# Retaining Underserved Students

## Strategies for Success in a Post-Pandemic Era
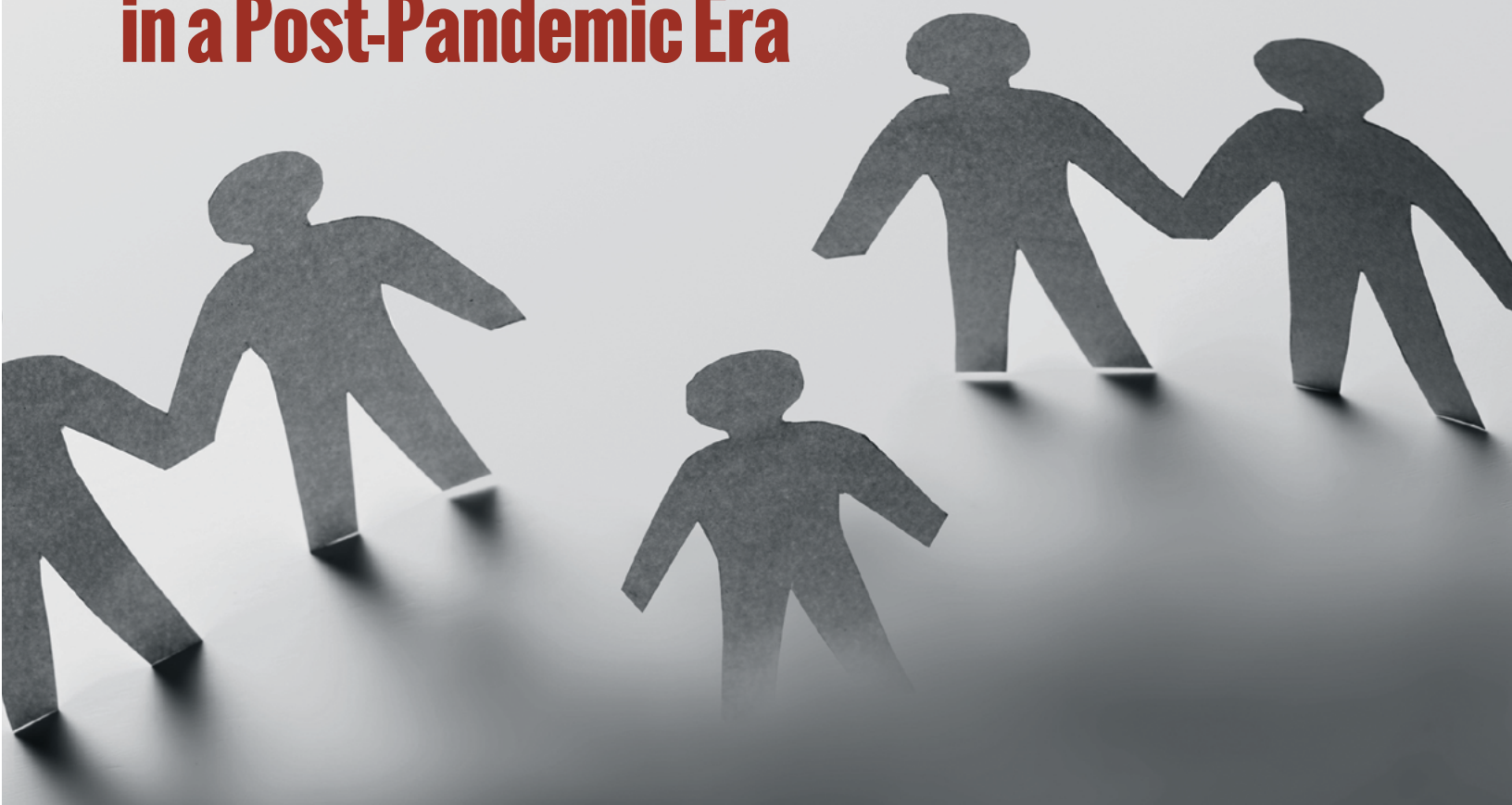
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## About the Authors

**Vimal Patel** is a senior reporter who has been with *The Chronicle* since 2014, covering social mobility, student activism, graduate education, and other topics. Previously, he worked for *The Bryan-College Station Eagle*, and he has written for *The Denver Post* and the *Los Angeles Times.* Vimal earned his bachelor's degree in journalism from Colorado State University.

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Elizabeth Ouanemalay, a first-generation college student at Wesleyan University, is facing the threat of the coronavirus alone on a largely deserted campus.

BRADLEY E. CLIFT FOR THE CHRONICLE

# Introduction:
# The Crisis for Underserved Students

S en. Claiborne Pell was well aware of the link between family income and college access when Congress created his namesake financial-aid grants more than half a century ago, to make higher education available to more Americans.

But what Pell could not have known was that the gap between rich and poor would soon be a canyon. Or that college would not be just one way out of poverty and into the middle class, but increasingly the only one. Or that his financial-aid grants would not keep pace with the twin threats of inflation and soaring tuition.

And he certainly could not have known that, in March 2020, higher education would face an unprecedented challenge to its existence and a crisis of commitment to the retaining underserved students he championed. As the Covid-19 pandemic has overturned higher education's business model, colleges face a daunting decision: How much are they willing to do to support low-income students?

Even before the coronavirus upended it, higher education's approach to underserved students was fraught with contradictions. At the same time that colleges invested in many of those students, college degrees became increasingly the property of the privileged. Stagnant wages and increasing tuition meant paying for college became out of reach for more students and families.

Over the last decade, the maximum Pell Grant award — the basic pillar of financial aid for needy students — fell by 0.3 percent per year when adjusted for inflation, according to the College Board, while published tuition and fees at public four-year institutions during that time increased by 2.2 percent per year. Private institutions saw similar increases.

Even while some colleges met all educational expenses for the neediest students, living expenses continued to rise as wages did not. In 2017, the average net price of a public four-year institution cost 23 percent of a family's median income, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. But for some students, in some places, it was far more. The average net price of in-state tuition and fees cost 40 percent or more of the median household income for Black households in 17 states.

Meanwhile, states continued their decades-long disinvestment in public higher education. In the 10 years since the 2008-9 recession, state spending per student fell $1,220, or 13 percent, after accounting for inflation, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. This meant the cost of going to college was shifting to the consumers: students and their families. The change wasn't subtle. According to the New York Fed Consumer Credit Panel/Equifax, student debt over the last 15 years exploded sixfold to more than $1.5 trillion, surpassing credit-card debt and all other forms aside from mortgages and making Americans reconsider whether college was worth it. Even the relatively affordable institutions, like many regional comprehensive public colleges that swear they're not the cause of the debt problem, suffer from the ensuing per-

> **Even before the coronavirus upended it, higher education's approach to underserved students was fraught with contradictions.**

ception that college is for the wealthy.

By other indicators, even with fewer resources overall, colleges are paying more attention to their underserved students than ever before. In recent decades, colleges made efforts to recruit more Black and Hispanic students to demonstrate their commitment to equity. And the American college student population, despite continuing to be underrepresented at the most selective institutions, became more diverse than at any time before.

More recently, colleges — pressured by activists — realized that getting students in the door wasn't enough. Graduation gaps persisted, as they do now. For the cohort of students who entered four-year colleges in 2011, 64 percent of white students had graduated by 2017. The six-year graduation rate for Hispanic students was 55 percent, and for Black students it was only 40 percent.

So the last decade saw the proliferation of the student-success movement. Colleges created vice-president- and vice-provost-level positions dedicated to retention and student success. They created funds for basic needs and emergencies that students in a pinch could tap — a medical bill here, a car payment there. They invested in completion grants, recognizing that often students a few credits shy of a degree just need-

# Average Net Price of Attendance as a Share of Household Income

The average net price of in-state tuition and fees at a public 4-year university was equivalent to 40 percent or more of the median household income in 2017 for Hispanic and Black households in seven states and 17 states, respectively.

**Legend:**
- Overall
- White, Non-Hispanic
- Black
- Hispanic
- Asian
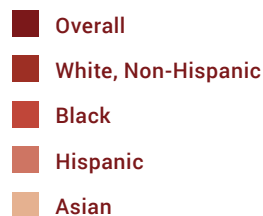
| State | Overall | White, Non-Hispanic | Black | Hispanic | Asian |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alabama | 35% | 30% | 54%* | 45%* | 23%* |
| Alaska | 15% | 14% | | 18%* | 16%* |
| Arizona | 25% | 22% | 31%* | 30%* | 18%* |
| Arkansas | 29% | 27% | 44%* | 33%* | |
| California | 16% | 14% | 24%* | 20%* | 13%* |
| Colorado | 24% | 22% | 32%* | 32%* | 21% |
| Connecticut | 22% | 19% | 35%* | 35%* | 19% |
| Delaware | 21% | 19% | 30%* | | 13%* |
| Florida | 20% | 18% | 26%* | 22%* | 15%* |
| Georgia | 24% | 20% | 31%* | 29%* | 17%* |
| Hawaii | 18% | 18% | | 20% | 17% |
| Idaho | 26% | 25% | | 30%* | |
| Illinois | 26% | 23% | 44%* | 30%* | 19% |
| Indiana | 21% | 20% | 34%* | 25%* | 17% |
| Iowa | 25% | 24% | 47%* | 31%* | 22%* |
| Kansas | 28% | 26% | 44%* | 35%* | 23%* |
| Kentucky | 30% | 29% | 40%* | 34%* | 25%* |
| Louisiana | 30% | 24% | 49%* | 35%* | 22% |
| Maine | 27% | 27% | | | |
| Maryland | 20% | 18% | 25%* | 22%* | 16%* |
| Massachusetts | 23% | 21% | 38%* | 43%* | 20%* |
| Michigan | 25% | 24% | 40%* | 30%* | 17%* |
| Minnesota | 23% | 22%* | 41%* | 30%* | 21% |
| Mississippi | 33% | 26% | 49%* | 34%* | |
| Missouri | 25% | 24% | 39%* | 28%* | 21% |
| Montana | 26% | 26% | | 28% | |
| Nebraska | 25% | 24% | 42%* | 32%* | |
| Nevada | 22% | 20% | 31%* | 24%* | 20% |
| New Hampshire | 30% | 29% | | 36%* | |
| New Jersey | 20% | 17% | 32%* | 29%* | 13%* |
| New Mexico | 23% | 19% | 31%* | 27%* | |
| New York | 17% | 15% | 25%* | 24%* | 16%* |
| North Carolina | 23% | 20% | 32%* | 30%* | 15%* |
| North Dakota | 22% | 21% | | 24%* | |
| Ohio | 31% | 29% | 52%* | 41%* | 23%* |
| Oklahoma | 28% | 26% | 41%* | 32%* | 23% |
| Oregon | 27% | 26% | 43%* | 32%* | 21%* |
| Pennsylvania | 34% | 32% | 54%* | 50%* | 27%* |
| Rhode Island | 26% | 23% | | 40%* | 24% |
| South Carolina | 36% | 30% | 56%* | 44%* | 30% |
| South Dakota | 30% | 28% | | 41%* | |
| Tennessee | 29% | 27% | 39%* | 36%* | 22%* |
| Texas | 20% | 16% | 26%* | 25%* | 14%* |
| Utah | 17% | 16% | | 24%* | 17% |
| Vermont | 32% | 32% | | | |
| Virginia | 25% | 23% | 36%* | 27%* | 17%* |
| Washington | 16% | 16% | 23%* | 22%* | 13%* |
| West Virginia | 23% | 23% | 34%* | | |
| Wisconsin | 23% | 21% | 46%* | 31%* | 19%* |
| Wyoming | 22% | 22% | | 26%* | |

Notes: Results are not included where the standard error associated with the median income is more than 10 percent of the estimated median income and are presented with an asterisk where the median income for that group is statistically different from that of non-Hispanic white households. Note that suppression and statistical significance tests are tied to median income, not average net cost as a share of (estimated) median income. Some people in the "Black" category may also identify as "Hispanic," so these categories are not necessarily exclusive.

Source: American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (Table B19013) and NCES Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System

ed a well-timed financial boost.

Colleges also recognized that students, especially those from first-generation and low-income backgrounds, needed more than just financial security to thrive. So they began trying to meet the needs of the entire student. They invested in mental-health resources. "Intrusive" became a word to commend advising that used data-analytics to intervene at the first sign of academic trouble.

Those investments led to impressive gains, though uneven across institutions, in retention and graduation rates. Some places, like Georgia State University, transformed themselves into models of student success, hosting delegations of curious administrators from across the country who hoped to replicate their success. Georgia State credits its new army of advisers and its obsessive use of data — it tracks students for 800 risk factors — for eliminating all race- and income-related gaps in retention and graduation rates. It took time, and money, but — finally — consensus seemed to be emerging about how to effectively support traditionally marginalized students.

Then came a global pandemic and the world changed. Supporting underserved students is more important than ever, but it's also harder than ever.

Virtually all that was known about how to keep retaining underserved students on track has become exponentially more difficult in a remote environment. The mentoring. The advising. The tutoring for students with learning disorders. Access to mental-health services. The peer-support cohorts, and the social ties. Students' very sense of connection to a college. And, depending on how battered colleges are in the months and years ahead, the financial support.

Meanwhile, the pandemic has hit vulnerable populations especially hard. Many working-class students and parents were laid off or furloughed. Undocumented students were prohibited from receiving federal emergency-relief money. Students with unsafe living conditions back home debated whether to put themselves in unhealthy

situations again or scramble to secure other housing as campuses shut down. And Black students weathered the psychological toll of twin plagues: the deadly virus felling African Americans in disproportionate numbers and the national crisis precipitated by a white police officer's killing of George Floyd, a Black man.

Covid-19 has exposed the widening class divides in higher education. For many students, being sent home to study online — missing activities like team sports or even their commencement ceremony — was disappointing. But for retaining underserved students, it has created extraordinary stress. Without campus jobs, they don't know what they'll do for income. Some are disoriented by the online migration; others don't even have the internet. Colleges are at a great risk of losing these students in the months and years ahead. That could undo the progress they've made toward equity. And

## First-Year Persistence and Retention

**Among students who entered college for the first time in fall 2017, Black students had the lowest persistence rate, and just over half of Black students returned to the starting institution.**

■ **Continued enrollment at starting institution**
■ **Continued enrollment at other institution**
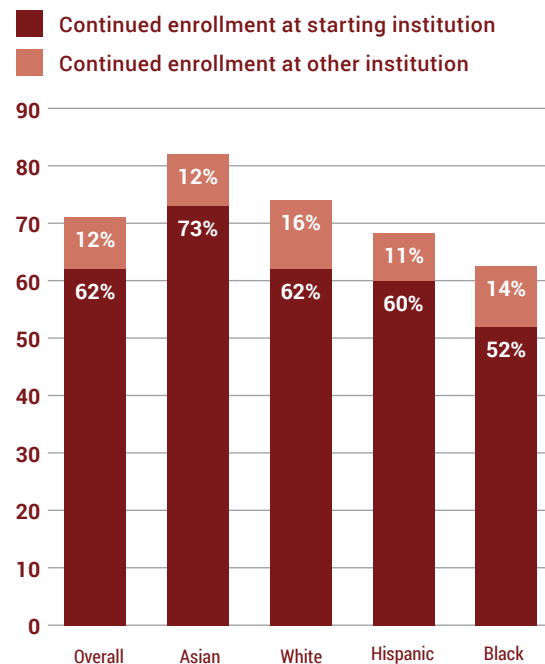


Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center

Two students chat at Metropolitan State U. of Denver's Center for Multicultural Inclusion and Engagement.

as many colleges struggle to survive the economic impact of the pandemic, keeping students enrolled may be a matter of institutional survival.

Administrators and professors committed to student success are thinking from all angles about how to retain their students before it's too late. Academically, they are considering extending the pass/fail option for the duration of the pandemic, though that idea remains controversial. They're trying to maintain the tutoring support and peer networks online. They're trying to unclog transfer pathways. Professors are trying to strengthen personal ties with their students, recognizing that faculty members are on the front lines of retaining them.

The pandemic has made clear that, for retaining underserved students especially, what happens in the classroom is only one factor in college success. So colleges are paying extra attention to hunger and housing insecurity. It's hard to find a college that didn't create some kind of an emergency fund for students. They

carved out exceptions to allow homeless students or those who didn't have a safe place to go to remain in campus housing.

Colleges also knew they had to stay connected with the students they could not see face to face. Many places like Metropolitan State University of Denver, Georgia State, and Odessa College, in Texas, made sure to keep regularly checking in with students for the duration of remote learning. They beefed up social programming, like virtual bake-offs and dance "parties" to attempt to recreate the sense of community that exists on a college campus. And if colleges weren't already good at tele-mental health, they needed to get good and fast, as students' mental-health needs — already outpacing resources at many colleges — became even more urgent.

It's too soon to tell whether these efforts have maintained the momentum colleges had built up to support their underserved students, but early signs are troubling. A national survey by Strada based on more than 10,000 responses collected between March 25 and May 28 found that 15 percent of

Black Americans and 21 percent of Latina/o Americans had canceled their education plans, compared with 11 percent of white Americans.

Renewals by returning college students of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid — an indicator of college enrollment — were down substantially as of the end of May, according to an analysis of federal data by the National College Attainment Network. Overall renewals dropped by more than 250,000 students, or 3 percent, compared with the year before. And for the neediest students, the signs were worse. Renewals for those with family incomes of less than $25,000 were down 7 percent.

