

# Pathways to Success for Community College Students

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# AIR Pathways Project

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- States: KY and WA
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# Previous Research on Community Colleges and the Labor Market

## **Studies Using Administrative Data:**

- Florida: Backes et al.
- Kentucky: Jepsen et al.
- California: Stevens et al.
- Michigan: Bahr et al.

## **Common Findings:**

- Low Completion of Associate Programs, Higher in Certificates
- Low Enrollment in Associate/Certificate Programs with Strong Market Value, High Enrollment in Liberal Arts AA programs with Little Value
- Little Successful Transfer and Receipt of BAs despite High Expectations!

**See Holzer and Baum, *MAKING COLLEGE WORK*, Brookings, 2017**



# Why a New Study of “Pathways” in CCs?

- What programs are chosen by and successful for different categories of students – e.g., youth v. adults, disadvantaged or not, low achievers or not, by race/gender?
- What are pathways to success for disadvantaged and low achievers? Why are these not chosen more often?
- For those not successful: where along the paths do students fail?
- How linear and lengthy are the pathways?
- Are formal “career pathways” effective?
- Causal Impacts???



# Many Definitions of “Pathways”

- Program of Study with Required Series of Courses (including Developmental and “Gateway”) and Credit Accumulation
- Transfers across Programs and Institutions: Certificate to Associate, Associate to Associate, Associate to Bachelors
- Supports and Services
- Can include Work-Based Learning
- Formal “Career Pathways”:
  - 1) Low-Achieving Adults: Start with Dev. Ed, Stackable Certificates
  - 2) Youth: High School CTE to Community CollegeDifferent from “Guided Pathways” (T. Bailey)
- Informal: Fields of study and sequence of courses chosen towards attainment of certificate, associate or bachelor



# Our Work To Date

- KY administrative data on community college students
- Population: All students beginning community college in 2010-11 – Follow them thru 2016
- In 2010-11: Enrollment Choices: “Pathways” initially chosen by different groups of students
- By 2016: Completion Rates of Certificates, Associates, BA Degrees in Pathways (with or without market value) by different groups
- Characteristics of “Pathways”: Duration of enrollment, Time to credential, Multiple credentials, Pathway switching



# Preliminary Findings, KY 2010-16: Students and Their Choices of Pathways

- Students: Many are Older; Many “Not Ready”
- 7 pathways – 5 to Associates, 1 to Certificate/Diploma, 1 to BA plus Residual of “No Major Chosen”
- AA Pathways Most Frequently Chosen: Liberal Arts and Health (plus No Major)
- Certificate/Diploma Pathways: 15%
- Little Variation in Choices across Demographic Groups
  - A bit more in Certificate/Diploma among the Non-Ready
  - Fewer men in Healthcare!



# Preliminary Findings – Completion

- Completion: Low (30%) overall after 6 years
- Highest credential attained:
  - Certificates/Diplomas – 8%
  - Associate Degrees – 14%
  - Bachelors – 7%
- Highest Completion in Health
- Pathways with Relatively High Completion and High Market Value for Low Achievers: Certificates/Diplomas, Applied STEM and Health!





# Preliminary Findings: Annual Transitions

- Steep enrollment drop-offs, especially in first few years
- Early credential attainment: Certificates/Diplomas – 1-2 years
- AAs and BAs: Median of 3 and 5 years respective



# Preliminary Findings: Using Lower Credentials as Stepping-Stones

- Probability of AA attainment: Higher with certificate than without!
- Probability of BA attainment: Not higher with AA



# Preliminary Findings, KY – Nonlinear pathways

- Many switches across Pathways
- Many Certificates Earned in AA Pathways and Out-of-Pathway AA Attainment
- Low Rates of Transfer and BA Completion



# Summary of Preliminary Findings on Pathways

- Choices of Programs: Too little Health(men); Too little variation between Ready and Non-Ready students – Optimal?
- Completion: High in Healthcare overall, and in Certificates/Diplomas (App. STEM) for Non-Ready
- Value of Certificates: Early attainment, Increase probability of attaining AAs and BAs
- Nonlinear Pathways: Optimal?



# Next Steps

- Specific Hurdles: Developmental and Gateway Courses; General Education and Specific Subject Courses at 100 and 200+ Levels
- Different Pathways for Different Groups – e.g., High School Students, Returning Adults
- Causal Impacts? Regression Discontinuities; Matched Samples Using HS Information
- More Qualitative Analysis: What Helps Students in High Completion Fields?



# *Possible* Implications of Results

- Guide Students to Make Better Choices — More Choices of High-Completion Fields, More Linear Pathways – How?
- More Information and Counseling, More Use of Administrative Data, Guided Pathways
- More Successful Transfer Procedures
- Help with Key Gateway Points
- Other Supports and Services