Doing Good and Doing Well
Going to Scale to Improve Student Success and Institutional Fiscal Stability

The phrase, “Doing good and doing well”, means doing good deeds while getting along fine; being healthy, profitable, etc.

Many postsecondary institutions are struggling to improve student success in the face of declining enrollment and the reduction of resources. Demographic trends of declining enrollment are not going away. According to Grawe, “the primary challenge for the two-year sector in the next 15 years is clear: dramatically reduced enrollments. Indeed, the expected rate of contraction in two-year enrollments is almost 20 percent faster than for college enrollments in general.” The reality of this contraction is already hitting community colleges because most of their revenue comes from tuition, fees, and state support, which more often than not is dependent on students in seats. While increased recruitment efforts can mitigate some loss, such efforts generally come with additional costs. However, these can partially or, depending on the outcome, completely offset any financial benefit. By far, the most cost effective way colleges have to maintain and even improve their financial position is to reduce their historic, double digit, student attrition levels and increase the completion rate among first-time-in-college students.

Current efforts to improve student persistence in community colleges at scale have largely been ineffective or, like the currently popular co-requisite models, only impact a subset of students. Even the Guided Pathways movement has yet to be fully proven at scale and is difficult to implement. And most critical when it comes to the financial well-being of community colleges, there has been no cost-effective intervention that has accomplished what community colleges most need now (and will only become ever more critical in the future): to keep students of all demographics moving toward completion, and to accomplish this while, at the same time, closing historic achievement gaps. Until now.

The Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC) has developed a simple and straightforward process for implementing a cost-effective, impactful intervention over the course of five on-campus meetings. The initiative consists of on-site consulting and on-demand coaching services with administrators, faculty, and staff. Consulting and coaching services occur over a one year period that enables a college to improve student outcomes and financial performance within the first year of implementation. We use a standard continuous improvement cycle for implementation (as described in our book): assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation.
The service begins with an assessment of course retention and success in each class. The work is counterintuitive: instead of focusing on the deficits, we start by reviewing data to identify the “Bright Spot” faculty who have high retention and success rates in their course sections. We then use a proprietary protocol to talk with Bright Spot faculty about their classroom behaviors. In our work across the nation, we find surprising consistency across Bright Spot faculty in their non-academic activities and the intentionality of their actions.

The next step is to meet with administrators and a coalition of Bright Spot faculty and staff to introduce the action plan. At this time, the group also develops five interconnected plans for development, implementation, communication, monitoring, and evaluation of the work.

The third step is to roll-out the initiative college-wide. Faculty who need assistance with implementing any of these simple engagement activities with fidelity learn from their Bright Spot colleagues who can provide the needed professional development and supports. IEBC coaches also remain on-call to provide technical support.

The fourth step is to monitor the implementation and to evaluate the initiative’s impact by returning to the data about student success metrics and assessing change. These metrics are course retention, course success, and persistence from term-to-term and year-to-year. Additionally, based on demonstrated progress at colleges already implementing this work with fidelity, we expect to see achievement gaps close among traditionally underperforming populations. In fact, at colleges implementing these changes with all faculty, term-to-term persistence increases between 15 and 25 percent.

One college in Texas calls it their “foundational program”. This work propelled this college to state and national recognition as an Aspen Prize Top 10 and Rising Star winner and Achieving the Dream’s Leah-Meyer-Austin winner. Since implementing this program the college’s in-class retention rates for all student demographic groups has reached 96% and there are no equity gaps. Course success rates have soared to 81%, up more than 11 percentage points, term-to-term persistence has increased by 15% and is now over 80% for all student subpopulations, and three-year graduation rates increased by 110% in three years.

Another college, located north of Chicago, is in the process of ramping-up their version of the work. Currently about 25% of enrollments are in classes with participating faculty. Even though they have not yet gone to scale, the immediate impact on persistence rates has been extraordinary. For first-time-in-college students, term-to-term persistence rates increased 24 percentage points to 83%; and year-to-year persistence (Fall 2016 to Fall 2017) increased 26 percentage points to 68%.

At a third college in Washington, implementation has led to considerable gains in closing the achievement gap. Historically, their three-year course success rate average ranged from 71 to 92 percent across ethnic subpopulations. After only one year of implementation course success rates increased for all groups and the range diminished to only four points: from 90 to 94 percent.
Given the extraordinary and immediate results on student in-class retention, success, and persistence of a cost-effective intervention program it is clear that there is no tradeoff between “Doing Good” and “Doing Well.” IEBC’s model for improving all student outcomes and increasing revenue without incurring off-setting costs continues to work for all of these colleges and enables administrators to keep existing programs and services and consider adding new ones and even adding other important programs and services for students, rather than worrying about possible revenue shortfalls due to dropping enrollment.

In fact, IEBC is so confident about this work that we are offering a money back guarantee: If a college implements with fidelity these low- to no-cost activities and they do not realize an increase in student term-to-term persistence one year after implementation that offsets the cost of IEBC’s facilitation and coaching, 50% of the fee will be reimbursed.

IEBC’s staff has a demonstrated history of working with community colleges across the US to improve student success. Specifically, for the last 20 years, we have worked deeply with community college faculty on improving practice to increase student success. **We are the first educational support organization to offer a guarantee.**

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