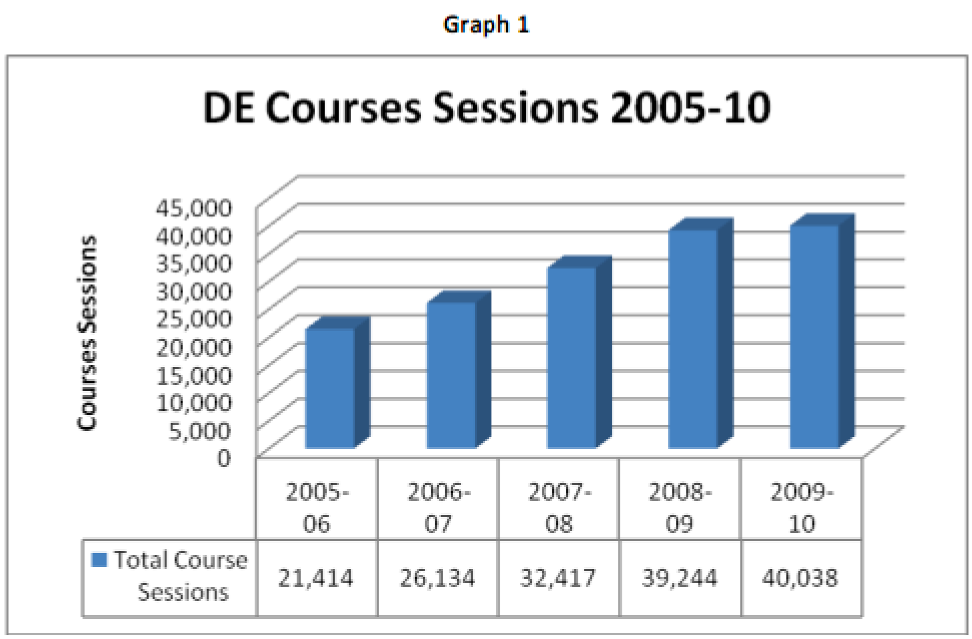
The researchers tracked more than 50,000 students in Washington state community and technical colleges from fall 2004 through spring 2009.

They found that, in general, students who worked more hours and were more academically prepared were more likely to take an online class. Online courses also were significantly more popular among students who were female, white, fluent in English, transfer-oriented, eligible for financial aid, had never enrolled in remedial education or were older than 25 when they entered college.

In California, community colleges Chancellor Jack Scott has advocated an increase in online education as one of several ways the college system ought to try to do more with less. In **his 2009 speech [PDF]**, "Living in Difficult Times," Scott said increasing the system's online class offerings was one of five necessary innovation strategies at a time when on-campus facilities are often "stretched to the max."

An **April 2011 report [PDF]** from the chancellor's office shows that online education has grown exponentially at the colleges and that students are less likely to successfully complete these classes than traditional courses.

The report looked at distance education courses, 89 percent of which are online classes. In 2005-06, community college campuses in California offered 21,407 distance education course sessions. By 2009-10, the colleges offered 39,964 distance education course sessions – an 87 percent increase. By another measure, enrollment in distance education classes grew from about 12 percent of total enrollment to about 24 percent in the five-year period.



Source:

California Community Colleges

The growth of distance education at California community colleges

The report shows a gap between success rates for online and traditional courses. Face-to-face classes had a success rate of 67 percent – 10 percentage points higher than the rate for distance education courses. Unlike the Teachers College statistical analysis, however, the chancellor's office report does not adjust its analysis for student characteristics.

Success rates for credit distance education and traditional education course sessions (duplicated head count)

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Credit distance education sessions	53%	53%	54%	55%	57%
Credit traditional education sessions	64%	65%	65%	67%	67%

Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office					

A survey of more than 9,000 California community college students who had withdrawn from distance education courses indicated that the top reason for dropping was a personal challenge related to their family, health, job or child care.

About 30 percent said they couldn't handle the combination of study and work duties, while another 30 percent said they had fallen behind and it was hard to catch up.

The Teachers College report recommends that colleges do more to improve student learning in online formats. For one, the study suggests requiring that before students can sign up for an online class, they take an assessment on whether online learning is a good fit for them.

