

# BreakThroughs

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Here's what you'll find in this issue of *BreakThroughs*:

- 1 **Reaching Milestones**  
*Breaking Through at One Year*
- 2 **Announcing . . .**  
*The New Breaking Through Web site*
- 2 **Levers For Change**  
*Why the Ford Foundation Supports Breaking Through*
- 3 **Leading the Way**  
*A Profile of Central New Mexico Community College*
- 6 **Opening Doors to Opportunities**  
*A Student Perspective on Breaking Through*
- 8 **Expanding Our Reach**  
*Breaking Through Grows to 26 Community Colleges*
- 9 **Facilitating Peer Learning I**  
*Getting Employer Support for Recruiting Entry-Level Health Care Workers*
- 10 **Facilitating Peer Learning II**  
*Promoting Student Success: Adapting Case Management Training for Community Colleges*
- 11 **Identifying Supportive State Policies**  
*State Policy Workshop*
- 12 **Documenting Progress, Capturing Lessons, Measuring Impact**  
*Tracking the Progress of Adult Learners*
- 13 **Staying Connected**  
*How to Contact Us*

The Newsletter for **Breaking Through**: Helping Low-Skilled Adults Enter and Succeed in College and Careers

Welcome to our third issue of *BreakThroughs*. We are excited to update you on our work to create more effective pathways for low-skilled adults to enter and succeed in community college occupational and technical degree programs. In this issue, we present some of our first-year accomplishments. We also offer a message from one of our funders, announce the launch of our new Web site, and proclaim the addition of four learning colleges to our network!

In "Leading the Way," we profile Central New Mexico Community College and its efforts as a Breaking Through Leadership College. This is followed by an intriguing student perspective on the Breaking Through program at CNM. In "Facilitating Peer Learning," we share information from two workshops offered during our meeting. You'll find summaries of presentations from our state policy workshop in "Identifying Supportive State Policies" and get an update on college efforts to track the progress of adult learners in "Documenting Progress."

Thanks for your interest in and support of Breaking Through in 2006. As this issue illustrates, we are proud of what we've achieved so far, and have high expectations for the new year.

## REACHING MILESTONES:

### *Breaking Through at One Year*

The Breaking Through initiative reached a milestone in summer 2006 as it concluded its first year of operations. During this year, the partners, funders, and grantees laid a strong foundation for achieving the initiative's ambitious goal of increasing the number of low-skill adults who enter and succeed in community college occupational/technical certificate and degree programs. Here's a brief summary of the early achievements:

- In October 2005, Breaking Through awarded demonstration grants to six Leadership Colleges that receive funding and technical support to expand and institutionalize their approaches to advancing low-skilled adults.

- Also in October 2005, Breaking Through awarded demonstration grants to ten Learning Colleges that benefit from opportunities to learn from one another and also receive technical assistance from NCWE and JFF.
- In September 2006, the initiative expanded to include a statewide effort in North Carolina, thanks to a generous grant from the North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Foundation and the active commitment and involvement of the state community college system. One Leadership College and five Learning Colleges were selected.
- The initiative launched a multi-year peer learning strategy, including a spring event each year and a fall event at NCWE's annual conference. Peer learning opportunities between these events are also expanding. (See page 9 below.)
- The state policy effort expanded from a small research component to an in-depth analysis of six key policy areas, with support from the Ford Foundation. The goal is to identify and disseminate information about policies that support the advancement of low-literacy adults into and through community college occupational and technical degree programs.
- JFF and NCWE designated a team of independent evaluators, Debra D. Bragg and Elisabeth A. Barnett, as well a nationally recognized expert, Peter Ewell, to provide technical assistance in data and tracking.
- JFF and NCWE developed and inaugurated a multi-faceted communications strategy to expand awareness of the growing need to serve low-literacy adults and enhance expertise about promoting promising strategies for helping such students enter and succeed in postsecondary education.
- The partners and funders refined the strategy for the Leadership Initiative to target current college presidents in several key states. The goal is to leverage change in institutions that are not currently part of Breaking Through.