"This tells you that low-income students are price sensitive," says Sara Goldrick-Rab, a Temple University sociology professor and director of the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. "It's not that these

## Change in FAFSA Renewals

More than 30,000 fewer applicants of income less than $25,000 completed a FAFSA between April 1 and May 31, 2020 compared to the same period last year.

**% change in 2020-21 FAFSA renewals over same period last year**

Income level

| Income level | % change |
|---|---|
| <=$25,000 | -5.7% |
| $25,000 - $49,999 | 2.5% |
| >$50,000 | 9.6% |

Source: Analysis of federal data by the National College Attainment Network



Students at Benedict College, in South Carolina

students don't know the Fafsa needs to be renewed. That's not the main issue here. They know. This means they are very uncertain about whether they're coming back in the fall."

No one knows where the student-success movement is headed now. But to understand how it might meet the Covid-19 era, it's helpful to see how it came to be.

When Karen Stout started as president of Pennsylvania's Montgomery County Community College, in 2001, the framework through which she and higher education leaders broadly viewed the social-mobility challenge was still the same one that Senator Pell had thought about a generation before: access. Just get more low-income and minority students into colleges. Societal equity will flow.

The reasoning behind that was clear. The benefits of a college degree, now as then, were monumental. Those with a bachelor's degree are better able to weather a recession. Their lifetime earnings are substantially higher — by about $1 million, by some measures. They have better health, and more access to health care. The bachelor's degree is the golden ticket to the middle class and beyond.

But access doesn't pave a path to any of those things. Students need to finish to reap the rewards. The recognition, in the 2000s and beyond, that graduation rates were still abysmal, and that there were seemingly intractable gaps by income and race, spawned the modern student-success movement. Everyone started paying attention to — or at least paying lip service to — student success, thanks partly to high-profile advocacy groups like the Lumina Foundation, the Aspen Institute, and Achieving the Dream.

At Montgomery, Stout was able to diversify her student and faculty ranks. But she soon realized, after seeing abysmal data on completion, that more needed to be done. With the help of Achieving the Dream, a non-profit that works to make organizational changes to support student success, Stout began thinking more deeply about retention and graduation rates.

"Access without the promise of success was not leading anywhere for our community," said Stout, now the president of Achieving the Dream. "We were early in shifting our strategic plan to something we called 'Beyond Access.' We started to focus on understanding our data and our students' stories rather than designing our institution around our own organizational hypotheses about who we should be."

There were skeptics, who didn't think a hyperfocus on data, advising, and nonacademic support would make a real difference in retention and graduation rates. But as success stories started pouring in from across the sector, even they had to get on board with the reformers. The true believers found allies among those who knew raising retention rates was also a business imperative. State budgets became tighter, and as America's racial composition changed, colleges had to start figuring out how to reach a more diverse student population to increase enrollment and the tuition dollars that flowed from it. It was part social crusade, part survival strategy.

That's now truer than ever.

There are two ways higher education as a sector could go in supporting its underserved students. It could retrench, focusing on existential issues amid a time of crisis, paying attention to student success, but only to the degree that administrators perceive it aligns with the institution's business imperative of staying afloat and healthy.

But Stout is hopeful that for at least some aspects of the sector, the fallout from the coronavirus will energize student-success efforts. "Covid has forced colleges that have been experimenting with some redesign to pull the switch," she said. "It has made it possible for them to make those changes and make them at scale."

No college has it all figured it out. And few leaders will say they're not nervous about what the next several semesters mean for higher education's commitment to social mobility. But in the following pages we'll describe the unprecedented scramble by colleges to continue to support their underserved students, and outline the tactics and strategies administrators and professors are taking to achieve that goal. Only time will determine their effectiveness.

**Making sure students have adequate** food, housing, and access to technology is key to their educational success, especially now.

**Meeting those needs** is not just a social mission; it also makes good business sense.

**Getting aid to the right students** is a challenge, so colleges must streamline the process and make it easy for students to apply.

**Students also need income,** so colleges should reimagine work-study to be creative about student employment.

# What's Elementary: Meeting Basic Needs

The 60 or so students who come to Amarillo College each day for access to a computer pass by a man at the front who checks them in. The man, clad in a blue mask with the letters "AC," gives them hand sanitizer and a mask if they're not already wearing one. He asks them to stand on a pink "X" he taped to the floor so he can take their temperature with a thermal camera. Only then does he direct them downstairs to the building's socially distanced computer lab.

Every now and then one of these students might take a closer look at the masked man, squint, and say, "Hey, are you the president?"

"When they let me be," he jokes.

The man is, in fact, Russell D. Lowery-Hart, the college's president. He has put Amarillo College on the student-success map by tirelessly advocating for the basic needs of students. So it's on brand that he has moved his computer, family photos, and lots of hand sanitizer and Clorox wipes to the entrance of the computer lab. This is where students without access to computers come to work on their studies during the novel-coronavirus pandemic. This is Lowery-Hart's new office. "I couldn't ask volunteers to sit at that desk if I wasn't willing to do it myself," he says.

Lowery-Hart firmly believes that taking care of his students' basic needs is basic social justice. Amarillo College has spent about $500,000 over the last two years on things like groceries, diapers, rent assistance, and car payments for its retaining underserved students. But Lowery-Hart says that's simply good business.

"We have a moral and economic obligation," he says. "It's a financial investment we're making in our students, and it pays off with revenue because our students are staying with us and graduating with us."

Since Lowery-Hart became president, in 2015, and scaled up the basic-needs effort, fall-to-fall student retention has increased from 45 percent to 57 percent. While the effort costs about $300,000 a year in institutional support, the additional revenue from tuition associated with students staying enrolled and completing their degrees is about $4.6 million, he says.

Academics have for years had a robust debate about whether students' basic needs ought to be the responsibility of colleges, which are already expected to provide a suite of programs and services while their budgets keep getting thinner. But the coro-

**"I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more."**

# 44%
### of 2-year students

# 36%
### of 4-year students

2019 #RealCollege Survey

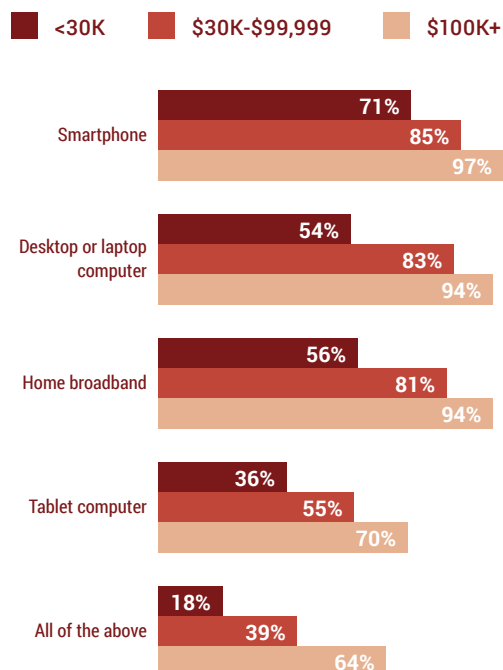Source: The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice

Social-services coordinators Ashley Guinn, left, and Leslie Hinojosa hang up donations at Amarillo College's Advocacy & Resource Center (ARC), where students can find clothing, food, emergency aid, and social services.

## Lower-income means lower levels of technology adoption

The percentage of U.S. adults with an income under $30,000 who have home broadband is significantly less than those with incomes over $100,000, and the share of lower-income Americans who rely on their smartphones for broadband has nearly doubled since 2013.

**% of US adults who say they have…**

■ <30K ■ $30K-$99,999 ■ $100K+

**Smartphone**
71%
85%
97%

**Desktop or laptop computer**
54%
83%
94%

**Home broadband**
56%
81%
94%

**Tablet computer**
36%
55%
70%

**All of the above**
18%
39%
64%

**% of US adults who say they have a smartphone, but no broadband at home, by annual household income**

■ 2013 ■ 2016 ■ 2019

<30K: 12% | 20% | 26%
$30K-$99,999: 7% | 10% | 14%
$100K+: 4% | 4% | 5%
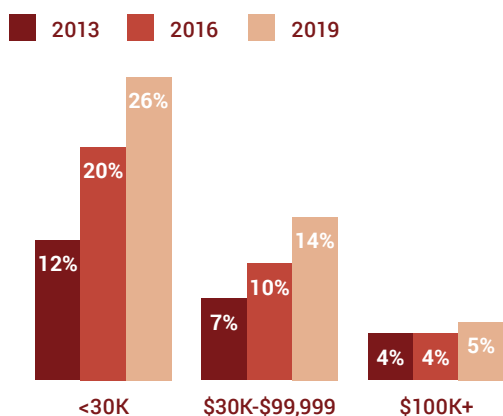
Source: Pew Research Center

navirus pandemic has shifted, if not settled, the conversation. It's not just social justice anymore. It's a business strategy.

Basic-needs support and emergency funds had been gaining normalcy in recent years at many institutions, especially those, like community colleges, that serve low-income students. But as the picture of student need and the educational inequities it exposes have become clear thanks to the pandemic, it's hard to find an institution that hasn't at least pieced together some type of fund to respond to students' emergency needs.

Where are they getting money? Anywhere they can. Some states, like California, have been especially thoughtful about basic-needs funding, giving the state's institutions an advantage. The state legislature in 2019 gave $15 million each to the University of California and the California State systems for that purpose. Many colleges turn to support from alumni and other donors. That has the advantage of allowing the college to support undocumented students, who are sometimes restricted from obtaining federal or state money. At least one college is now trying to institutionalize its basic-needs fund by endowing it. (See story, Page 19.)

It's unclear whether this focus on basic needs will continue beyond the pandemic. Is this the new higher-education normal or just triage? At the least, academics are now more likely to realize that taking care of basic needs isn't just student-affairs work but essential educational work. "Teaching becomes easier when students are fed and awake," says Sara Goldrick-Rab, a Temple University sociology professor and founding director of the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.

### TECHNOLOGICAL SUPPORT

Relieving food and housing insecurity was becoming a central concern for student-success advocates before Covid-19 struck. But the pandemic brought more attention to a common educational barrier that is made exponentially worse in an online world: lack of access to computers and Wi-Fi.

Amarillo College President Russell Lowery-Hart helps a student navigate a virtual visit with an academic advisor at the Ware Student Commons.

For the retaining underserved students who don't have a properly working computer or a reliable internet connection, their degrees are now even further out of reach. This includes students who may have a properly working computer but have to share it with a spouse, who also needs it for work, and with children who use it for school.

With the migration online, many colleges struggled to meet the technology needs of their underserved students. They rushed computers and wireless hotspots to them, especially those in rural areas with spotty internet. Some places, like Metropolitan State University of Denver, asked professors to make all their class content available on a smartphone, since more stu-

dents have access to those than to computers. Some colleges equipped their parking lots with Wi-Fi, so students could sit in their cars and work. And when all those efforts didn't solve the problem, colleges like Amarillo decided to keep some form of socially distanced on-campus access to computers.

It's the reason Lowery-Hart is sitting at the circular front desk, checking students in. The on-campus computer lab, he says, is a last resort. But like so many student-success efforts, one size doesn't fit all. Administrators are trying to meet the computer challenge from as many angles as possible. Amarillo also gathered up all its laptops on campus

*Continued on Page 17*

**"I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals."**

# 45%
### of 2-year students

# 38%
### of 4-year students

**2019 #RealCollege Survey**

Source: The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice

When Annie Ciaraldi got word that her college, the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, was planning to close its dorms in response to the coronavirus outbreak, she sprang into action.

First, Ciaraldi, associate dean of student affairs, appealed to her colleagues' hearts, arguing it would be wrong to leave students stranded. Then, she appealed to institutional self-interest.

"This university does not want to be on the front page of the newspaper saying we won't let them stay," Ciaraldi recalls saying. Her arguments worked, and roughly 650 students remained on campus for the transition to online learning.

As colleges nationwide prepared to send their students home in the spring, administrators faced a difficult decision: what to do about students with nowhere else to go?

Even before the global pandemic, thousands of college students struggled with hunger and inadequate housing. According to the latest annual survey by the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, at Temple University, roughly half of all community-college students and close to a third of students at four-year colleges had experienced one or both in the previous year.

Ultimately, many colleges let students petition to stay on campus, as UMass Lowell did. Among the students who stayed was Kerri, a formerly homeless nursing student who requested a pseudonym to preserve her privacy. Kerri, who works in a hospital and has treated patients with Covid-19, says it was a relief not having to move off campus in the midst of a pandemic. Since she works with Covid-19 patients, "it would be dangerous for me to live with anybody else," she says. "There was nowhere else I could go to be safe, and to isolate myself."

Kerri and the other remaining students moved into a single dorm so the others could be cleaned. The college kept a dining hall open for pick-up and gave students with no where else to go extra swipes on their meal plans. When the dining hall closed for the summer, the staff handed out gift cards to local grocery stores and let students order food from the campus pantry online, and pick it up at the campus police department.

Other colleges kept food pantries open, by appointment, or posted signs on the doors telling students to call to come in. A few, such as Middle Tennessee State University, continued serving hot meals to students who remained in the dorms.

Colleges with wraparound services for homeless students, such as counseling and financial-literacy training, moved those supports online. At UMass Lowell, which is part of a statewide pilot that is pairing two- and four-year colleges with a community-service provider, Kerri and other students without secure housing continued to meet with a case manager and each other over Zoom, for charades and conversation.

"A roof over their heads is not the only thing housing-insecure students need," says Jose Fierro, president of Cerritos College, which is preparing to open what Fierro says will be California's first housing development built exclusively for homeless students. A local nonprofit will manage the building and provide in-house counseling and mentoring.

With unemployment rates lingering in the double digits, Ciaraldi and other advocates for homeless stu-



SAMANTHA CIARALDI

**Annie Ciaraldi, associate dean of student affairs at the U. of Massachusetts at Lowell**

> "This university does not want to be on the front page of the newspaper saying we won't let them stay."

dents are bracing for a challenging fall. In Massachusetts, a monthslong moratorium on housing evictions is set to end this summer, and Ciaraldi is worried that students who are behind on rent will lose their homes.

A survey conducted by the Hope Center in April and May suggested that the pandemic had already led to a spike in student hunger and homelessness. It found that more than 60 percent of respondents were experiencing basic-needs insecurity, and that 15 percent of those who attended four-year colleges had become homeless as a result of the pandemic.

Still, colleges can only help their homeless students if they know who they are, and most still don't have a good way of tracking homelessness among students. On many campuses, homeless and hungry students remain invisible.

So what should colleges that are concerned about student homelessness do?

Mariah Craven, a communications consultant for the National Foster Youth Institute, suggests that faculty members look for warning signs in online classes. If a student seems to always be connecting from their car or the public library, or if their surroundings seem chaotic, check in with them, she said. Realize, though, that you will miss some signs of struggle, and let all students know that you're open to chatting if they need support, Craven says.

But be careful about how you phrase that offer of help, warns Marcy Stidum, who directs a program for homeless and foster youth at Kennesaw State University, in Georgia. Asking "are you homeless?" might alienate students who see themselves as simply "between places;" better to say, "If you're struggling with food or housing, these are the resources."

Frequent reminders of those resources help, too, says another formerly homeless student at UMass Lowell who knows how precarious life can be.

"Sometimes we're so busy we forget that we have support," she says. "Let us know what's still available, because things could change at any moment."

and checks them out like library books.

Underscoring how important community partnerships can be, Lowery-Hart and the superintendent of the local school district teamed up to scatter school buses loaded up with Wi-Fi signals strategically throughout local neighborhoods with high need. The partnership came about when local leaders got together to tell each other about their emergency plans. Access to broadband was a common problem and the partnership was natural, Lowery-Hart says. The school system's students need the Wi-Fi, and so do their parents — Amarillo College students.

### DISTRIBUTING FEDERAL AID

While colleges ramped up their basic-needs work, they also received a crash course in the mass distribution of emergency aid, thanks to $6 billion from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (Cares) earmarked for needy students.

Getting aid is one thing. Getting it into the hands of needy students is another. How do you make sure your aid is doled out efficiently and fairly without tangling students in red tape, precisely the ones who are least equipped to slice through it?

Consider the proliferation of student-led crowdfunding efforts during the pandemic. Students at many institutions, including very well-resourced ones like Harvard and Wesleyan (Conn.) Universities, turned to collecting money for their vulnerable peers because they felt administrators were falling short. They also said their universities' basic-needs funds weren't responsive or nimble enough.

Whether it was the federal money or their own donor-supported emergency funds, colleges struggled with how to get it into students' hands. Some used their own data on their students' financial need,

**"I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food."**

## 36%
of 2-year students

## 28%
of 4-year students

2019 #RealCollege Survey

Source: The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice

and distributed the money into their accounts unrequested. Others created an application process. Each strategy risked losing needy students.

The first avoided the bureaucracy of paperwork, and got the money into students' hands more swiftly. But it was based on information already on file about students' financial needs and didn't reflect their current situations. With rampant family job losses and furloughs, those situations could have changed markedly. Asking students to apply allowed the ones whose need had slipped through the data to receive help. But the risk remained that some retaining underserved students, for one reason or another, wouldn't apply.