College Accreditation and Federal Aid by the Numbers
Why We Need to Reform the Accreditation System

Center for American Progress

By David Liu | July 19, 2011

A CAP brief in June by Policy Analyst Julie Morgan argues that the government must keep college accrediting agencies accountable to ensure students get the most out of their institutions and uphold taxpayers' investments in higher education. Accreditors are essentially gatekeepers between higher education institutions and federal aid since accreditation is a precondition to participating in the financial aid programs contained in Title IV of the Higher Education Act, including the Pell Grant program and the federal student loan program. Morgan recommends that accreditors should create stricter standards for quality assurance and introduce more transparent benchmarks for continuous quality improvement at schools.

The low graduation rates at many accredited community colleges and for-profit colleges, as well as some four-year institutions, are a signal that the quality of the services offered at those institutions may not be up to par. Likewise, the rising student loan default rate at many for-profit institutions may be a sign that students are not getting a sufficient education to pay their debt upon graduation. And some studies suggest that students are not learning very much at many of our nation's four-year colleges either.

The following numbers illustrate the need to reform accreditation to protect the large U.S. taxpayer investment in higher education and make sure accredited institutions—nonprofit and for-profit alike—are providing a quality education for their students.

Taxpayers' investment in financial aid

More than $100 billion: The amount of new federal dollars allocated for student lending in 2010.

More than $30 billion: The amount of money invested in Pell Grants, a federal program that provides money to enrolled college students with financial need.

$545 million: The amount in Pell Grants received by students at for-profit colleges in 2010.

Debts and defaults on loans at different types of accredited institutions

16 percent: The percentage of student loans borrowed by students across all institutions of higher education expected to go into default over the life of the loans.

46 percent: The percentage of student loans borrowed by students at two-year for-profit institutions expected to go into default over the life of the loans.

65.7 percent: The percentage of students graduating from four-year institutions with education debt.

$22,900: The average amount of education debt incurred by students graduating from all institutions of higher education in 2011.

6.9 percent: The unemployment rate for college graduates in May 2011, up from 4.2 percentin January.

Enrollment and graduation at accredited institutions of higher learning

1.8 million: The enrollment at for-profit colleges, an increase from 365,000 in the past several years.

22 percent: The graduation rate at four-year for-profit institutions of higher education around the country in 2008.

22 percent: The graduation rate at two-year public institutions of higher education around the country, including community colleges, in 2008.

More than 500,000: The current total enrollment of the University of Phoenix, an accredited for-profit institution of higher learning. This represents the largest student body of any college in the United States, surpassing the State University of New York system in recent years.

9 percent: The graduation rate for four-year bachelor's degree programs at the University of Phoenix.

69 percent: The withdrawal rate for Kaplan College, another popular accredited system of for-profit higher education.

Study at accredited institutions of higher learning

50 percent: The number of students, from a sample size of more than 2,300 students at a range of colleges and universities, who did not take any course in which they wrote more than 20 pages over the course of one semester.

32 percent: The number of students from the same sample size who did not take any courses with more than 40 pages of reading per week, based on data released in 2011.

20 percent: The number of full-time college students in 2003 who report devoting more than 20 hours per week to studying, compared to 44 percent in 1981 and 67 percent in 1961.

13: The average number of hours per week spent on studying by full-time college students in 2003, compared to 20 hours per week in 1981 and 25 hours per week in 1961.

Health Care Costs Up Again

Inside Higher Ed

July 25, 2011

With health care and its associated costs so frequently in the news, it should come as no surprise that health care costs for colleges and universities and their employees have continued to rise.

Health care premiums for institutions increased by 7.3 percent this year, several times the rate of inflation, according to an annual survey released today by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources.

The increase was equal for employees with and without family coverage. Increases in costs for employees were slightly higher than for institutions; the survey found an increase in median annual deductibles. While premium costs have been going up consistently, this year's increase is the largest in recent years.

"It is frustrating that the cost of health care continues to escalate, forcing many higher education institutions to cut benefits or shift more of the cost to employees," said Andy Brantley, president and CEO of CUPA-HR, in a statement.