### **ANNOUNCING THE NEW BREAKING THROUGH WEB SITE...**

Breaking Through has launched a new tool for sharing information and disseminating promising strategies. The Web site presents information about the initiative as a whole and the colleges involved in it, along with resources that can help all community colleges that are striving to help low-skilled adults succeed. Stay connected and informed: bookmark this page and share it with your colleagues! Go to:

[www.breakingthroughcc.org](http://www.breakingthroughcc.org)

To learn more about the accomplishments in the first year, including some of the specific outcomes attained by the Leadership Colleges thus far, see "The Initiative After One Year" at [www.breakingthroughcc.org/resources.php](http://www.breakingthroughcc.org/resources.php)

## **LEVERS FOR CHANGE**

# Why the Ford Foundation Supports Breaking Through

*By John Colborn and Cyrus Driver*

John Colborn is the Director of Program Operations at the Ford Foundation. Cyrus Driver is the Deputy Director, Education, Sexuality, and Religion, at the Ford Foundation.

The Ford Foundation has long seen the community college as a critical institution for advancing economic and educational opportunity. It is a gateway to postsecondary education for lower-income people and first-generation

college students at a time when college-level skills and credentials are increasingly required for jobs that pay family-sustaining wages. It is an avenue for pursuing lifelong learning for working adults seeking skills to succeed in their

jobs and in their careers. It is an engine for economic development, enabling communities and regions to build a skilled workforce and attract and retain jobs.

The foundation's Community College Bridges to Opportunity Initiative represents a joint effort of our education and economic development programs to improve educational attainment and economic self-sufficiency for low-income people. Our aim is to promote the integration of remedial, vocational, and general education in ways that enhance student success. In this work, we focus particularly on public policies and the ways community colleges are governed, funded, and held accountable.

Breaking Through focuses on one of the most challenging issues facing community colleges and policymakers: How to improve outcomes for the millions of students enrolled in basic skills and remedial community college programs. The participating colleges in the Breaking Through project are proving that low-skilled adults can go on to postsecondary education and training that leads to college credentials and good jobs. By supporting JFF and NCWE and the policy and advocacy work under Breaking Through, we hope to hold up public policy strategies that broaden the successes realized under Breaking Through.

## LEADING THE WAY:

# A Profile of Central New Mexico Community College, Albuquerque, New Mexico

We continue our profiles of the Leadership Colleges in this issue with a focus on Central New Mexico Community College. A summary of CNM's Breaking Through project is followed by an interview with one of its outstanding students, Elizabeth Renee Clark.

## About Central New Mexico Community College

Central New Mexico Community College is the largest and most comprehensive community college in New Mexico. Serving more than 26,000 students, it is the second largest educational institution in the state. CNM offers a wide range of educational programs, including certificate programs in business, health, technologies, and trades occupations; Associate's degrees in occupational fields and liberal arts; adult and developmental education ranging from basic skills and GED instruction to college prep courses; customized training and assistance to large and small businesses through the CNM Workforce Training Center; apprenticeship

programs in trades occupations; and concurrent enrollment and articulation opportunities for high school students.

Students of color comprise more than half of CNM's current enrollment, with Latinos as the largest population within that group. Over two-thirds of CNM students are adult learners, with nearly 35 percent of students age 31 or older. Women comprise 60 percent of its student population.

## CNM and Breaking Through

Over the past 40 years, CNM has built a strong reputation for preparing students for successful careers. As a result, 96 percent of its graduates find jobs in their major areas of study. Several practices contribute to this effectiveness. For over 10 years, the Adult Basic Education program, which provides basic skills training, GED preparatory courses, and ESL courses for adults, has been housed in an academic division of the college, the Division of Educational and Career Advancement. This same division offers college preparatory, developmental education,

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college success, and career exploration courses. The integration of Adult Basic Education in the ECA academic division facilitates the transition of low-skilled adults into college preparatory programs, credit-bearing courses, and job training programs. Faculty members can collaborate across the programs and develop more consistency in classroom policies and practices. They also can share resources, such as computer labs, instructional materials, tutoring support, and student support services (e.g., counseling and advising).

In addition, the Division of Educational and Career Advancement helps students transition to other divisions in the college as they identify their major areas of study. Achievement Coaches in each instructional division provide students with academic and personal support to facilitate their success. As a result of this combination of academic and comprehensive support services, the ECA is the only community college designated as a Center for Working Families pilot site funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Centers for Working Families provide a supportive and resource rich environment where families can gain access to employment services, family economic supports, consumer financial services, community connections, and other trusted and high-quality services in a convenient location.