San Francisco State University threaded that needle. It distributed about $12 million based on its own data about needy students — $1,000 for a full-time student in the lowest income bracket, and $750 for full-time students in the next bracket; part-timers received half that. But to serve students who didn't fill out a Fafsa or whose need didn't appear in financial data, the university also created an application process for about $1.8 million. About 3,700 students submitted applications, far exceeding supply.

Meanwhile, some of the most retaining underserved students — those who are undocumented — were not eligible at all. So the university relied on a donor-supported emergency fund to assist them. "You have to build a rich portfolio," to meet all your students' needs, says Lynn Mahoney, San Francisco State's president.

Simplicity is key. Goldrick-Rab, from the Hope Center for College, Communi-

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**"I was hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food."**
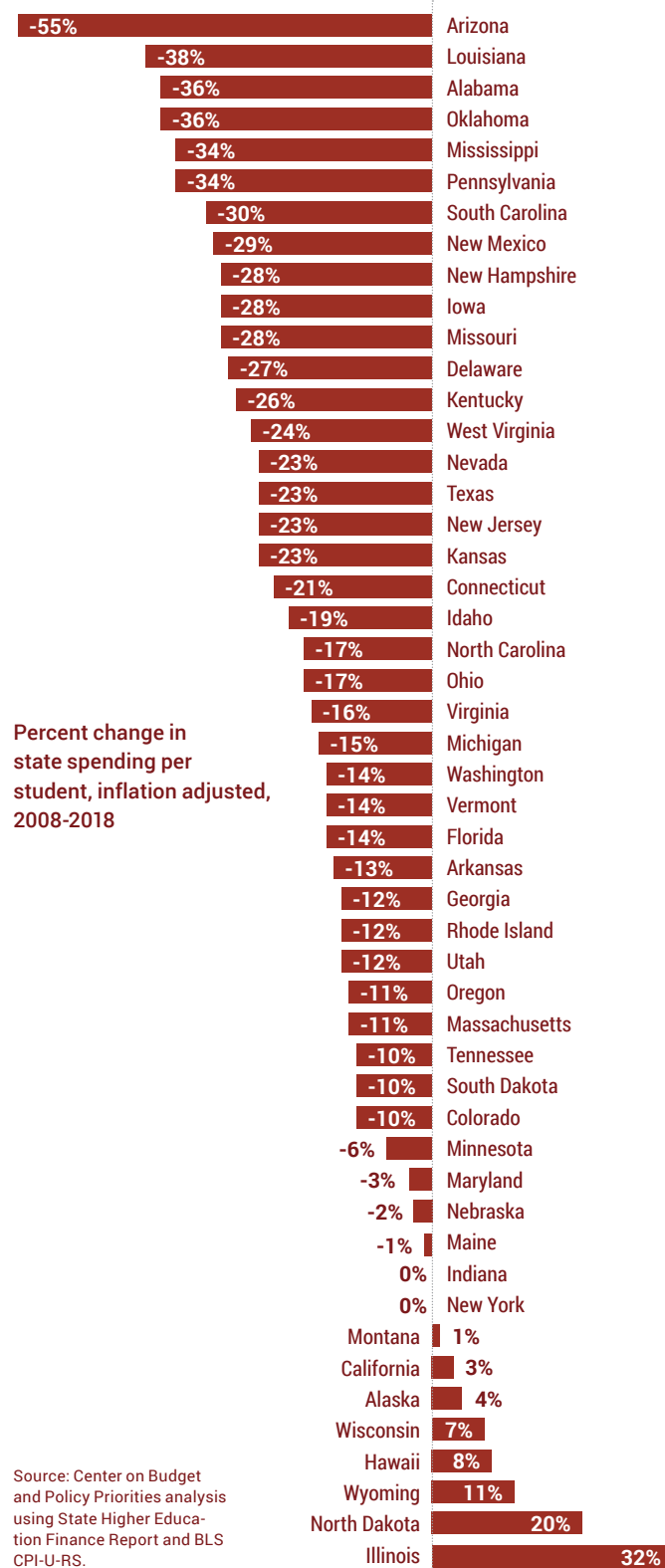
## 29%
### of 2-year students

## 21%
### of 4-year students

2019 #RealCollege Survey

Source: The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice

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## State Funding for Higher Education Remains Far Below Pre-Recession Levels in Most States

**Percent change in state spending per student, inflation adjusted, 2008-2018**

| State | Percent |
| --- | --- |
| Arizona | -55% |
| Louisiana | -38% |
| Alabama | -36% |
| Oklahoma | -36% |
| Mississippi | -34% |
| Pennsylvania | -34% |
| South Carolina | -30% |
| New Mexico | -29% |
| New Hampshire | -28% |
| Iowa | -28% |
| Missouri | -28% |
| Delaware | -27% |
| Kentucky | -26% |
| West Virginia | -24% |
| Nevada | -23% |
| Texas | -23% |
| New Jersey | -23% |
| Kansas | -23% |
| Connecticut | -21% |
| Idaho | -19% |
| North Carolina | -17% |
| Ohio | -17% |
| Virginia | -16% |
| Michigan | -15% |
| Washington | -14% |
| Vermont | -14% |
| Florida | -14% |
| Arkansas | -13% |
| Georgia | -12% |
| Rhode Island | -12% |
| Utah | -12% |
| Oregon | -11% |
| Massachusetts | -11% |
| Tennessee | -10% |
| South Dakota | -10% |
| Colorado | -10% |
| Minnesota | -6% |
| Maryland | -3% |
| Nebraska | -2% |
| Maine | -1% |
| Indiana | 0% |
| New York | 0% |
| Montana | 1% |
| California | 3% |
| Alaska | 4% |
| Wisconsin | 7% |
| Hawaii | 8% |
| Wyoming | 11% |
| North Dakota | 20% |
| Illinois | 32% |

Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities analysis using State Higher Education Finance Report and BLS CPI-U-RS.

# How One College Rethought Food Aid for Students

Joseph I. Castro knows the struggles of low-income and first-generation students well. He was one himself. Now, as president of California State University at Fresno, which has a high number of financially needy students, those challenges are foremost on his mind.

So shortly after he became president of the college, located in California's Central Valley, he began one of the nation's first large-scale hunger-prevention programs. Started in 2014, the campus food pantry grew to serving about 5,000 students a month. The need is clear. About 65 percent of the college's students are on Pell Grants.

When classes moved online and students largely went home, the campus had to revise its basic-needs strategy. It's now using a variety of ways to get food to students. The food pantry, called the Student Cupboard, remains open, with social-distancing and security precautions. "We went from a client-choice model, where students picked what they wanted like a grocery store, to a prebagged model and handing out bags at the door," says Jessica Medina, coordinator of the university's Food Security Project.

For those who can't come to campus, or don't feel safe doing so, the campus is sending gift cards for food, paid for through an emergency fund. And it's partnering with a local company, BitWise industries, to deliver meals to students' homes. "Bitwise will deliver the food on our behalf," Castro says. "We've leveraged our resources with other organizations as well, like the Central California Food Bank and Catholic Charities."

The partnerships also help with a food-waste problem that has become visible worldwide as supply-chain disruptions have caused farmers to dump usable produce because that's less costly than moving it. "We share our resources with the other organizations," Castro says, "so if they have an overabundance of a certain product, we can give it away before it perishes."

The campus's assault on food insecurity is the product of a few advantages. For starters, it helps that the Cal State system announced in May that classes would be online in the fall, allowing Fresno and other campuses to plan for a virtual experience. The California legislature has also been well ahead of other states in giving colleges money to support students' basic needs, providing the University of California and Cal State systems each $15 million for that purpose in 2019.

Even as more colleges have begun paying attention to hunger and housing insecurity, there continues to be robust debate about whether colleges ought to be responsible for intractable societal issues like a lack of food. Castro saw that debate on his own campus in the early years.

"The way we framed it was, 'You can't be successful as a student if you're hungry,'" he says. "We also focused on hygiene. What we found was students who didn't have money would cut back on their food and hygiene items. If they did that, they didn't feel as comfortable being in public and then might stop going to class. You could see how that cycle could make them a dropout."

A campaign like this is about momentum. Castro already had it. The campaign to collect emergency money for students, even pre-Covid, was resonating with many alumni, he says, who could see their own struggles with poverty during college in the current students. Covid-19 has further underscored the link between basic needs and student success.

Castro is now focusing on building an endowment that would institutionalize the food-pantry program so it will be less dependent on donations and state support, which, of course, can no longer be taken for granted.

ty, and Justice, says Cares Act applications often ask students to tell the story of their emergency, "worse yet, to tell the story of their poverty." Not only can the discomfort some may feel discourage them from applying, the complicated process may admit bias on the part of the reviewers, Goldrick-Rab says.

"All that's necessary is to size up the student's condition in the moment," she says. "We don't need a history book. We just need to know what the shape of the problem is. Are they having a housing problem? A food problem? A technology problem? Figure out what the problem is and then figure out,

based on the money you have, how to prioritize those problems. Then reward. Just go. There's too much agonizing going on."

### RETHINKING WORK-STUDY

A job hasn't traditionally been thought of as a basic need of students, but for those paying their way through college, or without any parental support at all, or taking care of others who can't work, it's the most basic need. That makes Covid-19 especially pernicious to student success. In just the first three months after the world moved online, more than 40 million people filed for unem-

## SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT PARENTS

Before the novel coronavirus struck, shuttering her college and her sons' schools, Vanessa Nuñez would study before or after her job at the Family Resource Center at Los Angeles Valley College, or during her lunch break. Her days, like those of many working parents, were a balancing act, filled with drop-offs, pickups, and after-school activities.

But when everything shut down in mid-March, Nuñez's carefully crafted routine was upended. Suddenly she was stuck in her duplex all day with four boys, ages 5 to 12. She squeezed in her own classes among her sons' daily lessons on Zoom. Some days she'd stay up until after midnight finishing assignments, then rise again at dawn, just as her husband was returning from the night shift working construction.

"It's hard, because I try to focus first on them, and by the end of the day I'm so exhausted, it doesn't sink in as easily," she said in an interview in late May. She was trying to complete the prerequisites so that she could continue her studies in child development at California State University at Northridge.



COURTESY OF VANESSA NUNEZ

**Vanessa Nuñez with her four sons**

Still, Nuñez knew she was among the lucky ones. Both she and her husband were still employed, and the school district had given each of her sons a laptop, so they didn't have to fight over technology. Many of the student parents she helps at the Family Resource Center had lost their jobs and were struggling to meet their basic needs. They were missing the free

diapers and wipes that they'd normally collect from the college every week or two — not to mention the tutoring, counseling, and camaraderie the center provided.

Student parents, who account for more than one in five undergraduates today, faced multiple stressors even before the pandemic hit. In a 2019 survey by the Hope Center for Col-

ployment, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Experts warn that unemployment could exceed Great Depression levels.

Covid-19 has mostly eliminated on-campus student employment. The service-industry jobs that low-income students often rely on off campus will be scarce for the duration. And even for colleges that aspire to be back in-person for the fall, the same jobs won't exist as social distancing becomes the new normal.

There's a lot of talk these days about gap years — time off to travel, explore, or relax. If you are affluent or have the means, perhaps a gap year might be viable. But poor people don't take gap years. They drop out, and often don't come back. As much as colleges might want their retaining underserved students to remain enrolled — for moral and financial reasons — for many, putting food on the table or paying rent understandably will supersede continuing their education.

Keeping low-income students enrolled depends partly on whether colleges can help them navigate employment. Colleges need to reimagine work-study. Students have many skills colleges can leverage to create new jobs, says Laura T. Hamilton, a professor and chair of the sociology department at the University of California

lege, Community, and Justice, more than half reported that they had been food-insecure in the prior 30 days, and close to 70 percent said they'd been housing-insecure in the previous year. More than 60 percent said they found child care unaffordable, and large numbers reported feeling anxious or depressed.

Given those statistics, it is perhaps unsurprising that student parents graduate at much lower rates than do their peers without kids. Only 37 percent complete a degree or certificate within six years, compared with 59 percent of students without children, according to unpublished estimates by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

The coronavirus has compounded the financial and time-management challenges facing parenting students, making an already steep climb to graduation even steeper. Along with a sometimes difficult transition to remote learning — for themselves and their children — student parents are coping with the loss of income and child care that made attending college possible for many.

"Student parents sit at the intersection of so many vulnerabilities," says Lindsey Reichlin Cruse , study direc-

tor at the Institute for Women's Policy Research. "All the things that make it difficult for parents to study in normal times are even sharper now."

Los Angeles Valley College's Family Resource Center has done more for them than most. The center, which provides wraparound support for more than 500 parents and grandparents, had raised almost $28,000 in emergency aid by late May, award-

> # "Student parents sit at the intersection of so many vulnerabilities."

ing small-dollar grants to 45 students struggling to pay for food and housing. "We realized that money is really what our students need right now," says Marni Roosevelt, who expanded the center from a parent-support group she started in 2000. "They need to be able to keep their lives going."

But the center, which employs both a resource counselor and a marriage-and-family therapist, is also trying to meet student parents' emotion-

al needs. In May the two counselors started holding online "cafes," where students could come for support.

Monroe Community College, in New York, holds weekly online meetings where student parents can get information about available resources and "talk about what's going on in their lives," says Mary Ann DeMario, an institutional researcher who is helping build a program for single moms at the college. "We want to make sure they feel connected, so they don't feel they're going it alone," she said.

Still, both Roosevelt and DeMario say they expect that some of the student parents at their colleges will need to take time off from classes, to recover their financial and emotional footing. The goal, each one says, is to get those students re-enrolled as quickly as possible. "They are always walking on this precipice, and this maybe knocked some of them off," says Roosevelt. "For some students, it's just too much — they can't handle everything. And that's real life."

Nuñez, meanwhile, is trying to emulate her sons, who rarely grumble, she says. Their resilience and adaptability "help me motivate myself." In that sense, maybe being a parent is an advantage.

## U.S. Weekly Unemployment Claims

In just the first three months after the world moved online, more than 40 million people filed for unemployment, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

**Seasonally adjusted U.S. weekly UI claims (in thousands)**

| Week ending | Initial claims | Change from prior week | 4 week average | Insured un-employment | Change from prior week | 4 week average | IUR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| March 21 | 3,307 | 3,025 | 1,004.25 | 3,059 | 1,275 | 2,061.00 | 2.1 |
| March 28 | 6,867 | 3,560 | 2,666.75 | 7,446 | 4,387 | 3,497.75 | 5.1 |
| April 4 | 6,615 | -252 | 4.267.75 | 11,914 | 4,468 | 6,050.75 | 8.2 |
| April 11 | 5,237 | -1,378 | 5,506.50 | 15,819 | 3,905 | 9,559.50 | 10.9 |
| April 18 | 4,442 | -795 | 5790.25 | 18,001 | 2,192 | 13,297.50 | 12.4 |
| April 25 | 3,867 | -575 | 5,040.25 | 22,377 | 4,366 | 17,030.25 | 15.4 |
| May 2 | 3,176 | -691 | 4,180.50 | 22,548 | 171 | 19,688.75 | 15.4 |
| May 9 | 2,687 | -489 | 3,543.00 | 24,912 | 2,364 | 21,962.00 | 17.1 |
| May 16 | 2,446 | -241 | 3,044.00 | 20,841 | -4,071 | 22,669.50 | 14.3 |
| May 23 | 2,123 | -323 | 2,608.00 | 21,268 | 427 | 22,392.25 | 14.6 |
| May 30 | 1,897 | -226 | 2,288,25 | 20,606 | -662 | 21,906.75 | 14.1 |
| June 6 | 1,566 | -331 | 2,008.00 | 20,544 | -62 | 20,814,75 | 14 .1 |

Source: U.S. Department of Labor

*Continued from Page 21*

at Merced, which serves a largely low-income student population.

Colleges could enlist students to become online recruiters, an area institutions will need to invest more in if enrollment drops as expected because of Covid-19. Planning departmental virtual events, promoting wellness, and helping professors with technology needs as IT departments are stretched thin are other ways students could be employed.

Some of Hamilton's students trained her how to use a chat board while teaching online. She's now thinking about continuing to use the technology when classes are back in person for students who are more comfortable typing their questions than asking them.

An overworked IT employee isn't always needed to help faculty use the latest classroom technology like a chat function or Zoom. "A lot of what faculty need is pretty basic. I don't know how to say that nicely," says Hamilton, co-author of *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality.* "Students are digitally savvy.

We should take advantage of that."

At Southern Utah University, administrators put students to work in new jobs that included preparing online teaching modules, designing graphics, marketing, and peer-mentoring. But the reality is the new jobs aren't likely to make up for those lost. Another way colleges can put students to work is by creating research opportunities, Hamilton says. Undergraduate researchers could give faculty members assistance at a time when they're stretched thin. The experience would also give students an advantage on their résumé and better prepare them for graduate school or what's expected to be a brutal job market.

The pandemic poses unprecedented challenges to colleges, chief among them figuring out how to meet their students' basic needs so they can continue their studies.It will require care, creativity, and, frankly, money. But far-sighted colleges are realizing that basic-needs work is an an investment in students' futures, and in their own.