The findings of the CUPA-HR survey, as well as other recent surveys of higher education and business leaders, make it clear that administrators still see significant uncertainty when it comes to the future of health care benefits. A combination of rising costs, varying expectations among faculty and staff, and national reforms all present challenges that colleges and universities are trying to figure out how to address.

Because of these challenges, college administrators, like employers in other fields, are weighing the advantages and disadvantages of dropping coverage for some or all employees once several provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the health care overhaul legislation passed by Congress in 2010, goes into effect in 2014.

"I don't think we're going to be able to provide that lifetime security like we used to," said Brad Kimler, executive vice president of benefits consulting at Fidelity Investments, during a presentation at the annual conference of the National Association of College and University Business Officers. "And I don't think it's realistic to expect that."

A recent *Inside Higher Ed* survey of business officers found that a large percentage of business officers, particularly at private universities and public baccalaureate institutions, listed health care liability as one of the most significant challenges of the next two to three years. Despite that concern, the question of how to manage these costs seems often to be going unaddressed. The CUPA-HR survey found that only a quarter of responding institutions had developed a strategy for what their health care benefits should be in three years.

The major question that hangs over administrators about upcoming health benefits decisions involves the components of the health care overhaul law that go into effect in 2014, notably the requirement that companies offer a reasonable level of health care benefits to their employees. Companies with more than 50 employees that don't offer health benefits will have to pay a penalty of $2,000 per worker. Individuals who do not not receive health benefits from their employers will receive income-indexed premium and out-of-pocket cost-sharing subsidies, enabling them to obtain private coverage they would not be able to afford on the current market. These options will be available in state or regional health care "exchanges."

It might be cheaper for employers, including colleges and universities, to pay the penalties and forgo whatever tax breaks come with offering employer-supported health benefits than to continue to provide benefits. "As a result, whether to offer ESI [employer-sponsored insurance] after 2014 becomes mostly a business decision," states amuch-discussed survey conducted by McKinsey and Company, a management consulting firm. "Employers will have to balance the need to remain attractive to talented workers with the net economics of providing benefits -- taking into consideration all the penalties and tax advantages of offering or not offering any given level of coverage," the report states.

That survey found that 30 percent of employers will definitely or probably stop offering employer-sponsored coverage, a significantly higher percentage than the 7 percent of employers that the Congressional Budget Office predicted. Among employers who are well-versed in the law, the proportion increases to 50 percent, and 60 percent said they would pursue alternatives, the McKinsey survey found.

The report did not break down respondents by field, but did note it would be unlikely for only one company in a given field to dramatically alter its plans. Higher education institutions, on average, tend to be more generous with benefits than other types of employers, so the sector as a whole might see few shifts after the new provisions go into effect.

Getting out of the employer-supported health benefit game could be economically viable for some employers, but it could also be beneficial to employees. The McKinsey study notes that "because of the subsidies, many low-income employees will be able to obtain better health coverage, for less out of pocket, on an exchange than from their employer."

Aside from the economic decision, colleges and universities are also going to have weigh the cost of health benefits as a recruiting and retention tool. Kyle Cavanaugh, vice president for human resources at Duke University, said his institution would be hard-pressed to abandon its plan for that reason. "Faculty and staff tell us that one of the most significant things they value in working here is the health care plan we provide," he said. "The plan is highly valued, and because of that, we would have to very seriously weigh the cost of continuing to provide that."

But he noted that it is too early in the process to know what the exchange system will look like and therefore to actually make a judgment on that front. Most states have not even begun to design the health care exchanges (some have even said outright that they will not create them). A lot of politics remain between now and 2014, administrators say, including major deals regarding national spending and a presidential election.

Because so many factors will go into a college or university's decision on whether to abandon or modify its plans in three years, Cavanaugh stressed that institutions should be gathering and analyzing their data now. "Health care benefits have to, now more than ever, be managed in a strategic way," he said. "The combination of costs, faculty and staff expectations, and the ongoing evolution of national health care reform drive the need to be looking at this from a strategic standpoint."

Doing so could also show returns in the short term, if colleges find ways to drive down costs and measure the effectiveness of different programs. Cavanaugh said his college has found savings by increasing the use of generic drugs. By tracking conditions associated with avoidable and repeat hospital admissions, the university has also been able to work with providers to lower admissions. While Duke's costs have still gone up, Cavanaugh said they have been below the national average for the past few years.