Finally, CNM indicates its responsiveness to the needs of working adults by offering courses, programs, and tutoring services on evenings and weekends, in addition to the more traditional morning and afternoon weekday classes. Life and work skills are also integrated into the curricula of the Adult Basic Education and developmental education programs to increase their relevance for working adults.

### *The Challenge*

Despite its strengths in supporting low-skilled adults, CNM identified two major gaps that hindered its efforts and effectiveness: the lack of a formalized process to encourage low-skilled adults to prepare for a set of designated career pathways into high-demand occupations, and the absence of accelerated learning leading to

fairly immediate economic payoffs into these career pathways.

### *The Response*

*Integrating institutional structures and services* is CNM's primary high-leverage strategy in Breaking Through. Breaking Through is strengthening the existing connections among Adult Basic Education, developmental education, and the careers/technical fields of construction trades by developing clear pathways to the workforce. Students engage in coursework to explore careers in the construction trade industry. Basic skill instruction is integrated into the career exploration content in an intensive, accelerated learning environment.

### *Key Features of the Breaking Through Program*

The Breaking Through Initiative at Central New Mexico Community College provides accelerated and contextualized adult basic and developmental education for project participants with low academic skills, facilitates clear pathways to construction apprenticeship programs, and provides multiple supports toward pursuing certificate and degree programs in the construction trades. The initiative facilitates the early identification of career interests, early connections to supportive industry contacts, and early access to academic readiness and personal supports, all with the goal of encouraging student success.

The Breaking Through program at CNM has six key features:

- *Accelerated basic skills and career exploration.* This three-week course includes a math and reading focus applied to construction trades; GED test preparation; a construction lab project; and a construction site visit. While building their basic skills, students get a hands-on "preview" of what work in the construction trades is like. Furthermore, students who have not obtained their GED receive some preparation for acquiring that required credential so that they can enter the apprenticeship phase of the program and proceed in their matriculation at CNM.

*Once they have developed sufficient skills, students can be placed in an apprenticeship at any time. An apprentice can begin the program without a high school credential, with the expectation that a GED will be earned within a year.*

- *Twelve-week learning community.* Students continue to improve their basic skills in math and reading as they concurrently receive instruction in various construction trades. A cohort approach is utilized, so that students can support one another. As one participant noted, “The community developed amongst the students was both the most satisfactory and unexpected thing for me.”
- *Apprenticeship in a construction trade.* Once they have developed sufficient skills, students can be placed in an apprenticeship at any time. An apprentice can begin the program without a high school credential, with the expectation that a GED will be earned within a year. Several apprenticeship programs have committed to advising the program and hiring graduates of the program. Apprenticeship partners include the Association of Builders and Contractors, Associated General Contractors, Iron Workers Local 495, Northern New Mexico Independent Electrical Contractors, and the plumbing and pipefitting industry. Apprentices earn 60 percent of what a journey person earns. After each additional 1,000 hours (which usually takes about six months), they get a 5 percent increase in pay. In three to four years, the students can receive a journey person license.
- *Certificate and Associate’s degree programs.* While in the apprenticeship programs, students can continue to matriculate in CNM’s certificate and degree programs. CNM awards certificates in four construction apprenticeship programs: electrical, carpentry, plumbing, and welding. It awards Associate’s degrees in construction technology, mechanical technology, and metals technology. Apprenticeship coursework is closely related to the degree coursework and is articulated so that students can receive college credit for their apprenticeship coursework.
- *Comprehensive student support.* CNM Breaking Through students receive advising and support through multiple resources. Five Achievement Coaches (one Breaking Through coach and four others in different instructional programs) aid students with course

selection, academic advice, accessing emergency scholarships, and personal counseling. When several students have needed assistance with bus passes, purchasing textbooks, finding stable housing, and accessing clothing, these coaches have gained support from the CNM Foundation, Center for Working Families, and community agencies to meet the needs of these students so they could continue their education. Peer mentors have also provided information on course expectations, financial aid, and various campus resources. Even the apprenticeship partners have offered their support to students and the Breaking Through program. Some student course and registration fees are paid by the appropriate apprenticeship agency once the student is a registered apprentice. The Associated Builders and Contractors, Associated General Contractors, and Northern New Mexico Independent Electrical Contractors have also donated funds to the project to provide food and supplies for community building activities. These funds supported a kick-off celebration and award ceremony during the first phase of the project. A faculty member noted, “The kick-off celebration and end-of-class celebration were good motivators and were well worth the time, expense, and effort.”