# The Learning Curve:
# Meeting Academic Needs

When colleges moved their entire teaching operations online almost overnight, professors had to hope their students would grade them on a curve. This was not a time to perfect online pedagogy informed by rigorous literature and state-of-the-art technology. This was triage, an imperfect solution to a crisis no one could have anticipated. But come fall, when most colleges anticipate much if not all of their instruction will be done online, teaching will need to be more deliberate — especially if colleges want to argue they're still worth the full in-person price.

Even while colleges beef up their on-line pedagogy, they will have to contend with the digital divide. The problem is not just that students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to have the digital tools necessary to succeed, like a laptop and reliable internet connectivity, but how students communicate with their professors about the failure of that equipment.

Low-income and minority students are less likely to tell faculty members if they were having problems with their technology, says Jessica Calarco, an associate professor of sociology at Indiana University who has studied the digital divide. In her research she found, for example, that 54 percent of college students with a parent who completed a bachelor's degree had asked for a technology-related extension or accommodation, while only 38 percent of first-generation students had done the same.

"They felt like it wasn't a good excuse," Calarco says. "They worried faculty mem-

bers would assume they were lying to get an extension. They felt it was their responsibility, like, If I can't get online, or if my computer breaks, that's on me."

> ## "They felt it was their responsibility, like, If I can't get online, or if my computer breaks, that's on me."

Calarco's research informs how she's adapting her class to a time of crisis. The debate over synchronous or asynchronous online teaching? She offers both, livestreaming her lectures but posting them for those who can't connect at the scheduled class time. She also posts transcripts of the lecture for students who may have trouble playing video.

Calarco concluded that it would be inequitable for her students to continue on with the spring semester as before. So she said those who chose to continue participating could only improve their grades. Penalizing students for work produced remotely, she says, would be "grading them on their privilege."
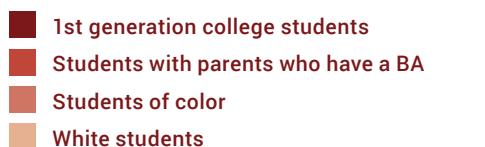
There will still be a learning curve in the fall, for professors and students who are exploring a remote world they didn't ask for. Wraparound support from advisers, counselors, and mentors will be important. But the support from professors — who will be on the front lines of keeping students connected — will be just as crucial. Colleges will need to think deeply about the fairness of assessment. They will have to unclog the pathways by which students move into and through college. And they'll need to invest in pedagogy with a personal touch.

### THINKING THROUGH PASS/FAIL

Technology, of course, is only one aspect of the distinct worlds low-income and affluent students inhabit during remote learning. A quiet place to study. A desk. A sched-

## Technology Concerns

**Access to technology is a critical problem for students from underrepresented groups.**

- 1st generation college students
- Students with parents who have a BA
- Students of color
- White students

Students who have asked for a technology-related extension or accomodation

- 38%
- 54%
- 42%
- 33%
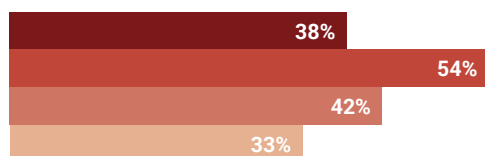
Students who think a professor would probably grant a technology-related extension

- 22%
- 38%
- 32%
- 36%
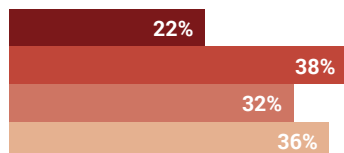
Source: Jessica McCrory Calarco

ule free from work duties that allows for studying. Help with child-care responsibilities. Each of those advantages is harder to come by if you're an underprivleged student or single parent. That's made colleges and faculty members rethink student assessment.

Among the trickier academic topics is what to do about grading in the fall. Colleges had no reservations about giving their students a pass/fail option in the spring. Students didn't know what they were getting into, and they hadn't signed up for it. But as remote learning extends into the fall, what should colleges do about grading? Even into the summer, it's a question colleges are punting as they cling to hope for an in-person fall, or at least more certainty.

Some students have always had more support than others. But college was, at least in one way, a great equalizer. All students were in one place, with access to the same computer labs, libraries, and workspaces. Now even that limited semblance of equality can't be taken for granted. A student who doesn't have a desk at home, or a quiet place to study, or reliable access to a computer and internet, can't be fairly compared with a student who has all of those things, argues Calarco and others.
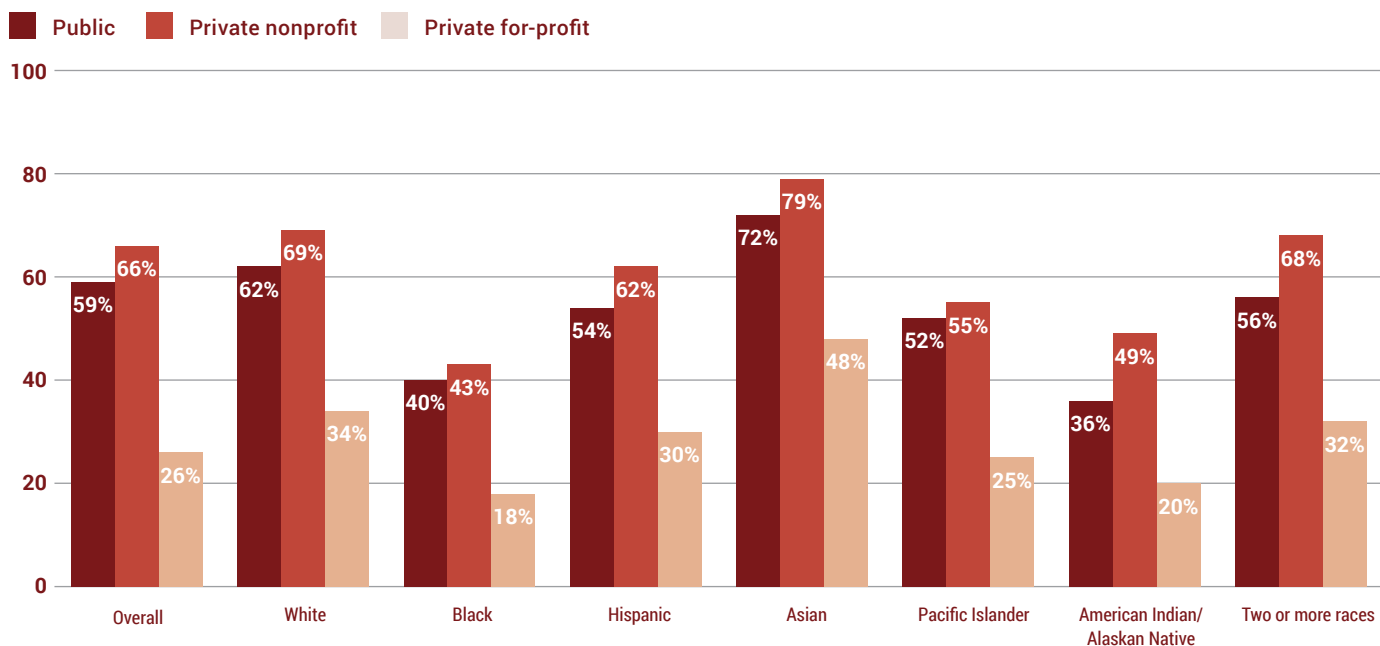
If classes are remote in the fall, Calarco wants to move toward an "ungrading model." Students will reflect on their participation and what they've learned. They'll get assignments that she may or may not collect. Calarco will move away from exams. "Online exams right now aren't a particularly fair option," she says, "especially if they're timed exams."

Whatever call colleges make on pass/fail for the duration of remote learning, changing the grading system has consequences. And simply giving students the option to go pass/fail without thinking through the implications could disproportionately hurt retaining underserved students. Some of the changes are beyond a university's control and require a culture change: Will medical and graduate schools not penalize students who choose a pass/fail option?

But universities should be thinking about logistics on their own campuses.

## Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity

The graduation rates for full-time Black, Hispanic, and American Indian students at a 4-year institution lag significantly behind that of white and Asian students.

Legend: Public, Private nonprofit, Private for-profit

| Category | Public | Private nonprofit | Private for-profit |
|---|---|---|---|
| Overall | 59% | 66% | 26% |
| White | 62% | 69% | 34% |
| Black | 40% | 43% | 18% |
| Hispanic | 54% | 62% | 30% |
| Asian | 72% | 79% | 48% |
| Pacific Islander | 52% | 55% | 25% |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 36% | 49% | 20% |
| Two or more races | 56% | 68% | 32% |

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Follow-through is necessary. Do pass/fail grades count toward major credit for graduation? Will they satisfy sequencing requirements so that, for example, a grade of "pass" in a general-chemistry course will get the student into an organic-chemistry course?

"You have to make sure that two, three years down the line, students are able to meet their major requirements and graduate," says Laura T. Hamilton, chair of the sociology department at the Merced campus of the University of California. "Most universities have guidelines, so pass/fail classes don't count the same way. So you have to make the downstream changes to make sure students aren't negatively affected."

From his office on the sixth floor of the tallest building on the Navajo Nation reservation, Diné College's president, Charles "Monty" Roessel, gets a bird's-eye view of the challenges that confront his students.

When he looked out his windows one morning in mid-May, this is what he saw: students sitting in the parking lot with laptops, making use of the college's free Wi-Fi. And this: a line of at least 70 cars, filled with students waiting to collect their federal emergency-relief checks.

The scenes encapsulated two of the biggest hurdles that stand between many Native students and a college degree: poverty and the digital divide. Twenty percent of Native American students lack computers or internet access at home, according to a survey by the American Indian College Fund. And roughly two-thirds of tribal-college students report food or housing insecurity, according to a recent survey by the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.

The coronavirus, and the economic and educational disruption it has wrought, has magnified these challenges, leading to concerns that college-graduation rates among Native students — already among the lowest in the nation — could slip still further. In a survey conducted by the college fund in March, one in five of its scholarship recipients said they were likely to drop out, up from one in 10 the previous fall.

Under normal circumstances, students who attend the nation's 35 accredited tribal colleges can come to campus for meals, internet access, and a quiet place to study. But with campuses closed, many of those students are confined to crowded, multi-

> ## "It's that old-fashioned distance education, which — you know — works."

generational homes, often with spotty or nonexistent internet access. Students and their family members have lost their jobs Some have themselves contracted Covid-19.

The Navajo Nation, which spans parts of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, has been particularly hard hit by the pandemic. A week after Roessel described the scene outside his window, the Nation surpassed New York for the country's highest infection rate per capita. Diné, the nation's oldest tribal college, has lost students and alumni to the virus, including a former Miss Diné College in her 20s. "It has touched everybody on the reservation, and since we're a reflection of the reservation, it has touched us, too," Roessel says.

When Diné shut down, in March, he rushed laptops and mobile Wi-Fi devices to his scattered students, 86 percent of whom do not have internet access at home. But the hot spots worked only if students lived within range of a wireless tower, and many did not. In the early weeks of the closure, students were climbing hills or walking miles into town to get a signal. Many had limited data plans that were quickly depleted by two-hour-long Zoom classes.

So faculty members started tailoring their teaching to students' circumstances, making instructional decisions on a case-by-case basis, Roussel said. Some conducted classes by telephone, or jettisoned live lectures for PowerPoints that could be e-mailed, piecemeal. A few took to teaching by text.

Other tribal colleges made similar accommodations for their students, says Carrie Billy, president of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. Some of the most remote and internet-challenged colleges went so far as to print out packets that students could pick up and return, eliminating the need for technology altogether.

"It's that old-fashioned distance education, which — you know — works," Billy said.

Tribal colleges have also worked with community organizations to get meals to their students, as prices rise and some foods become scarce. But

**UNCLOGGING PATHWAYS**

Many underserved students begin their higher-education journeys at community colleges, with the hope of earning a bachelor's degree. Often, those hopes are soon dashed. About 80 percent of students who enter a community college indicate they want to earn a bachelor's degree, according to the National Student Clearinghouse. But after six years, only about 13 percent do so. And for lower-income students, it's only 9 percent. What happens?

Life can intervene. Working two jobs, juggling kids' schooling, caring for elderly parents. These can all derail a student's path

Billy and other tribal-college advocates know it will take more than flexibility and food to keep Native students enrolled, particularly if classes remain online this fall. It will also require recreating campus communities and cultures online.

Tribal colleges are "very face-to-face," says Cheryl Crazy Bull, president of the American Indian College Fund. Many professors know their students personally, having grown up with members of their families. Classrooms are collaborative, honoring the knowledge that students bring to the learning process. Tribal colleges also play an active role in maintaining tribal traditions and ceremonies — ceremonies that have been put on hold during the pandemic.

Among tribal-college leaders, "there's a big fear that enrollment will take a huge hit if students can't come back," Billy says. "Students really want that physical sense of community."

Diné is planning to reopen its campus in the fall, perhaps with two eight-week sessions rather than a semester block, Roessel says. That way, if there is a second wave of infections, the second session can be conducted online. The college is also working to create satellite classrooms where students will have access to laptops and the internet in a smaller, socially distanced setting.

In the meantime, Diné is using the $7 million in emergency aid it has received from the federal government to expand its broadband capabilities and build studios where faculty members will be able to record lectures. Roessel is also working on ways to help students stay connected to their culture through the use of technology — to remind them that they can find balance in an unbalanced world.

"As bad as it is on the reservation, there are ceremonies you can do to get back into balance," he says. "That's our underlying philosophy. And now is the perfect time for that philosophy to come into play."

Charles Roessel, president of Diné College, speaks with two board members.

to a degree. But the higher-education bureaucracy is also a culprit. Clunky transfer requirements. Credits that don't transfer. Credits that do transfer but don't count toward a degree. Transfer students lost on average 43 percent of their credits, according to federal estimates in 2017. All this can be deflating to a first-generation college student, or at the least delay progress toward a degree, which translates to a higher cost and yet another barrier to finishing college.

The coronavirus amplifies the risks. The pandemic has rejiggered the pathways on which students move into and through higher education. The uncertainty has caused some students to stay closer to home. Others may choose to enroll in a community college if they can't have an on-campus experience, accruing credits toward a degree on the cheap. Transfer students who move from a two-year to a four-year college are increas-

ingly important to colleges as well, as overall enrollments have skidded in recent years. But each bend in the pathway threatens to throw students off course.

Transfer requirements that student-success advocates already viewed as complex and confusing now become riskier. Will a class with a lab that wasn't completed because the in-person component was canceled or delayed be accepted for transfer credit? Will an online course — which some colleges historically viewed as less than an in-person course — count?

Now's the time to revise transfer policies, and with a little savvy, colleges can market the changes and attract more students, says Josh Wyner, executive director of the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program

"If you've never offered an online course," he says, "you can look somebody straight in the face and say, 'We don't think this is good

Naudia Johnson, who is studying entrepreneurship, plans to transfer from Johnson & Wales University in North Miami to a college in her home state of New Jersey, closer to her parents.

# How One College Wields Data to Keep Students Enrolled

The student-success movement was born of and has always relied on data. First came the realization that access and success are two different things, as increases in enrollment aren't matched by graduation rates. Now, pinpointing when students drop off the higher-education ladder, tracking them for risk factors, and intervening at the first signs of distress all depend on obsessively collecting, dissecting, and acting on data.

But Middle Tennessee State University takes its data further. Richard Sluder, vice president for student success, sends a weekly student-success update to whomever on campus signs up for it. This helps foster a culture that measures students' academic progress. At a time of extreme uncertainty, he says, it's especially helpful to elevate data and make deans, advisers, and others responsible for hitting targets.

"The awareness means everything," Sluder says. "Otherwise the approach would be to hope for the best and wait for the [university's] census in the fall of 2020."

In a weekly update Sluder sent in late May, the number that stuck out was 183. That's the number of students by which the university had fallen short of a key enrollment goal: an 80-percent retention rate for the fall-2019 freshman cohort. Though 2,467 students from that cohort, or 74 percent, had signed up so far (almost a percentage point better than the same time the previous year), the college needed 2,650 to show up for the fall of 2020.

Some colleges within the university had seen dips in their retention rates for this cohort compared with the freshmen of 2018 — 2.8 percent lower for the business college, 3.7 percent lower for the education college. In the late May email, Sluder used yellow highlighter on one sentence: "We have time to make a difference for these students and our institution. Classes start in 91 days, and fall census is in 105 days."

Data alone can't improve student success. It must be paired with action. With the data, the advisers can direct interventions to specific students, by different variables: Veteran status. Race. Income. Grade-point average. Financial-aid status. Then an adviser can take steps tailored to the student's circumstances. For example, in the liberal-arts college, those receiving a scholarship dependent on their GPA are tracked so that administrators can intervene with academic support if students are in danger of losing their awards.

None of the interventions could be possible without beefing up advising, Sluder says. The university has invested heavily in advisers over the last several years and now has about 70, bringing the adviser-student ratio to about one per 260. "When you get up to one per 700 or 800, you're just going to be doing transactional advising — processing people, approving students to get registered, things like that," Sluder says.

Sluder's favorite day of the week is Tuesday. That morning, he receives the latest student-success and enrollment data. Tuesday is also Brad Baumgardner's favorite day. The advising manager in the liberal-arts college checks the data dashboard the first thing in the morning. In early June, he was pleased to see that the college, amid a global pandemic, had a first-time freshmen retention rate 2 percent ahead of the same time last year.