CUPA's survey did find some notable widespread efforts to contain health care costs. More than 60 percent of colleges in CUPA-HR's survey said they offered wellness programs, but participation of employees at colleges was less than 20 percent at many institutions.

The survey also found the highest percentage of respondents providing same-sex domestic partner benefits -- 56 percent -- since the survey began. That is a significant increase from the 37 percent of respondents who reported offering same-sex benefits in 2005.

— Kevin Kiley

Does Performance Funding Work?

Inside Higher Ed

July 25, 2011
A *little* performance-based funding doesn't work. But a lot of it might.

That's the conclusion of a recently published study examining the impact of formulas that tie state funds for public colleges to various measures of institutional performance. Performance-based funding is a favored tool of the policy makers and foundations that are pushing higher education toward greater efficiency and better outcomes in terms of college retention and completion; only if states change the incentives for colleges and universities, the reformers argue -- rewarding them for getting students through college rather than just enrolling them in the first place -- will institutions alter their behavior.

Based on that premise, several states -- including Ohio and Indiana -- have altered their formulas for allocating state funds in recent years, but those programs are too new to offer any evidence of their efficacy. But several other states have had performance-funding programs in place for much longer, and in a paper released this spring at the annual meeting of the Association for Institutional Research, two scholars studied Tennessee's -- the country's "oldest and most stable performance funding program" -- for insights into how such programs affect retention and graduation rates.

Not very much, the authors report. From 1979 through 2005, Tennessee altered its performance funding program numerous times, but throughout that period, the proportions of institutions' state allocations that were tied to performance remained small, varying between 2 and 5.45 percent. And from 1997 on, the program rewarded four-year colleges and universities based on their retention and six-year graduation rates.

But from 1995 to 2008, the state saw no statistically significant change in those rates at its public institutions, according to the study by Thomas Sanford, associate director of research at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, and James M. Hunter, a doctoral candidate in educational policy and administration at the University of Minnesota. Even when the state doubled the money tied to those outcomes in 2005, the change had no effect.

"Despite these monetary incentives, this study’s findings suggest that the adoption of new performance funding policies has little impact on altering institutional behavior at their current funding levels," the authors write.

That doesn't mean that performance funding can't work, though, says Sanford. "We knew this was a relatively small amount of colleges' total appropriations, and a very small amount of money to change to try to implement something so big," he says.

Just last year, Tennessee totally revamped its funding model to tie as much as 80 percent of institutions' unrestricted appropriations (unrestricted appropriations account for between a third and half of public colleges' budgets in Tennessee) to a set of outcome measures rather than to enrollment, in addition to the 5.45 percent that was already allocated through the performance funding system (those funds are now tied to quality measures).

Tennessee is betting, Sanford says, that tying a more significant portion of institutions' state funds to performance will influence their behavior in ways that smaller amounts did not -- especially because if the state provides no new funds, colleges will end up competing with each other for money.

"There's a real sense that this is going to make a difference," he says. "At an institutional level, we're seeing more and more focus on strategically developing plans to hit these goals." It will take several years to see whether the new funding system has the desired impact, Sanford says.

In the meantime, it would be a mistake to view the state's previous performance funding plan as a failure, says Sanford. While Tennessee's program may have been too weak to change institutional behavior, he argues, it started changing the conversation and the "culture of expectations" within the state, arguably laying the groundwork for the more substantive changes that the state has now adopted.

"[T]he state’s long history of tying state appropriations to outcomes may have made tying 80 percent of state appropriations to outcomes more politically palatable and culturally feasible," the authors write.

— **Doug Lederman**

Love of journalism burned bright in Jolene Combs

JOHN BOGERT/Daily Breeze

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El Camino College journalism advisor Joleen Combs, pointing, helps student Cleo Gordon learn the computer system in the school's state-of-the-art newspaper lab in the newly-built Humanities Building in this January 2008 photo.

It's been a bad stretch. First came the death of Father Mike Lenahan, then John Simpson - Korean War veteran and driving force behind the Redondo Beach Veterans Memorial - followed by the loss of Jolene Combs.