- *Institutionalized college infrastructure.* As an outcome of Breaking Through, CNM seeks to build an ongoing infrastructure to address the college and career readiness of individuals with low skills. Drawing from the lessons learned in Breaking Through, it has developed a College and Career Readiness Center where students can study, receive mentorship, and learn essential work skills.

#### *Progress to Date*

- In its first six month of operations, CNM has retained 33 students in the first cohort, 23 of whom are pursuing certificates and/or Associate’s degrees in the construction trades. Drawing from a waiting list of potential students interested in the program, an additional cohort of at least 50 students will start in January 2007.

*Even early in the initiative, evaluations by both faculty and project participants have found the Breaking Through experience to be valuable for students.*

- Students enrolled in and completed various classes in GED preparation, mathematics, reading, and courses related to construction trades (i.e., electrical, plumbing, welding, and carpentry). Students achieved significant learning gains on ACCUPLACER and WorkKeys test results. Ninety percent of project participants that took the WorkKeys post-test increased their scores.
- Students completed several class-based construction projects, including building at least one cottage that was auctioned off by the college, with the proceeds fed back into the construction program. (See below.) Project participants have demonstrated academic motivation, excellent attendance, and commitment to the mission of the project. Seven students have already been accepted into apprenticeships.
- Greater cooperation has been fostered between the Division of Education and Career Advancement and the Division of Applied Technologies, in which the construction trade programs are housed. Faculty have worked together to design and teach a new curriculum in the accelerated basic skills and career exploration course. Faculty across divisions have also consulted one another in modifying the curricula for other courses to better meet the needs of students with low academic skills.

As the Breaking Through initiative at CNM proceeds, two ongoing challenges are evident.

Continuous efforts must be made to promote student retention. While a number of institutional and community resources have been utilized, the rigor and intensity of the program, combined with the pressures many students face in providing for their families and addressing their life and personal issues (such as the lack of transportation, day care, basic food, and shelter), make an ongoing focus on this challenge a significant priority for CNM. Furthermore, fluctuations in the construction job market necessitate that CNM provide continuing support to project participants so that students can get jobs during and after their apprenticeships. CNM staff maintain close relationships with employers to facilitate understanding of this industry and better anticipate employer needs. Breaking Through is committed to helping CNM meet these challenges.

Still, even early in the initiative, evaluations by both faculty and project participants have found the Breaking Through experience to be valuable for students. A faculty member noted, “The carpentry lab building project and the construction site visit were the two things that I believe students enjoyed and were motivated by the most.” At least one student concurred, stating, “I enjoyed the fast-paced learning environment and going to the construction lab.” Another student gave advice to other adults interested in joining the project: “I would advise students to be open-minded and come prepared to work because the instructors [are] serious about teaching math.”

## OPENING DOORS TO OPPORTUNITIES:

# A Student Perspective on Breaking Through

In October 2006, as part of the National Council for Workforce Education annual conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the initiative held a learning tour of the CNM *Breaking Through* program. Nearly 35 conference participants visited the CNM campus and met with students, faculty, and employers providing apprenticeships. One portion of this tour included a visit to a student construction site. The visit was led by Elizabeth Renee

Cleveland (who goes by Renee), a construction technology major at CNM and a *Breaking Through* student.

Renee gave us an overview of the *Breaking Through* construction program (see CNM profile above). It begins with a three-week intensive program to introduce students to the building trades and increase their basic skills, especially in math. Students get help on getting

their GED and increasing their math scores on ACCUPLACER.

We then visited the workshop where the lab class is offered. The lab class provides a practical application of what the students are learning in the math class. They learn about the carpentry materials cut list in theory; in the lab they put this theory into context. About 20 students participate, with each taking part in the projects, often in small groups. Projects begin small—each student creates a wooden toolbox—and then grow to the creation of large doghouses, and finally at least one cottage.