That's the result of removing impediments to registration, like holds on students who had not met previous advising requirements, and of constantly staying in touch with the students who had not yet registered. "We have a report we can run that shows which students aren't registered," Baumgardner says. Reaching out to them via phone, email, or "whatever it takes," he says, "we continue to communicate with them throughout the summer until they indicate to us, 'No, I'm not coming back for this reason.'"

The data, along with other changes like free tutoring and course redesign that elevated student success, have led to impressive gains. The four-year-graduation rate for the 2009 cohort was 19 percent. For the 2015 cohort, it was 35 percent.

Retention and graduation rates translate to dollars. If the college had not succeeded in raising its retention rate between 2013 and 2018, it would have enrolled 537 fewer students — or lost $2.4 million per semester on gross tuition revenue.

"The old saying is, 'Work hard and do your best,'" Sluder says. "Here, the saying is, 'What's your number?'"

enough quality.' But if all your students just completed a semester online, how can you say that?"

Clearly communicated admissions processes and deadlines have always been important to first-generation students, who are less likely to have a parent guide them through the process, but they are crucial now to attracting and retaining them. With high-school and college students' access to their counselors limited, the two- and four-year colleges need to communicate and coordinate requirements and deadlines to avoid a confusing maze of bureaucracy, says Audrey Dow, senior vice president for the Campaign for College Opportunity, an advocacy group in California.

"The more we can coordinate and streamline information and requirements for students, the easier it will be for students to know what they have to do to get into college and graduate," Dow says. "Right now each of the 23 California State University campuses can make its own decision about when admissions deadlines are. There may be 23 different processes by which they accept students for fall 2021. That's not helpful for the students who have the least ability to navigate the college-application process."

## BUILDING PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

Research suggests that retaining underserved students may be especially at risk in a fully online world. Here again it's telling to consider transfer students. One study by researchers at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of Central Florida found the least prepared transfer students, those who entered the course with low grade-point averages, were retained about 20-percent less in online classes than in face-to-face classes.

One of the researchers, Rebecca Glazier, an associate professor of political science at Arkansas, teaches online classes and believes in their value. Taking some courses online allows schedule flexibility, saving time on commuting to campus.

But, she says, there's a tipping point. Once students take more than about 40 percent of their courses online, chaos ensues. You're juggling many virtual due dates, all

without a professor's eye contact, body language, and voice inflection to indicate the importance of a forthcoming paper or project. Succeeding in such a disconnected environment requires the organizational and self-regulating skills that low-income and first-generation students haven't always de-

### The Leaky Transfer Pipeline
**Getting that four-year degree proves elusive for the majority of students**

About **80%** of students who enter a community college indicate they want to earn a bachelor's degree.

But **13%** do so.

And for lower income students, it's only **9%**

Sources: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Improving the Transfer Handoff: The critical effort to help community-college students get a four-year degree

veloped, Glazier says.

These students may be less likely to access support services like the library, or to feel comfortable contacting professors with questions. Glazier says it's especially crucial for professors to intentionally create personal connections in an online-learning world. Those could be as simple as a few efforts to humanize themselves. Talk about a book they just read. Post videos, maybe of their cat. The goal is to be approachable so that students, especially those who feel lost, feel connected and willing to reach out if they have a problem.

"If they're just logging in, reading some notes, taking a quiz, getting something au-

tomatically graded, it's easy for them to forget they even have an online class," says Glazier. "They won't feel that social obligation to participate in a class with a person they don't really feel like they know."

The outreach should start even before the semester begins. Glazier recommends faculty members send a welcome email. It could be as simple as saying they're excited to have students in the class and explaining the course ahead. Attach a syllabus, and perhaps a welcome video — publicly available since many learning modules don't become available until classes start. Professors could even do a survey asking students if they have a preferred name, their gender pronoun, and whether there's anything in their lives that might make it difficult for them to succeed in the semester.

Download and save that information. If a student is struggling later on or has skipped classes, professors can send a personal message. "It might say, 'Hey Steve. I haven't seen you in class. I know you were worried about juggling your job and class, and I just wanted to check in and let you know I'm worried about you.'" A personal connection, along with a willingness to work with struggling students based on their life circumstances, can make the difference for a student on the verge of dropping out, Glazier says.

New research in June from the University of California at Davis underscores the importance of professor-student connections to student success, especially for the neediest students. The researchers tested the effects of simple professor interventions like personal and strategically timed emails to students about the keys to success in the class and reminders of when the professor was available to talk. The results? Letter grades went up by nearly a third (for example, from a B- to a B) for Black and Latina/o freshmen, and nearly half for the students least prepared for college, the researchers say.

> A personal connection, along with a willingness to work with struggling students based on their life circumstances, can make the difference.

The interventions, conducted across 43 classrooms and nearly 4,000 students at a "large broad-access university," were completed before Covid-19. But the research is especially relevant in a world where students are more physically disconnected from their colleges than ever, says Michal Kurlaender, one of the researchers and a professor of education at Davis. "Faculty now are students' main source of connection to the university," she says.

**IMPROVING PEDAGOGY**

Some colleges are encouraging their faculty members to embrace what's known as "inclusive" online pedagogy. San Francisco State University will use $3 million of its Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economics Security Act money to invest in online classroom technology and provide professors money to attend classes to improve their online pedagogy and make it more inclusive. That includes using low-bandwidth teaching so that students without reliable computers and broadband have access to courses, creating transparent assignments with clear criteria for success, and making images and other course ma-

## Canceled Education Plans

More Latino Americans canceled their education plans during the spring semester than other groups.

Latino American **21%**

Black **15%**

White **11%**
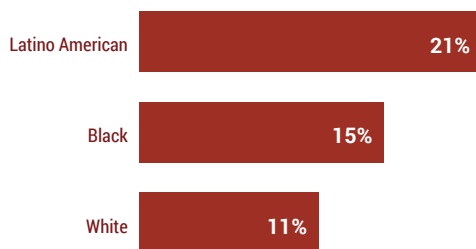
Source: Strada Education Network

Chetan Joshi, director of the counseling center at the University of Maryland at College Park, was worried. With coronavirus cases on the rise in the mid-Atlantic, his university was about to pivot to online learning, and he wasn't sure how students with disabilities would fare.

His biggest fear, he recalled in an interview a couple months later, was that "we would get into a situation where students are overwhelmed, feel frozen by the new challenges, and give up."

So the university acted quickly, creating resource guides for students and faculty members with detailed information on accessibility and accommodations in online courses. Staff sent emails to the roughly 2,000 students who had received accommodations for in-person classes to say that if they needed new ones, the staff would be available virtually.

The goal, says Jo Ann Hutchinson, assistant director for accessibility and disability service, was "to help avoid or reduce anxieties, confusion, and concern."

The proactive approach didn't eliminate every problem that students with disabilities would encounter in the switch to online learning, but it did provide a map for navigating the sudden shift, and it helped reassure students that "they were not alone in this difficult environment," Joshi says.

On many campuses, the midsemester move online was far bumpier, advocates for the disabled says. Blind students dealt with documents that were incompatible with their screen readers. Deaf students confronted captioning riddled with errors.

Students with attention deficits struggled to focus amid the distractions of their homes.

While the challenges differed by disability, the place where they showed up most often — and with greatest consequence — was in remote testing, says Jane E. Jarrow, a longtime disability-rights advocate.

"It didn't matter whether it was a student getting extended time, or a student who uses assistive technology, or a student who needs information in alternate format — there were problems," she says.

Roughly one-fifth of undergrad-

## Roughly one-fifth of undergraduates and 12 percent of graduate students have some kind of disability.

uates and 12 percent of graduate students have some kind of disability, according to the National Center for College Students with Disabilities.

Under federal law, colleges are required to provide them with an equal opportunity to education, through accessible content and "appropriate academic adjustments."

In theory, colleges should have had systems in place before the pandemic to ensure that their learning platforms, software, and materials were accessible to all students. But many didn't, says Chris Danielsen, director of public relations at the National Federa-

tion of the Blind. Some colleges weren't sure how to tackle the problem, he says; others took the word of vendors who claimed their technology was accessible when it wasn't.

"Universities should have already been doing this, and now we've hit a crisis and they have to do it," he says. "It's always difficult to retrofit a system that isn't accessible, and it's extremely difficult under this type of pressure."

Accommodations were an issue as well. Some colleges put the onus on students to figure out what online-learning accommodations they would need, says Val Erwin, a Ph.D. candidate in higher education at Bowling Green State University and one of the chairs of the student-advisory board at the National Center for College Students with Disabilities. In rarer cases, colleges required students to get retested before granting any changes in accommodations — a difficult proposition during a pandemic, she says.

For some students, self-advocacy didn't come easily. Jasmine Maddox, who has PTSD and ADHD and normally takes exams alone, in a quiet space on campus, says her institution, Albion College, offered to update students' accommodations for online learning. But when she struggled with testing at home, she didn't speak up, because she didn't want to burden her professor, whose father was ill.

"I was like 'it's only eight weeks,'" she says. "It was very difficult learning."

As many colleges plan for a "hybrid" fall, with a mixture of online learning and in-person classes, advocates are urging them to

Melanie McDaniel, a student at American U., was diagnosed with ADHD but was rejected by the college board for extended time on the SAT. Demand for disability accommodations for schoolwork and testing has swelled, but access to them is unequal.

keep students with disabilities front of mind.

"Accessibility is not a one-and-done thing," says Danielsen, who suggests that colleges train faculty members in basic accessibility concepts and put a person or panel in charge of reviewing software and platforms for online learning.

Colleges must also anticipate new challenges that will arise with planned changes in classes in person, Jarrow says. For example: If everyone is wearing masks, how will deaf students read lips? And how will blind students navigate a campus with reorganized routes and new rules about staying six feet apart?

"If colleges think that 'fixing' the problems of remote instruction this spring will have them ready to face the fall for students with disabilities, they are in for a rude shock," she says.

The key, says Kristie Orr, president of the Association on Higher Education and Disability, will be consistent communication with the faculty and listening to students' needs. Texas A&M University, where Orr directs the department of disability resources, recently convened an online panel of students with disabilities to talk about their experiences with online learning. More than 150 faculty and staff listened in.

The University of Maryland, meanwhile, plans to survey its students this summer to determine what worked — and what didn't — in the shift to online learning, Joshi says, to ensure it continues to improve in the fall.

terials more racially representative.

Colleges have turned to peer mentoring as a way to support students, who tend to find one another more approachable, and even more credible, than an administrator. San Francisco State applies that principle to faculty members in the pursuit of improving pedagogy. Its Center for Equity and Excellence in Teaching and Learning identifies professors who have demonstrated their commitment to inclusive pedagogy and are respected by their peers to act as evangelicals for teaching and learning projects.

With the Cares Act money, the college plans to scale up more of this outreach and further encourage "teaching and learning communities," including those organized by discipline. Administrators also want to invest in course-design support to help professors make their classrooms more resilient, able to nimbly transition from in-person to online. That may include the hiring of temporary staff who could help the faculty with web-writing and videography.

Professors are already hungry to adapt to the new teaching normal, says Maggie Beers, the university's assistant vice president for teaching and learning. As of late May, about 600 faculty members were already enrolled in an online teaching and learning lab. The university will now use the additional money to pay faculty members to complete teaching and learning programs. That will allow adjunct faculty members living in one of the most expensive areas in the country to spend more time on pedagogy. "Our faculty would do some of this without the encouragement of pay," Beers says. "But it's the right thing to do. It allows them to not take another job that would distract them from this."

Even before classes start, professors can start providing resources for students. Rather than waiting for students' questions, they can try to anticipate them.

Yolanda Norman , a first-generation student advocate who teaches college success courses and runs an internship program at the University of Houston, took a closer look at her summer syllabus. She's adding infor-

mation to help students adapt to this new world: How to create an electronic signature. Merge PDFs. Scan documents using an iPhone. "How can I provide these resources ahead of time so they're not wondering what to do?" Norman says.

Administrators and professors need to keep in mind that the language of higher

> # Transfer requirements that student-success advocates already viewed as complex and confusing now become riskier.

education, however familiar it may sound to people from college-going backgrounds, can sound foreign to many first-generation students who are encountering it for the first time. Norman, who was a first-generation student herself, described the confusion many students expressed when learning they had a pass/fail option in the spring: "They had no idea what to do," she says. "What is a pass/fail? What does that mean for me? How do I do this?"

Universities need to find systematic ways to deliver outreach. But faculty members can serve on the front lines by ensuring that students have the information they need to succeed. For example, Norman says, don't just tell them they need to schedule an appointment with their financial-aid officer. Schedule one for them. Then give them a list of questions they need to ask and have answered during the meeting. Then follow up with the student.

Keeping retaining underserved students connected to their colleges will require many points of contact, including advisers, mentors, counselors, and peers. But professors will play a crucial role, because for many students they'll remain the closest connection to their college.

# Space to Think: Keeping Students Well

The mental-health crisis on college campuses is well documented. The number of students who screened positive for anxiety increased to 31 percent in 2018-2019 from 17 percent just six years earlier, according to the Healthy Minds Study, which surveys thousands of students each year. Rates of major depression and suicidal thoughts have also risen.

Students with poor mental health can't thrive academically, and research has found that those with depression and anxiety are more likely to drop out. Colleges, overwhelmed with the demand for services, have added counselors, fostered community partnerships for referrals, and embraced teletherapy, group counseling, and peer-support networks.

That was all before coronavirus. Now many students are physically disconnected from their professors, peers, counselors, and all other support services. Some are living on nearly deserted campuses because they don't have anywhere to go. Others are living in unsafe environments or have family responsibilities, jobs, or other stressors. That's all on top of the fear and uncertainty of surviving a global pandemic with no end in sight.

Black students are also grappling with the toll of racism and racial unrest following the killing of a Black man, George Floyd, by a white police officer. On majority-white campuses, Black students report greater feelings of isolation and loneliness. Students who overcome barriers on the road to and through college are often celebrated for their grit and resilience, but those qualities have limitations.

Mental-health experts say that coronavirus will exacerbate the campus mental-health crisis, and early data indicate the same. Eighty percent of 2,086 college students said that Covid-19 has negatively affected their mental health, according to an April 2020 survey by Active Minds, a mental-health advocacy group. College leaders are also paying attention. In a survey that month by the American Council on Education, 41 percent of college presidents said

> **"Students filmed themselves dancing in their living rooms. It helped them feel connected. It was weird but cool."**

the mental health of their students was among their most pressing pandemic-related concerns.

But students' mental-health needs cannot be addressed solely by counseling. That was true before the pandemic and is even more so now. So colleges have begun to embrace wellness more broadly. That means

keeping students connected with one another and their campus: offering social and wellness programming, relying on peer mentors, and drawing on a broad network to prevent the isolation that physical distancing can cause.

**KEEP STUDENTS CONNECTED THROUGH PROGRAMMING**

Going to class and being on campus was one guard against social isolation. Now, many students won't have an in-person experience, so colleges are trying to find ways to create campus life virtually.

Those who work in college mental health say students are hungry for these virtual experiences. And offering them makes good business sense: They give students a reason to stay connected to the college — and something in return for the student-support fees colleges are still collecting.

At Southern Utah University this spring, administrators offered, among other events, bakeoffs, paint nights, and dance parties — all virtually. They hired a DJ, who set up shop at the campus, complete with strobe lights, and streamed the event on its Facebook page, where more than 1,000 students logged in, says Eric Kirby, the university's assistant vice president for student affairs. "Students filmed themselves dancing in their living rooms," Kirby says. "It helped them feel connected. It was weird but cool."

It helped Kirby rethink how the university should offer programming even after this crisis passes. Surveys of students showed the online events were a hit. "Our introverted students are loving this," he says. "They would never show up to an in-person dance. It's making us wonder, Was our old way really serving all of our students?"

Just how much do students crave these experiences? Consider Georgia State University. A registered dietician on staff there created videos about healthful cooking and eating habits, like how to cook nutritious meals cheaply and quickly, and how to eat less junk food. The dietician still conducts nutrition consultations virtually with students who need them, but the online programming allows her to extend her reach. More than 3,400 students have watched the

Elizabeth Ouanemalay talks to friends while in her dorm at Wesleyan U. "Going back home wasn't even an option," she says.

videos, says Jill Lee-Barber, associate vice president for student health and wellness.

The university would never have been able to reach that many students in person, she says. The scheduling flexibility helps, since about 80 percent of Georgia State's undergraduates hold down jobs. Moreover, the anonymity of such programming draws students who might have been embarrassed or shy about going to an in-person event.

The nutrition programming is part of a suite of online wellness events the university offers through a program called Panther Pause, which puts on three or four events each day. Some are webinars in which students interact with the presenter. Others are videos of the presenter doing an activity that the student can also do, like going on a walk. Some are stress-relief activities like stretching and yoga.

For some students, meetings with licensed mental-health specialists, in person or remotely, will still be necessary. But wellness programming allows colleges to offer students with less serious bouts of stress and anxiety a quick and accessible form of relief.

## LEAN ON PEER MENTORS

Many colleges are leaning on and beefing up their peer-mentoring programs, which are tried-and-true strategies to improve student success. The programs have many advantages over traditional mentoring. Students often have better rapport with fellow students than with professors. At a time of limited resources, the programs are cheap. They also allow colleges to provide jobs for students who may have lost work because of the pandemic.

