

Study: Strengthen quality of instruction, opportunities for 'deep learning' to improve community college completion rate

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Continuing to boost the quality of teaching in community colleges is essential if students' degrees are to have the desired impact on society and the economy, says a new report from The University of Texas at Austin's Center for Community College Student Engagement. The report, titled "The Heart of Student Success: Teaching, Learning and College..." » Continue Reading

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The report, titled "The Heart of Student Success: Teaching, Learning and College Completion," presents results of the 2010 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCCSSE), Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement and Survey of Entering Student Engagement. The data obtained from more than 400,000 students at 658 institutions offers a detailed portrait of community college students' educational experiences and describes how colleges across the U.S. are adopting strategies that improve learning.

"While summits, policy papers and changes in institutional culture clearly are important," says Dr. Kay McClenney, director of the Center for Community College [Student Engagement](#), "graduation rates simply

will not increase unless we attend with equal urgency to what goes on between teachers and their students.”

According to the CCCSSE survey, 52 percent of students report that completing a certificate is their goal and 84 percent say that getting an associate degree is the aim, but six years after entering school fewer than half have done so. McClenney notes that more than half of community college students attend school part-time, about 32 percent work more than 30 hours a week and about 22 percent are caring for dependents, so staying in school and doing well academically can be daunting.

To improve the chances of students having rich learning experiences and completing college, the report proposes that community colleges:

- strengthen classroom engagement;
- integrate student support into learning experiences;
- expand professional development for full-time and adjunct faculty;
- focus institutional policy on creating the conditions for learning.

"There's an escalating national push for more college degrees," says McClenney, "but the degrees will have the desired economic and social effects only if college completion reflects real and lasting learning. In our 2010 CCSSE survey, we include a special focus on deep learning, which is defined as 'broadly applicable thinking, reasoning and judgment skills — abilities that allow individuals to apply information, develop a coherent world view and interact in more meaningful ways.' Survey results show that improvement is needed in this area.

"The report also emphasizes just how critical it is to make a substantial commitment to professional development for faculty members if we want to see dramatic improvement in college completion rates, and it encourages colleges to consider institutional and academic policies that create more structure and fewer options for students. We have to

relinquish our reluctance to require, even when that reluctance arises from an abundance of empathy for multi-tasking [students](#)."

Examples of community colleges that are working to connect [learning](#) and college completion are provided in the report, illustrating, says McClenney, "that the promise of increased student success is not a pipe dream but a growing reality."

More information: To read the report, visit the [Community College Survey of Student Engagement](#).

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

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