Somehow the deaths of the two venerable older men were slightly easier to take than the departure of Combs, who, though she was some years older than me, remained young in the manic way of journalists.

We ran remembrances of people who knew (and loved) the legendary El Camino College journalism teacher as a stern enforcer of the Associated Press Stylebook and as a figure of great inspiration.

Over the years I met dozens of reporters, good ones, who owe much to studying with Combs, the daughter of a journalist in whom the candle of the profession burned bright. Then again, I always thought that such dedication glowed brightest in people who didn't haul themselves into a newsroom each and every day for a good scourging.

Not that teaching is an easy gig. Fact is, I more or less worked for Combs for a couple of years some time ago, teaching night journalism classes to cutups who couldn't always be counted on to turn in assignments or stay awake in class.

That she was able to hit that hard carapace of poor high school preparation daily and produce so many fine writers, instilling in them a sense of exacting discipline, was a miracle.

She had an old-timey, throwback gift instilled in her by her editor father when she was growing up in Wichita, Kan., and Orange County. In childhood, she lived and breathed print news, eventually graduation from USC's journalism school, marrying husband, Winton (a reporter/editor), and having two great kids, Sue and Tom.

Not to be left out, at age 60 her widowed mother took up reporting at the Fullerton News-Tribune, where she worked until her death two decades later.

And though we weren't all that far apart in years, our conversation always seemed a bit student/teacher because - and this may have all been in my head - I don't think she ever quite accepted my writing style. Not that I blame her. Lots of people, including my high school journalism teacher, didn't.

Still, she was unquestionably the person behind my being hired into an excellent journalism program of her own creation, one where every issue of the school paper and every small-time journalism contest was treated like a run for the Pulitzer. Along the way, this dedication won a trophy case full of awards that she never leaned on because journalism, on any level, is all about tomorrow.

In fact, when I asked her if those awards in national and state contests were won under her tutelage, she said, "No." Then, after a moment's thought, she corrected herself with a "Yes, I guess they were."

I'm talking about a pro who lived the academic equivalent of Lasorda bleeding Dodger Blue. In fact, her last act before she partially retired back in 2008 was to guide the design and opening of a spanking new journalism building.

When we spoke that May she said - and this is something most people in this business would understand - that she would never have been able to hold down what she called a real job: "I don't know what people do in those tall office buildings. I don't know what I would do in one of these places even if I had to."

Her real job, her life's work, was as a self-described "constant cheerleader."

"It wears me down at times, but I hang in there because these are hard-working, motivated students who come in here from full-time jobs." These feelings of admiration did not keep her from adding, "I tell my students that I will die an old lady before they learn the proper use of the apostrophe."

It was a job she trained for like a boxer. Before she joined the El Camino staff in 1983, she spent 12 years teaching journalism to great effect (I know some of her students from that era as well) at Redondo Union High School.

There she met and became an honorary daughter of the equally demanding, hard-as-nails - and then three-years-retired - Helen Sinsabaugh, a women out of UCLA's first graduating class who began teaching in 1935.

She was closing in on 90 on the day we met, a day where I was happy to find Combs on hand playing the devoted daughter as the woman who claimed to be the oldest living journalism teacher enjoyed a few too many vodkas with cranberry juice.

Never married, her students - thousands of them from her years at RUHS and at the old Center Street School - were her abiding family. Combs, who wasn't one of those students, remained an admirer of the woman who also claimed that her main talent was "an ability to inspire."

When Sinsabaugh died at age 92 in 2000, Combs spoke about her old friend. And, in the speaking, she said much about herself: "Helen was crusty and edgy, pushing herself always, inspiring me not to let life get the upper hand."

Another of Sinsabaugh's old students might as well have been talking about Combs when he told me, "She was forever the teacher and we were forever her students ... she was a fantastic teacher; very direct, making us listen, making us work at our jobs. She didn't allow failure. She inspired and never let go."

Combs, 69, of Rolling Hills Estates, died on July 13 of an apparent heart attack while undergoing treatment for pneumonia. She leaves behind a great family and a long list of men and women who are better people because of her.

To that I'll add this. She was a decent, fair and extremely modest woman who spent her life in the service of others and in the service of an always-endangered ideal.

This is late, as remembrances go, but I couldn't let her pass without saying goodbye.