# How One College Uses Support Circles to Keep Students Connected

Even before the spread of the novel coronavirus, colleges were turning to group therapy sessions to meet their students' mental-health needs. With an overwhelming demand for counseling, these sessions let colleges help more students and harness the power of peers, especially those experiencing similar fears and challenges. The struggles of an undocumented student living under the threat of deportation are different, for example, than that of a Black student suffering from systemic racism.

At Arrupe College, a two-year program created by Loyola University Chicago to offer underserved students as a bridge between high school and a four-year college, the support circles have become even more important during the pandemic as a link to and among students. The facilitator poses questions: What are you worried about? What gives you comfort right now? What do you need more of? Each group member answers in turn, holding in view a "talking piece" to indicate that the others should be listening. Over Zoom, the speaker's frame on the screen reigns supreme. These circles aren't therapy. They're a space for students to voice anxieties among people who understand.

"The idea is active listening," says Nicole Sumida, a clinical social worker who ran a support-circle at Arrupe for undocumented students. In addition to their fears about the virus, they experienced uncertainty about their ability to stay in the United States. June's landmark decision by the Supreme Court protecting the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program gave the young immigrants known as Dreamers at least a temporary reprieve, but they still face obstacles to get jobs and financial aid.

"You're listening to each other's experience," she says. "It's not like group therapy, where there would be processing and crosstalk. It's simply just to hold space for people to be with one another. It's simple but very powerful and very connective."

Creating space for students is essential right now, wellness experts say. When protests against police brutality erupted following the

> ## "You're listening to each other's experience. It's not like group therapy, where there would be processing and crosstalk."

killing of a Black man, George Floyd, by a white police officer in Minneapolis, colleges scrambled to create virtual spaces like town halls for their students to discuss their feelings and experiences. Arrupe held a support circle for Black students.

Students have much on their minds, says David Keys, assistant dean for student success. One student expressed worries about how to balance the desire to protest racism while also staying safe from Covid-19. Others expressed anger and frustration that police killings of Black men have continued despite protests over the years. Keys says he received emails from students thankful that the college created supportive spaces for conversations.

## Arrupe College

**Challenge:**
Underserved students need extra emotional help in a crisis.

**Approach:**
Facilitate support circles.

**Result:**
Students report finding the circles helpful.

Arrupe holds similar events to keep students connected, Keys says. A weekly "coffee and conversation" is open to all students. A topic is decided before the gathering and students and faculty and staff members are asked to come prepared to share their responses. Recent topics have included how to prepare an antiracist toolkit and finding joy.

The ideal size of support circles is eight to 12 students, Sumida says. No circle is too small, but some are too big. Giving each student even just a minute or two to respond to a prompt would become unwieldy with too many participants. If interest in a topic is high enough to draw say, 20 students, they should be broken up into two circles, with two facilitators.

Arrupe and other colleges that have embraced support circles are trying to encourage an egalitarian feeling. "We drop all credentials, positions, and titles at the door," Arizona State University explains on its support-circles web page, along with other straightforward guidelines: Join with an open mind and no judgment. All emotions are valid. Unsupportive content will not be tolerated. Students can pop in and out of the session.

Support circles and other group-focused programming aren't for all students. And they don't replace the suite of wellness strategies that colleges can use, like individual therapy and peer mentoring. But they work for some students, providing one more tool to help them through the pandemic and keep them connected to each other and to the college.

And they're efficient. Colleges have a large pool of potential mentors: Essentially any student who meets certain requirements, like a minimum GPA, letters of recommendation, and a desire to help fellow students. These aren't counselors or therapists, so the training isn't expensive. The peer mentors are typically trained to spot distress in their mentees and help them connect with university resources like tutors or wellness experts.

In the University of South Florida's Peer Advisor Leader program (PAL), upper-level undergraduates coach first-year students and help them find a sense of community. When the pandemic hit, administrators turned to the 30 or so paid mentors to help connect with students, and added a handful more. Are students interested in how to make friends and leave a legacy? Creating connections as an international student? Learning about Greek Life? There are peers who specializes in each of those topics, just an email away.

Southern Utah University fosters long-lasting connections between peer mentors and their mentees, and that's paying off at a time when those relationships are crucial. Peer mentors sign up for a yearlong commitment, and are assigned to the same cohort of

> ## Peer mentors are "the first line of defense when something goes awry."

roughly 120 students for however long they're a mentor. They get to know their cohort, through an intake questionnaire and mandatory one-on-one meetings.

The students, Kirby says, open up to peer mentors in ways they wouldn't with authority figures. The mentors check in without any structured agenda, just to see how the students are doing. "Nothing more than shooting the bull," Kirby says.

After the online migration, the university added eight more paid peer mentors, this time expanding access beyond just first-year students. The university also pays special attention to first-generation students. Peer mentors identify students in their cohorts who are the first in their families to go to college and steer them to a first-generation-student support office, says Madi Maynard, coordinator of

After Luz Chavez's mother and two younger siblings lost their jobs, in March of 2020, the junior at Trinity Washington University became the sole provider for her family of five.

In the months since then, they have lived off her modest wages as a fellow with United We Dream, a youth-led immigration network. They've heard about the federal relief programs — the stimulus checks and emergency grants to students — but since everyone in her family except her brother is undocumented, they don't qualify.

Money wasn't the only thing weighing on Chavez's mind last spring, as she balanced work with online classes. The U.S. Supreme Court was set to rule any day in a case that would determine the future of a 2012 program that has allowed Chavez, and thousands of other young people brought to the United States illegally as children, to remain here to study and work. If the justices sided with the Trump administration, which sought to end the program — known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA — she might lose her job.

"I have so much stress in the back of my mind," said Chavez in late April. "We don't know if I'll be able to continue working, and if not, where the income for my family would come from."

The coronavirus has brought new uncertainty to college students nationwide, but undocumented students like Chavez are well acquainted with the feeling. For almost 20 years, they've been waiting for Congress to pass a bill, known as the Dream Act, that would provide them with a path to legal citizenship; for the past eight years, they lived in a legal limbo, with DACA up for renewal every two years. In June they received good news: The Supreme Court ruled that the Trump administration had failed to justify ending the program. Still, undocumented students lack a path to citizenship and remain ineligible for federal aid, and the Trump administration has said it plans to renew its effort to dismantle the program.

"There's a powerlessness, a feeling of being a victim of forces much larger than yourself that we're all feeling now," says Daniel Morales, a professor at the University of Houston Law Center. "In some ways, they're more used to it."

The global pandemic has heightened the uncertainty facing the more than 200,000 DACA-eligible students enrolled in American colleges. Though many undocumented students and their families work in hard-hit sectors like child care, food service and retail, they've largely been excluded from federal relief programs.

In a recent survey by The Dream. Us, a program for college access and success, more than half of undocumented students said that they needed mental-health support to cope with the current situation.

"That anxiety that everyone is experiencing is far more acute for students who identify as undocumented," says Jennifer Crewalk, associate director for undocumented-student services at Georgetown University. Since her campus closed, Crewalk has held biweekly "UndocuHoyasHealing Spaces," offering students an hour and a half to share stories and cultivate a sense of calm through breathing and relaxation exercises.

California's community colleges and Washington State's attorney general have sued the Trump administration over its decision to exclude DACA recipients from federal student-relief dollars, but the cases are open. In the meantime, Trinity Washington and a number of other colleges are offering grants to undocumented students to make up for the aid the federal government has denied them. "If anything," says Patricia McGuire, president of Trinity Washington, "this pandemic has made us realize that we are all one human family."

Luz Chavez hopes colleges will recognize the pressures that undocumented students are under and be flexible and forgiving in their policies. "We have other factors," she said, "that are preventing us from giving 100 percent to the classroom and homework."

Luz Chavez, an undocumented student at Trinity Washington University

orientation and the first-year experience at Southern Utah.

Because first-generation students' family members often can't guide them through the college-going process, connecting them with people who can is especially important, Maynard says. A peer mentor who can be their first point of contact on questions about student life makes college less stressful, Maynard says. "They're the first line of defense when something goes awry." And though they aren't experts on any topic, like concierges, they're the experts on how to connect with experts.

Southern Utah's training process for peer mentors is rigorous. They start training in May for the coming academic year. Most of the month is filled with exercises and scenarios they might encounter. Campus offices give the peer mentors crash courses in their operations and how to reach them. "We want our peer mentors to be confident in themselves," Maynard says, "so students in turn can be confident in them."

## EXPAND MENTAL-HEALTH RESOURCES

College counseling centers can be traced back to the end of World War II, when the GI Bill brought American veterans — and their traumas from the horrors of conflict — to campus. For the first few decades, these counseling centers were similar to mental-health institutions you'd find anywhere. Eventually, college mental-health professionals increasingly began to view their work as connected with student affairs and academics.

Todd Sevig, who has led the counseling center at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor for more than 20 years, sees an opportunity in Covid-19 to spur innovation in college-student mental health.

At Michigan, the counseling center in May rolled out an online tool called SilverCloud. Students can use the self-help platform at their own convenience and pace. The website starts with a brief quiz that helps steer the students to the right program to get started, and then points them to articles and videos to help them manage daily stress and anxiety, improve resilience, and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. "We're

hoping some students will find it helpful in and of itself," Sevig says. "Some students will want to do a little more and set up a talk with a counselor" using the tool.

The current crisis offers "an opportunity to sort of reimagine what a counseling center does on campus — not wholesale, but we can find some real new ways of doing things," says Sevig. "I don't think SilverCloud would have happened for us five years ago."

> **Black students are also grappling with the toll of racism and racial unrest. On majority-white campuses, Black students report greater feelings of isolation and loneliness.**

To respond to the pandemic era, Michigan has also reimagined another new practice. Last year it created a toolkit to help faculty members support students' mental health. Now the university is turning it into an app.

On a large campus like Michigan's, faculty members are the primary points of contact for many students. So the counseling center gives them a primer. Part of the document is about being responsive if, for example, a student says they're depressed and can't complete a paper. The rest is about being proactive, by sharing mindfulness strategies, supporting a growth mind-set — the belief that one's talents can be developed — in first-generation students, and creating an inclusive classroom experience. "Mental health is 100 percent tied to diversity, equity, and inclusion," Sevig says.

With foundation funding, the university sent printed copies of the toolkit to about 10,000 faculty members last fall. The new app version is set to be available

in August. It will enable faculty members to navigate among sections easily and allow administrators to make updates. "We're not asking faculty to be junior therapists," Sevig says. "Yet we're trying to expand a little bit the role of the faculty member." Sevig says he's open to people contacting him if they'd like to use the faculty toolkit app, which could be tweaked to be useful on other campuses.

That spirit of collaboration would come in handy for colleges with fewer mental-health resources. Caring for student wellness is a constant struggle at historically Black colleges, which often have nowhere near as much staffing and money as their majority white counterparts.

At Benedict College, in South Carolina, President Roslyn Artis has been turning to partnerships to meet what she expects to be the greater wellness needs of her students in the fall. When the campus lost a student last year to gun violence, a local health-care provider, Prisma Health, sent over six counselors to help students work through the trauma. Prisma is on standby to see students who return in the fall.

Artis is also seeking collaborations with nearby universities. She's hopeful for an agreement with the University of South Carolina: Benedict's students would get access to the university's counseling resources in exchange for Benedict's data on its students for research the university is conducting on at-risk populations in the age of coronavirus. If that doesn't come through, Artis says she'll figure something else out. "We'll call Clemson," she says. "We're not going to stop."

To meet the broader wellness needs of Benedict's students, more than 80 percent of whom are eligible for Pell Grants, the college is trying to create spaces for them to think about and discuss with one another the virus and the toll of racism. Benedict administrators hosted a Zoom meeting for Black male students. As a Black woman, Artis says, her lived experience isn't the same as a Black man's: constantly being perceived as a threat, more subject to being stopped by police. So she wasn't at the meeting. But her husband was.

"I really wanted there to be an authentic safe space for men to have an honest conversation about how they're singled out," Artis says. "The level of participation suggests we need to continue those kinds of conversations."

Like Benedict, colleges need to start preparing for the mental-health and well-

> **Students' mental-health needs cannot be addressed solely by counseling. That was true before the crisis and is even more so now.**

ness needs of their students in the fall, whether campuses are open or classes are held online. Some experts, like Sevig, predict a surge in students seeking treatment in the fall. At Michigan, as at most colleges, the demand for counseling sessions has dropped since the pandemic began. That's not because students don't need counseling. Many students are skittish about teletherapy. International time differences make checking in with a counselor challenging. Internet connections might be spotty. And seeing a counselor as your mom and dad walk back and forth across the living room isn't ideal.

But in planning for the coming semester, Sevig remembers the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The counseling center at Michigan didn't see a significant increase in students immediately after the attacks. "Three months later," he says, "the demand was huge." The nation, collectively, takes time to process grief, anxiety, and trauma. "Student mental health will probably be a major issue in the fall."

# Early and Often:
# Why Outreach Is Essential

A round three years ago, Max Lubin, a political organizer and recent graduate student in public policy at the University of California at Berkeley, felt that college leaders, and especially state legislators, had turned their back on the once-heralded California Master Plan for Higher Education. Years of budget cuts and rising tuition had gutted the state's commitment to its needy students. So Lubin started Rise Inc., a nonprofit advocacy group for the needs of low-income students in California.

Since the pandemic, however, the group has embraced another role, if reluctantly. It's been offering one-on-one case management to low-income students from around the country whose finances are in jeopardy. Rise Inc. might help students identify and apply for financial-aid opportunities, or connect them with unemployment resources or local food pantries. As of mid-May, about 2,500 students had sought its case-management assistance.

Demand exists for this service, Lubin says, because "by and large," colleges have fallen short in their outreach efforts. "We would like to see college counselors and college financial-aid officers reaching out to students one-on-one, checking on their well-being, finding out what they need and what the college can do to play a role in that," he says. "This is not a role we want to play on an ongoing basis. We're a policy-advocacy organization, not a social-work organization."

The pandemic has shown just how scary and confusing navigating college can be for low-income students: Financial-aid application deadlines. Transfer requirements. Connecting with state and federal agencies for help with basic needs. All while students are isolated from their in-person counseling and support networks.

Some students still have their high-school counselors' cellphone numbers and call them for guidance. Consider what that means: They're more comfortable relying on faraway K-12 advisers than seeking help from their college. Trusted relationships are crucial. The more that colleges can foster such trust, the better chance they have of keeping students who start to struggle.

Many colleges have recognized that outreach is key to their retention strategies. It's no longer enough to fire off an email reminder about deadlines, or even several emails. The communication has to be frequent and across media, and ideally — if resources permit — delivered by someone whom students already know. So colleges are thinking like social-work case managers. They're mustering their limited resources to divide cohorts of students among faculty and staff members responsible for staying connected to them. They're keeping in touch with students' parents, knowing that family relationships are often central to the college experience.

Staying connected with students during a time of crisis, like improving retention and graduation rates, is both a moral and a busi-

Anthony Roberts, a Georgia State U. adviser, speaks with student Antwan Schoolcraft from his office in the university advisement center

ness imperative. "From a purely cynical, tactical, stay-alive financial perspective," Lubin says, "colleges should be investing in outreach for low-income students right now, because whether or not they persist into the fall greatly depends on how they can navigate the current moment."

**CHECK IN EARLY**

The education system can be unforgiving. Ask the high-school student who wants to go to a selective college but had poor grades in her freshman or sophomore year. Or the college student whose early stumbles now make getting into graduate school a steeper climb. A student's educational fate can be sealed early. That's why spotting distress quickly, and intervening, is crucial for educators who want to keep their students on track.

Perhaps no college has invested in early interventions to the extent Georgia State University has. Advisers there reach out to students on the basis of hundreds of factors, some as seemingly minor as a poor test grade or even a C in a major course that administrators believe the student should be doing better in. The goal is to find problems early, before they become degree-derailing issues.

The model requires a significant spending on advisers — Georgia State now has more than 100. And the results have been impressive. The university has eliminated retention and graduation gaps by race and socioeconomic status. Once an obscure regional college, Georgia State is now widely seen as showing what's possible with an intense data-driven focus on student success.

So how has this student-success infrastructure held up under the stress of a global pandemic?

Quite well so far, says Timothy Renick, senior vice president for student success. But the spring semester wasn't business as usual. The university updated its tracking software so that advisers would receive early alerts about students' not logging into an online class. That makes tracking attendance for online classes easier than for in-person classes. Georgia State also tries to keep the same advisers with students until they graduate, pairing them up during orientation, to build rapport. Students, Renick says, are more likely to respond well to someone they have a relationship with.

Advisers connect with students through a variety of channels — chatbot, email, text, phone.

## Student Success at Georgia State U.

GSU's pioneering use of predictive analytics has become a national model.

**GSU** tracks

**800** risk factors for

**40,000** students every day.

**90,000** interventions based on alerts over the past year.

**4-year** graduation rates have improved by **7** percentage points.

**And students are graduating more quickly.**

**Over the past 7 years the number of bachelor's degrees conferred to African-American students has increased by**

**103%**

Source: Georgia State U.

Advisers are accountable, tasked with finding out why a student missed class. All of that note-taking on student behavior is stored in the cloud, available for use by another adviser or employee who pulls up the student's file.