After Renee's stern warnings about safety, we visited two cottages that are being built. It takes about one year to build the cottage, and all the students in the various construction programs participate: carpentry, plumbing, electrical, HVAC, flooring, etc. Just as on a real construction site, the students read blueprints, determine the materials needed, do the work, and get inspections after completing each phase of work. They encounter construction delays and unanticipated problems that need to be fixed. When the cottages are finished, they are auctioned off and the proceeds go back into the program. The cottages sell for about \$30,000 each, which, even with the \$9,000 relocation fee, is still about a third of their market value! (For some snapshots of Renee showcasing the cottages during this tour, go to [www.breakingthroughcc.org/schools.php](http://www.breakingthroughcc.org/schools.php).)

*BreakThroughs* subsequently interviewed Renee to learn more about her experience at CNM and her view of the *Breaking Through* program.

**BreakThroughs:** What were you doing before deciding to go to CNM?

**Renee:** I lived in Las Vegas, where I did a number of odds and ends jobs—working in casinos, waitressing, fork-lift driving. I moved to Albuquerque with my family in July 2005.

**BreakThroughs:** How did you find out about Breaking Through?

**Renee:** After living in a homeless shelter for a couple of months, we signed up for a housing

program called Saranam, offered through the Central United Methodist Church. The program covers our rent and utilities for two years and offers a small weekly stipend. In exchange, we do volunteer work for the church and attend life-skills classes offered by the program. One of the instructors for these classes, Ms. Kelly Klein, told us about Breaking Through at CNM. Because she also worked at CNM, she met Tracy Dace, the Breaking Through Achievement Coach, and learned about the program. Since I liked working with my hands and the accomplishment of doing things, I went to the Breaking Through orientation. Tracy was like a best friend from the beginning. I was eager to get started in the program. So I wouldn't lose my spot in the program, Saranam paid the \$40 application fee and I volunteered at the church to pay it back.

**BreakThroughs:** What were your initial impressions?

**Renee:** I started in welding, but after some advice, changed my major to carpentry, with an eye towards construction management. I was really fascinated by the lab classes with Mr. Brownlow and signed up for more carpentry classes. I liked the fast pace of the three-week basic skills classes. It kept me from getting bored. I am 41 years old and have two children and four stepchildren, so my time to go to school is limited. I wanted to get on with it. The instructors were fantastic and determined to make sure that we had what we needed. There was strong support.

**BreakThroughs:** What have you found challenging about the program?

**Renee:** I expected the study load and the instructors to be challenging, and they are. In the beginning, Tracy was just starting and the layout of the program was not so clear. Breaking Through covered the three-week intensive course, but I had to apply for financial aid for the next twelve-week session and the rest of the program. Saranam helped me apply for financial aid, which I used to get the books I needed. Tracy provided a lot of support for all of us. We would have meetings, lunches, and

*The lab class provides a practical application of what the students are learning in the math class. They learn about the carpentry materials cut list in theory; in the lab class, they put this theory into context.*

weekend BBQs to get to know each other and to know what to expect and what our responsibilities are. For example, when I started my carpentry classes, I needed my own tools. I could get them through financial aid if I ordered them through the bookstore, but it would be weeks before I received them. I was afraid of falling behind in my classes. Tracy helped me write letters to get an emergency scholarship from the CNM Foundation, and I was able to get money for the tools in a few days.

**BreakThroughs:** What has been surprising or unexpected about the program?

**Renee:** I've made accomplishments that I never gave thought to before. I never wanted to, or had an interest in, going to school. Years ago, after high school, I attended the University of Nevada, Las Vegas with encouragement from my mother. I lasted less than a month and spent most of that time at the student union. Now, I'm getting straight As, and, to my surprise, I

received the Student Excellence Award by the Women in Trades department. I'm receiving another award for attendance. I love going to school; I think it's great! With my family, it's hard to find a moment for myself; going to school is my quiet time.

**BreakThroughs:** What do you plan to do next?

**Renee:** This program has done a lot for me. It has opened doors to opportunities for now and for my future. I plan to continue getting more skills over the next semester. I will explore entering an apprenticeship program in the summer. I also want to continue working towards my Associate's degree. As an older woman in college, I received respect and support here. The instructors and Tracy are really committed, or students would never come back. They give us a reason to want to come; they make it interesting. They give us the energy to stick it out even when it's hard. I'm very, very pleased with this program.

## Facilitating Peer Learning

Breaking Through held its fall peer learning event in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in conjunction with the annual conference of the National Council for Workforce Education. Over 100 participants, including community college practitioners, Breaking Through partners, funders, evaluators, and other technical assistance providers met to reflect on and learn from the work that has occurred over the last six months. In this issue, we present summaries of two

sessions: one on getting employer buy-in for career ladder programs, and another on promoting student success.