Typically, Renick says, advisers look for a pattern of missing class, but the special circumstances of the pandemic have made them quicker to intervene. "Why wait for the student to fall further and further behind?" he says. In just the first two weeks after the online migration, advisers reached out more than 3,500 times to stu-

## SPOTLIGHT ON  LATINX STUDENTS

Erika Beck, president of California State University-Channel Islands, understands the critical role that a sense of belonging plays in the persistence of Latinx students. Half of the roughly 7,000 undergraduates at her Southern California campus are Latina/os.

So when the coronavirus pandemic pushed classes online, starting back in March, Beck asked the college's 100 "peer mentors" to help her move the campus community online, too. Together with student workers and college staff, they built a new website, The Island, where students could connect with staff members and with one another, through virtual events and support services.

"We want to make sure they stay connected to the 'dolphin pod,'" Beck says, referring to the the university's mascot, "because we know they value those personal relationships the most."

As the Hispanic population in the United States has grown, so too has the number of Hispanics seeking higher education. From 2000 to 2018, Hispanic undergraduate enrollment grew by nearly 150 percent, to 3.4 million stu-dents, federal data show.

This growth has compelled colleges to take steps to raise Latinx completion rates, including hiring peer mentors and expanding cultural programming. Such efforts helped increase the share of Latinx students earning a bachelor's degree within six years by eight percentage points from 2002 to 2015, to 54 percent, according to the latest federal data.

Now, with many Hispanic students losing jobs and family members to Covid-19, college leaders are worried that this progress could unravel.

Latina/os have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, with 40 percent reporting that they have taken a pay cut and nearly 30 percent saying they have been laid off, according to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in March. That's compared with 27 and 20 percent, respectively, of all Americans.

In California, Latina/os account



COURTESY OF CSU CHANNEL ISLANDS

Erika Beck, president of California State U.-Channel Islands, listens as students share their research.

dents who had not logged into class.

What the advisers learned was that all sorts of reasons were keeping students from attending classes. Some were struggling academically. Advisers connected them with tutors and other academic support. Some students, who had computer and technolo-

gy problems, were given emergency grants. In 200 cases, advisers made referrals to the counseling center because students were suffering emotional distress or other mental-health challenges.

All those steps were possible because the university took the initiative to connect, Re-

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for 44 percent of 18- to 49-year-olds, but for 65 percent of deaths among that age group, the Los Angeles Times found. That disparity, which can also be seen at the national level, has been attributed to a variety of factors, including the fact that Latina/os are less likely to hold jobs that allow them to work from home and more likely to live in densely populated neighborhoods.

If the problem persists into the fall, large numbers of Latinx students might have to drop out to care for sick relatives or to work full time, to support their families.

Recognizing this risk, leaders like Beck are reminding students — and their parents — of the economic benefits of a college degree. Over the summer, her college will unveil a new messaging campaign — "Believe, Belong, Become" — that will urge students to "not give up on your vision of the future," she says.

"We're telling students to stay engaged, because we know how important this degree will be in a post-pandemic society," Beck says.

Other colleges with large Latinx populations are reaching out to parents through local radio and other Spanish-language media, telling them that "we are still here for you," says Deborah Santiago, chief executive of Excelencia in Education."You

want to be sure parents are informed, because these are often family decisions. The family unit was important for recruitment, but it's also important for retention."

"When you come from a first-generation or immigrant family, you tend not to have the social network of family and friends that can help you find a job."

With many Latinx families worried about their financial future, colleges are also taking steps to reassure them that graduates will be able to find jobs. Those colleges are holding virtual job fairs, offering practice virtual job interviews, and identifying internships that can be done remotely.

"When you come from a first-generation or immigrant family, you tend not to have the social network of family and friends that can help you find a job," says Anne Prisco, pres-

ident of Felician University, in New Jersey, where just under a third of the students are Latinx. "The whole focus of career services is now on, 'How do you engage virtually in the career market?"

First-generation and minority students are less likely to feel a connection to their colleges and more likely to struggle with feelings of self-doubt, research shows. In response, many colleges with large Latinx populations are finding ways, during the campus closures, to sustain and build community online.

When Texas Woman's University shut down in March , the chancellor, Carine Feyten,started sending daily messages to the campus community, sharing "little stories about students, staff, and employees," along with humorous video clips and words of wisdom. When students, 30 percent of whom are Latinx, responded with their own stories and challenges, she knew the approach was resonating.

At California State University-Channel Islands, Beck is preparing for a virtual fall; the entire Cal State system will be mostly online. In May she asked student-government leaders to conduct a survey of students' unmet needs. The results will be used to shape student services and events, she said.

"The more we can keep them connected," Beck says, "the more we can keep them committed to their future."

nick says. "Going forward, especially with campuses that enroll so-called nontraditional students, we have to be a lot more vigilant about what's tripping up our students." By the last week of spring, the course log-in rate had climbed to more than 98 percent. "I taught 20 years in the classroom full time," Renick says. "I don't remember many days in my face-to-face classes where I had 98 percent of students attending."

## THINK LIKE SOCIAL WORKERS

Americans are taking a closer look at social workers. When protests roiled the country this summer after the killing of a black man, George Floyd, under the knee of a white police officer, many academics and pundits wondered: Why can't the police be more like social workers, rigorously trained to defuse stressful situations before they become violent? But law enforcement isn't the only sector that might benefit from a social worker's skills.

Colleges aren't in the social-work business. They're in the student-success business. But student success, it's increasingly clear, requires some social work — and, in fact, colleges are hiring social workers to help achieve their goals. These staff members act as one-stop resources to guide students through federal and state bureaucracies for financial-aid and food assistance, and to navigate challenges on campus. They look out for a student's mental health and general well-being. They're part therapist, part case manager. And in the midst of a pandemic, they're coming in especially handy.

Take Arrupe College, a two-year institution within Loyola University Chicago that was created in 2015 to support underserved students in the Chicago area. All of its students are eligible for Pell Grants or are undocumented. After the pandemic had begun, a survey of the student body (with a response rate of 60 percent) showed the extent of need: Fifty-four percent of the respondents reported having their jobs eliminated or hours reduced; 66 percent had parents who had lost their jobs or seen their hours reduced; 30 percent reported housing inse-

curity; 60 percent had trouble sleeping.

The tiny college, with an enrollment of about 300, has two clinical social workers on staff. They connect students with resources and counsel those struggling with their mental health. They organize support circles for vulnerable populations like undocumented students. When the pandemic hit, they phoned all of the students they were counseling, recognizing that financially needy students who would casually pop into their offices between classes were now physically disconnected.

If students were having internet trouble, a social worker could connect them with a Wi-Fi hotspot. Students facing food or housing insecurity, were guided toward community resources like food banks and the college's own emergency support. The social workers talked students through risk assessment, like weighing the need for employment versus the risk of being exposed to the novel coronavirus.

> **"From a purely cynical, tactical, stay-alive financial perspective, colleges should be investing in outreach for low-income students right now."**

Faculty members have good intentions, but they don't always have the time or skills to do this work, says Nicole Sumida, one of Arrupe's social workers. Because professors already know her, she says, they feel comfortable coming to her with concerns about a student.

For example, if a student hasn't shown up lately to a Zoom class, "I can reach out to that student, find out what they need and get it to them so they can focus on their academics," Sumida says. "Social workers — especially embedded social workers — can develop these really close relationships."

# How One College Offers 'High Touch' Support in a No-Touch World

Connections are essential to retaining and graduating low-income and first-generation students. With so many challenges that might derail them — academic, financial, mental health — the colleges that succeed in serving these students are the ones that have managed to forge strong ties with them.

But how to maintain that "high touch" support in a no-touch world?

Consider Odessa College. The two-year institution, where 60 percent of the students are Hispanic, serves an area of West Texas with some of the state's poorest performing elementary and secondary schools for their size. "It's jobs first here, and education — if it's thought of at all — second," says Donald Wood, vice president for institutional effectiveness. "That's just the culture we have."

But the college embarked on a journey in 2011 that was both simple and revolutionary. It aimed to better connect faculty with students.

That included requiring instructors to call all students by their names; intervene at the first sign of trouble, like a poor test score; and spend a few minutes getting some personal face time with each student. Just a quick hallway conversation: How are you? How's your job? How's your kid?

The results were impressive. Students used to drop classes at rates of about 15 percent for face-to-face classes and 20 percent for online classes. In 2019, the drop rate was about 4 percent for in-person classes and just about a percentage point higher for online classes. The college also increased enrollment six years in a row. Odessa has eight-week semesters, and this year's first spring term set an enrollment record.

Then the pandemic hit, and Odessa moved all instruction online. The college risked losing the connectivity that had been essential to its renewal.

Odessa's leaders enlisted their work-from-home employees to continue constantly reaching out to students. All of the college's 6,500 students were assigned to one of 125 faculty and staff members, who were split in teams of about five to eight people, each with a team leader to coordinate the effort. The employees would connect over phone, text, or email twice per week with each student. The administration receives reports every day on how many students hear from an instructor or staff member, adding a layer of accountability. "Basically," Wood says, "we engage the entire college on one level or another in this process."

The employees check in on how students are doing, and see if there are any ways the college can help ease the transition to remote learning. They might point them to financial resources and tutoring services, or answer questions students have about the periodic updates the college sends them.

The result? Enrollment for the second eight-week semester, which started in mid-March, also set a record. The semester ended in mid-May, and the course-drop rate held steady at prepandemic levels of about 4 percent.

Making such efforts to stay in touch with students gives Odessa "a profound advantage," Wood says. "I can't overemphasize the importance of staying connected in a way that allows students to know you're supporting them, are aware they're being challenged, and are willing to take steps to help them."

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## Odessa College

### Challenge:
A college dependent on "high touch" support for students must keep them close in a remote world.

### Approach:
Assign all the college's students to faculty and staff who are responsible for checking in on them.

### Result:
Enrollment for a second eight-week spring semester set a record, and the course-drop rate did not increase, even with the sudden move online.

The social workers are an essential part of the college's wraparound support, says the Rev. Stephen Katsouros, founding dean of the college. "If you're admitting these students, you have the responsibility to get them across the finish line."

Colleges are also finding others ways to infuse social work's culture of care throughout their institutions. Student success now is viewed not as administrative work, but as everyone's domain. The University of South Florida uses a care-management approach. Similar to how doctors' interactions with a patient can elicit crucial details of their medical history, the university has a platform that allows different units on campus — financial aid, career counseling, academic advisiing — access to a student's record so they have a clearer understanding of how to help.

Paul Dosal, vice president for student success, says he wants to expand that system to include other areas as well. For example, the records could include a student's fraternity or intramural team, so that staff members can find people close to the student if an intervention is needed.

"Now more than ever we need to strengthen communication between units and with students," Dosal says. "Our goal is to find somebody who has already established a relationship with a student. I've learned not to try the intervention myself. They wouldn't know me, and I would probably only scare them away."

## GO BEYOND STUDENTS

Research has shown that first-generation students rely more heavily on their families for making decisions about college. They tend to be more family-oriented, viewing their degree as a lever with which to lift their families and communities out of poverty or simply to set an example to younger siblings. So staying connected with parents can be an important strategy for colleges that want to keep students on track to graduate.

Southern Utah University uses newsletters to keep parents and their families apprised of campus news. The goal is to give families the latest information while also equipping them with coping mechanisms and financial knowledge that they can use to help their children. "We know that Generation Z relies heavily on families in making decisions and getting affirmation," says Eric Kirby, assistant vice president for student affairs.

In the past four years, Southern Utah's retention rate has climbed from 64 percent to 74 percent, after not having budged for almost a decade. There is no magic to the university's success, Kirby says. It's simply the result of intentional and meaningful outreach to students who need it the most, when they need it the most.

Timing is important. The university synchronizes awareness campaigns to when students are especially in need of particular information. Week two is when it rolls out the roommate-conflict-resolution campaign. Week three: homesickness. Week five: financial worries. Week eight: study habits. Reaching parents is part of that strategy. Since homesickness often hits by the third week, the second-week newsletter explains its signs and how to cope with it.

> ## "If you're admitting these students, you have the responsibility to get them across the finish line."

"If we can educate parents and provide them with the 'just in time' information they need," Kirby says, "they can serve as a front-line defense for retention and completion."

Communicating with parents is critical, says Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy, a professor and dean of the College of Education at American University. With all the uncertainty about this fall, parents, especially those of first-generation students, are anxious about what the semester will be like and whether their children will be safe. Advisers at the college have been fielding calls and contacting parents. And top adminis-

trators, including the president, have been holding Zoom meetings with them. The goal is to create opportunities for parents to ask questions.

"Even before Covid-19, first-generation students and their parents didn't have the social capital or resources to understand how universities work," says Holcomb-Mc-Coy. "That's always been the case. Now everything is magnified."

Student-success outreach extends into the community as well. One often-overlooked factor in students' stress about the fall is a reluctance to enter into a housing contract when there's no guarantee that colleges will open their campuses. What is a student with limited financial resources to do about housing?

At Southern Utah, the vice president for alumni and community relations sent a letter to off-campus landlords requesting flexibility in leases in the event of another Covid-19 flare-up or complications related to the pandemic.

"It said, Hey, we're not telling you what to do, but this is the reality we're facing," Kirby says."Our on-campus housing has such a

provision. Just know students are very reluctant to sign without that provision. So if you want to fill your housing in the fall, you'll have a better bet if you include such a provi-

> "If we can educate parents and provide them with the 'just in time' information they need, they can serve as a frontline defense for retention and completion."

sion. We're finding some success with local landlords."

The effort reflects the philosophy of outreach in a nutshell: Extending a hand to tap not just students but a whole network that can help them to stay enrolled.

# Viewpoints

# How to Maintain the Gains We've Made

The Chronicle *asked college presidents:*

**What must colleges do during the Covid-19 pandemic to avoid backsliding on equity?**

### Thuy Thi Nguyen

**President, Foothill College, California**



**Thuy Thi Nguyen**

We are living in extraordinary times. The coronavirus pandemic turned our world upside down, and racial unrest is turning our country inside out. How can we leverage this unprecedented disruption of higher education to advance equity?

The transition to virtual learning has challenged educators to re-examine teaching styles, assignments, testing, and grading. Working toward equity requires us to re-examine these areas at an even deeper level. Among our practices at Foothill College, we:

- provide high-quality, customized professional-development opportunities jointly developed by the Office of Institutional Equity and the Online Learning Office
- created a virtual Student Technology Support Hub led by the equity office, offering emergency funds and technology support
- practiced a philosophy of service leadership by hiring 25-plus student-tech ambassadors to provide technical assistance to students
- increased food stipends
- provide "equity innovation" mini-grants to assess grading practices in online courses
- expanded a faculty peer-review program for online courses with a focus on equity
- brainstormed flexible assignment deadlines and exams not based on memorization
- continue robust programming for heritage-month celebrations
- discuss compassion college-wide, using the ethic of love reflected in the Umoja learning community
- discuss equity at every bi-weekly president's briefing

These practices are only a start. Institutional evaluation and continuous improvements are required.

The pandemic has presented an opportunity to re-examine higher education with an equity lens, and the civil uprising challenges us to accelerate that effort. The unexamined life is not worth living; the unexamined system is not worth perpetuating.

## David Wilson

**President, Morgan State U.,
Maryland**

Gallup recently released poll results showing that only 21 percent of Black respondents strongly agreed that their professors cared about them as people, compared with 29 percent of Hispanic and 34 percent of white respondents. Black graduates participating in the survey were also significantly more likely than white or Hispanic graduates to say that their university was not a good place for students who are members of racial and ethnic minority groups.

These results were hardly surprising to me. Having spent 20 years in administration at predominantly white institutions, I am now concluding my 10th year as president of a historically Black institution, Morgan State University. My varied experiences have led me to the conclusion that investment in institutions like Morgan must be significantly increased, to enable us to continue our outsize production of Black and low-income graduates in the critical fields so necessary for national prosperity. This has become all the more apparent in this period of crisis brought on by pandemic and racial strife.

Of course, I write this prescription knowing full well that it is not a panacea. Not all of our nation's students will attend HBCUs. So, what I say to our predominantly white institutions, in fact, to all institutions of higher learning, is the following:



David Wilson

- Promote serious dialogue throughout your campuses. For stereotypes to be unearthed and confronted, we must create space for thoughtful debate and discussion.

- Our curricula must reflect a multitude of voices and perspectives — not just white ones. Many white students arrive on campuses completely unaware of the great histories and legacies of Black folk. And Black students don't feel it's their duty to educate them. This gulf must be filled.

- Governing boards, especially those of public institutions, should be reflective of the racial, ethnic, and gender composition of the state where the institution is located. The board will set the tone for campus diversity, starting with whom it hires as president or chancellor.

- Rethink institutional values. This is a time for serious reflection on our past, questioning the values of the institution and making the tough decisions to vacate those values not in con-

formity with an inclusive and empowering campus culture.

- Symbols and names matter: Remove all vestiges of racism on our campuses, such as Confederate flags and other symbols of individuals who wanted Blacks to remain in slavery.

- Form stronger bonds with HBCUs. Partnerships involving exchange of students and faculty between predominantly white institutions and historically Black colleges would be educational and transformational for both.

Polls show that students at HBCUs know they belong, thus, they succeed, in academics and in life, to the benefit of communities nationwide. That's why I believe that, with adequate funding, the future of Morgan and other HBCUs, post-Covid-19, is very bright indeed.

## Susan A. Cole

**President, Montclair State U.,
New Jersey**

We must do everything in our power to preserve funding for what we know works: need-based financial aid and programs and services that make equal opportunity for students of color and lower-income students a reality.

The pandemic has amplified existing inequalities in our society. Although Covid-19 has affected Americans from all social groups, its health and financial impacts have fallen most heavily on the poor and on Black and Hispanic Americans. At the very moment when our students need higher education the most, some states — and New Jersey is one of those — are slashing their public higher-education budgets in response to the steep drop in tax revenues caused by the lockdown.

My university saw its state appropriation, which was modest to begin with, cut by nearly 25 percent just as we entered the final quarter of our fiscal year, a time when it is virtually impossible to make meaningful budget reductions. Although federal Cares Act funding has helped to some degree, we and every other public institution in the state are facing very lean state appro-



Susan A. Cole

priations next fiscal year, combined with Covid-19-related restrictions that are generating many new costs.

We need to save our students from more than Covid-19. We also need to save them from a lifetime of diminished opportunities to achieve social and economic parity, and that we cannot do if we are unable to provide them with the education they need and deserve.

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## Peter Eden

**President, Landmark College,
Vermont**

Landmark College is a unique institution that enrolls only neurodiverse students who learn differently. Our students have dyslexia, ADHD, autism, and executive-function challenges. Landmark was founded on the belief that differences provide strength to individuals and organizations. In that spirit, we feel that to avoid backsliding on equity during the Covid-19 pandemic, colleges should:

- Stay focused on students, even when battling daunting budgetary and other challenges.
- Recognize the intersectionality that exists regarding race and ethnicity, socioeconomic dif-

ferences, learning differences, gender identity, and so on. Act to support, not just recognize, those students hardest hit by the pandemic, which adds yet another layer of stress and hardship.

- Do not assume that an online, alternative program — no matter how good — can be undertaken in the same safe, supportive living and learning environment as that provided on a campus.

This pandemic will be better managed once broad immunity is realized. Yet, the inequities that existed before coronavirus will almost certainly worsen because of it. Have a truly inclusive plan to discuss new challenges, and put together an honest budget to help solve them. Stick to your mission, not just in words but in action.



Peter Eden

Kirk A. Nooks

## Kirk A. Nooks

**President, Gordon State College, Georgia**

As president of a state college, I am always concerned with equity. Given the pandemic, I am far more so, because if colleges fail their students, the compounding catastrophic impact might be felt not for a year or two but for a generation. We must provide students with access to college, and to the services and resources to help them succeed there.

Approximately 70 percent of Gordon State's enrolled students hail from one of the 14 surrounding counties. The recent high-school graduates' spring semesters were disrupted and their standardized-testing dates canceled, disappointing applicants who were seeking an opportunity to demonstrate their talent.

Our state system's response has been to eliminate the need for test scores and use the students' GPAs for acceptance. Virtual open houses provided the information students needed during the final weeks leading up to their graduation. We hope that those efforts provided access to education for all students who seek the opportunity.

Budgets are severely strained, but priorities must not be short-changed. Whether in person, online, or by phone, the availability of tutoring, counseling, and health services will be crucial in supporting students' academic progress, personal development, and well-being. Colleges need to provide access to hot spots, laptops, and books in the first few weeks for a solid start to the fall semester. And they should strive to alleviate hunger and housing insecurity for all students during this financially turbulent time.

## Katherine A. Rowe

**President, William & Mary, Virginia**

At William & Mary, we are focused on advancing equity despite the pandemic. "Snapping back" is not an option; neither is the status quo.

Safety and wellness, flexibility, and equity are the principles we are planning around in the decision to return. Research shows that isolation is a significant risk factor for learning. Many inequities have intensified under Covid-19 and are felt acutely in the home communities of our most retaining underserved students. Universities must ensure that our students don't lose momentum on their path to a degree.

We learned a lot this spring that will carry into the fall. William & Mary is known for our student health and wellness program; that quickly moved online, where it served as a model for other



Katherine A. Rowe

universities. We rolled back planned tuition increases and froze fees for the 2020-21 academic year. We provided resources to students with urgent needs: emergency help with unexpected expenses in housing, food, transportation, health care, and connectivity.

Values of equity and belonging take on critical significance this fall. All institutions will be accountable for meaningful steps to combat racism. I recently outlined a set of actions, crafted in partnership with our student, faculty, and staff leaders, to ensure that we protect our Black students and accelerate efforts to eliminate racial bias on our campus. We affirmed our commitment to impartial and bias-free policing, extended learning goals for diversity, equity, and justice to all schools, and will launch a whole-institution approach to wellness. We know there is much more to do.

At a university such as William & Mary, which was part of Virginia's history of slavery, we have a particular obligation: to tell the story of this country more fully and forthrightly. Led by our Lemon Project, we have pursued that work of reconciliation for more than a decade. It seems even more urgent today than when it began.

Each fall, new students walk through the doors of William & Mary's iconic Wren building to cheers of "You Belong" and "Welcome Home" from returning students. Those messages resonate especially powerfully this year.

## A. Gabriel Esteban

**President, DePaul U., Illinois**

The Covid-19 pandemic struck African American and Latinx communities harder than others. The crisis forced colleges to swiftly transition to online teaching, highlighting inequities in access to technology for students of limited means and those who are differently abled. African American students, faculty, and staff are also reeling from the violent public murders of Black people.

The pandemic unveiled inequities. The violence reignited despair, grief, and anger.

As colleges plan for the fall, we must help students access and navigate remote-learning technology. We need to be cognizant of the post-traumatic stress our students and colleagues experience from both the pandemic and racial brutality. We must provide a safe and understanding community that allows students, faculty, and staff to cope and heal, even as we scramble to face the tremendous economic and operational pressures caused by the pandemic.

Higher education must diversify at every level. Audit procedures to identify and eliminate practices of exclusion and structural racism, and commit to measuring and communicating how equity efforts are proceeding.

We must learn to listen with empathy and converse with dignity and respect, and provide the critical-thinking skills and space for difficult but necessary dialogue involving people from across the ideological spectrum.



A. Gabriel Esteban

## Lee Pelton

**President, Emerson College, Massachusetts**

After George Floyd's death in police custody and the wide circulation of a letter I wrote to the Emerson community, I have often been asked, "Is this a moment?"

I answer: "This isn't a moment. It's a movement."

It can be traced back almost three decades ago to another videotaped incident, the brutal 1991 beating of Rodney King at the hands of four Los Angeles police officers, and the subsequent 1992 Los Angeles uprisings that followed the officers' acquittals. Now it is led by multiracial coalitions of young people, some still in high school. Its highly decentralized leadership can galvanize

a protest march of 10,000 people overnight through the expert use of social-media platforms.

This movement will be coming to our campuses in the fall. Its leaders and adherents distrust authority. They believe, with James Baldwin, that "any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety."

College presidents cannot view these events from our luxurious shelter as mere spectators. Here is how we can leverage the country's restless indignation and avoid backsliding on equity during the Covid-19 era:

- Throw out the platitudes. They will only offend.

- Presidents must be front and center on matters of equity and bias and, where possible, we need to bring our trustees on this journey along with us.

- Diversity in higher education is in danger of becoming a self-congratulatory kumbaya, "We Shall Overcome" Happy Meal — a tepid rendition of impartiality. The concept must instead confront head-on the systemic structural racism that continues to plague our nation. Where possible, replace or expand your diversity, equity, and inclusion programs with centers of social justice that focus on the unequal distribution of wealth, opportunity, and privilege amid plenty.

- We should continue our efforts to interrogate and renew the curriculum, redouble our efforts to recruit, hire, and retain faculty of color in concert with our efforts to enroll students of color, and develop programs that prepare those faculty members for the academic-leadership pipeline. We should seek to ensure that our senior leadership is diverse beyond the directors of our diversity, inclusion, and equity programs.

- Among the many duties to which we attend, I suspect that our procurement activities are not top of mind. However, we ought to make sure that our procurement offices are creating opportunities for businesses owned by people of color to successfully compete in our ordering and purchasing.

In "To Fulfill These Rights," his Howard University speech of June 4, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson said:

''You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'You are free to compete with all the others,' and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. Thus, it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates.''

This is as true today as it was almost three-score years ago. We must embrace, with fiery urgency, this movement beyond this moment. Let's seize the opportunity to bring to life our nation's credo, *e pluribus unum* — out of many, one — and to live out, in full measure, Benjamin Disraeli's proclamation that a university should be a "place of light, of liberty, and of learning."



Lee Pelton

# Here's What Students Say Colleges Can Do to Help

The Chronicle *asked:*

**"Besides offering financial help, what should your college do during the Covid-19 pandemic to help keep you enrolled and successful through graduation?"**



Jemere Calhoun

### Jemere Calhoun,

**Los Angeles City College, transferring to the U. of California at Santa Cruz**

As a father, I know that the closing of schools, day camps, day care, and after-school programs adds another layer of stress during the pandemic. While I have been lucky enough to be able to work from home, my sister, who is also a student and works full time, has not. I have volunteered to help her out, but I know many others who don't have that kind of help. Safe child care would help me and many other students.

Lack of motivation is a serious problem with online classes. Regular meals and real interaction with professors helps keep classes lively. I believe formats that encourage group interaction between students, and one-on-one meetings with professors, can increase motivation and productivity. Meal vouchers would enable students at home to log on and enjoy each other's company during communal meals. That type of community building can help students feel connected to their campuses from home.

### Matt Bodo,

**U. of California at Los Angeles**

To help students stay in college during the Covid-19 pandemic, colleges should:

- Train members of the faculty and staff on using their comput-

ers, programs, and software. I had a professor last quarter who didn't know how to adjust her volume. She canceled the first class after about an hour of asking us repeatedly to talk so that she could see if she had fixed the problem.

- Provide off-campus students

with mobile hot spots and improve websites for mobile users. For some students, phones are their only access to the web. Colleges should also lend students laptops.

- Make sure phone lines are sufficiently staffed, especially for students like myself for whom

the phone is the only way of getting in contact with financial-aid and other offices.

- Provide or refer students to housing resources, including emergency housing. That is especially important for students who might have moved to an unhealthy living situation or a poor learning environment.

- Help students understand and apply for unemployment and food-aid programs.

- Relax standards on course-unit minimums, because some underenrolled classes are being canceled. Colleges sometimes disqualify students from scholarships, housing, and other programs if enrolled less than full time.

- On that note, underenrolled courses shouldn't be canceled at all. Students may need specific courses as they near their graduation date, and having to stay longer than expected is just another thing to worry about.

- Colleges should aim to make psychological services more accessible to students, and ensure their staff members are adequately trained to do their jobs well online.

- Students should also be given later refund dates for dropping classes, as unexpected responsibilities may arise. Knowing that dropping won't cause any more financial hardship will lift at least a little weight off of our shoulders.



Matt Bodo



Tifany Quiñonez

## Tifany Quiñonez,

### U. of Colorado at Denver

During this pandemic, colleges can assist their students by reducing their workload and shortening exams. It is crucial for professors to be more lenient and understanding. I often felt very overwhelmed with assignments while trying to process how to best deal with the pandemic. It was even more challenging to transition in the middle of the spring semester, during the stress of finals.

Colleges need to do more to reassure their students that they are still here for them. Resources such as one-on-one time with advisers, career centers, LGBTQ+ community centers, and therapists must be readily available for students despite the transition to online. And colleges should reach out to their students by phone, email, or letters to check up on their mental and physical health.

Aditya Jhaveri

## Aditya Jhaveri,

**Emory U.**

Unfortunately, opportunities after college have been drastically affected by Covid-19, making it more difficult to find purpose in our college degrees and our liberal-arts educations. The economy that students will be entering has been transformed, and we will need to adapt. Colleges must make extra efforts to support job searches, professional development, and networking experiences.

## Nicole McGrath,

**Greenfield Community College**

Professors, please don't phone it in if your college sticks with an online curriculum.

I am an overachiever. I give my best in all that I do. I also have attention-deficit disorder. I do not learn well from only reading a textbook. I will admit that although I have purchased thousands of dollars in books, I have read precious few. I skim assigned readings to get the idea of what we're discussing in class, then learn from the discussions.


Nicole McGrath

At one time, I attended a fully online for-profit college. Most of the professors were "phoning in" their classes half-heartedly. They would throw hundreds of pages of reading at us, expecting us to memorize facts and pass tests. They didn't hold online class time, which meant that students had little or no interaction with professors or classmates. Discussion forums were assigned, but most students didn't participate.

When I moved from fully online to Greenfield Community College, I began to thrive because I was no longer left to my own devices. Professors encouraged me to interact and thanked me for doing so because it gave more depth to their classes and helped other students better understand concepts. This environment was essential to my survival as a student.

Please, professors, hold regular class times online just as you would if you were on campus. Encourage discussion and interaction. For students like me, those are the cornerstones of learning.

## Anjali DasSarma,

**U. of Maryland-Baltimore County**

As the editor-in-chief of the student newspaper, and as a rising senior, I know that the pandemic has hit students hard. But one part of on-campus college life that I believe can be replicated from home is networking.

I am a humanities scholar, and we are required, and others are encouraged, to attend the Humanities Forum speaker series. I've also attended a talk at the University of Maryland-Baltimore where I met the *New York Times* White House correspondent Maggie Haberman. Such events, to me, are a major part of the college experience.

These speakers and forums have helped me expand my mind and think critically about the world around me. Universities need to consider what speakers might contribute to the networking opportunities of those who are close to graduation. Students need to see that people like them have succeeded beyond college. In this period of death and despair, these opportunities are a beacon of light. They remind us that the Covid-19 crisis won't last forever.


Anjali DasSarma

# Further Reading

"Beyond Financial Aid: How Colleges Can Strengthen the Financial Stability of Low-Income Students and Improve Student Outcomes," Lumina Foundation, March 2018

"Equity in Mental Health Framework: Recommendations for Colleges and Universities to Support the Emotional Well-Being and Mental Health of Students of Color," by Alfiee Breland-Noble, Victor Schwartz, Stephanie Pinder-Amaker, Jordan Cattie, and John Edwards; a joint project of the Steve Fund and the Jed Foundation, 2017

"First-Generation Student Success: A Landscape Analysis of Programs and Services at Four-Year Institutions," by Sarah E. Whitley, Grace Benson, and Alexis Wesaw, the Center for First-Generation Student Success, October 2018

"Guide to Assessing Basic Needs Insecurity in Higher Education," by Sara Goldrick-Rab, Jed Richardson, and Peter Kinsley, The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, Fall 2019

"How to Help Struggling Students Succeed Online," by Beth McMurtrie, *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* March 26, 2020

"The Healthy Minds Study: 2018-2019 Data Report," by Daniel Eisenberg, Sarah Ketchen Lipson, et al.; the Healthy Minds Network, 2019

"My Professor Cares: Experimental Evidence on the Role of Faculty Engagement," by Scott E. Carrell, Michal Kurlaender; the National Bureau of Economic Research, June 2020

"Pandemic Pedagogy and the Limits of Compassion: One Professor's Hard-Earned Lessons From Teaching in a Continuing Emergency," by Beckie Supiano, *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* June 19, 2020

"Real College During the Pandemic: New Evidence on Basic Needs Insecurity and Student Well-Being," by Vanessa Coca, Sonja Dahl, Sara Goldrick-Rab, Gregory Kienzl, Sarah Magnelia, Carrie R. Welton; the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, June 2020

"Success by Design: Improving Outcomes in American Higher Education," by Tiffany Dovey Fishman, Allan Ludgate, and Jen Tutak; Deloitte Insights, March 16, 2017

"Students Need More Information to Help Reduce Challenges in Transferring College Credits," Government Accountability Office-17-574, August 2017

"Tracking Transfer," National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, September, 2019

"What Do Our Most Retaining underserved students Need This Fall? To Be on Campus," by James Lang, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 3, 2020.

"What Drives Student Success? Assessing the Combined Effect of Transfer Students and Online Courses," by Rebecca A. Glazier, Kerstin Hamann, Philip H. Pollock, and Bruce M. Wilson, Teaching in Higher Education, November 4, 2019

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# Related Publications

*The Chronicle* produces a series of in-depth reports for campus leaders. Here are a few complementary titles.

### Improving the Transfer Handoff
The critical effort to help community college students get a four-year degree

As enrollment pressures and equity concerns have intensified, four-year institutions are now finding that their own survival is more closely tied to the success of transfer students. Rather than waiting for community-college students to reach out to them, they're joining with two-year colleges to recruit students early and smooth the path to a bachelor's degree.

### The Truth About Student Success
Myth, Realities, and 30 Practices That Are Working

Student success is now an institutional priority, but the uncomfortable truth is that helping more students thrive is hard. Despite notable gains at some colleges, many are struggling to raise retention rates and eliminate achievement gaps. Explore 30 practices in action, and ground your efforts in the lessons of this evolving movement.

### Overwhelmed
The real campus mental-health crisis and new models for well-being

College students are more distressed than ever before, and increasing shares are enrolling with mental-health histories. More and more overwhelmed students are seeking help, overwhelming their colleges. Even with growing staffs, counseling centers cannot keep up. Troubled students are left with unmet needs. Learn how colleges are handling the demand for services and making well-being a campus-wide priority.

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