Summaries of other session may be found at [www.breakingthroughcc.org/calendar.php](http://www.breakingthroughcc.org/calendar.php).

Breaking Through continues to provide opportunities for community colleges seeking to learn from one another between the semiannual peer learning meetings. Peer Learning Groups provide opportunities for colleges to share experiences, while Working Groups collaborate on developing specific products. A peer learning group in contextualizing math has been established, and a learning group in contextualizing for health care is emerging. Working Groups assist with the development of Breaking Through policy briefs and the development of a new student support model, drawing from the case management experience. Look for more information about the accomplishments of these peer learning groups and working groups.

### EXPANDING OUR REACH

#### Breaking Through Grows to 26 Community Colleges

Breaking Through is pleased to announce four additional colleges that have joined the initiative as Learning Colleges, with financial support from a variety of sources. These colleges are:

- City College of San Francisco, San Francisco, California
- South Seattle Community College, Seattle, Washington
- St. Philip's College, San Antonio, Texas
- Tacoma Community College, Tacoma, Washington

## FACILITATING PEER LEARNING I:

### Getting Employer Support for Recruiting Entry-Level Health Care Workers into Career Ladder Programs: What's Working?

*Developing strong partnerships with employers is central to the success of health care pathways projects, beginning with the recruitment of the frontline health care workforce into entry-level and advanced training programs.*

Many Breaking Through colleges are focused on health care pathways projects. Developing strong partnerships with employers is central to the success of these efforts, beginning with the recruitment of the frontline health care workforce into entry-level and advanced training programs. Session leaders Linda Lewis of Southeast Arkansas College and Bob Paponetti of Cuyahoga Community College shared the strong experience their colleges have in employer relations during the workshop.

Southeast Arkansas College has actively engaged health care employers to develop a responsive strategy for recruiting entry-level workers into its pathways program. Working with the Jefferson Regional Medical Center, the college has conducted recruitment and orientation sessions on site. This is the first step towards creating real pathways opportunities for frontline staff within the medical center that could parallel the academic offerings at SEARK. Linda Lewis provided participants with examples of outreach and marketing materials they have used with their participating employers and their employees.

Bob Paponetti described how Cuyahoga Community College has engaged employers, the public workforce system, the city, the county, and several community-based organizations in efforts to recruit adults with sixth- and seventh-grade skill levels for its health care pathways program. He presented the marketing materials developed by Cuyahoga and explained their marketing efforts to their partners in detail.

The discussion highlighted several key strategies for getting employer buy-in and support:

- Meet the educational needs of employers by “reducing cycle time” through turning around course development and delivery in faster and more efficient ways.
- Develop close relationships with employers to facilitate employer buy-in and release time. This is especially important for long-term care and smaller employers given the unique challenges for these employers. Models in Denver, Colorado, and in Worcester and Springfield, Massachusetts, are good examples.
- Identify strategies for optimizing and building the capacity of nurse educators, an often scarce resource. The Colorado Institute has developed a promising strategy.
- Train supervisors to ensure real employer engagement and the successful involvement of employees. Supervisors need to get the message from their managers that this kind of education and training is important, and get the incentives and support necessary to encourage their direct reports to participate.
- Provide on-site academic advisors, career coaches, and/or education coaches to support employees and liaison with supervisors to promote success.

For more information, including a list of recommended resources, see [www.breakingthroughcc.org/calendar.php](http://www.breakingthroughcc.org/calendar.php)

## FACILITATING PEER LEARNING II:

### Promoting Student Success: Adapting Case Management Training for College Settings

*Community colleges can build their capacity to promote student success by developing external partnerships, broadening the function of existing advisers, training staff to meet the needs of the expanded role, and identifying effective strategies and tools.*

This session explored case management and student support strategies being utilized by Breaking Through colleges and the challenges they have encountered. Catherine Sills of Portland Community College and Gloria Hatcher-Mayes of the Seattle Jobs Initiative gave an overview of a case manager training model currently under development, and they extracted some of the key lessons from working with each other over the past few months.

Community colleges can build their capacity to promote student success by developing external partnerships, broadening the function of existing advisers, training staff to meet the needs of the expanded role, and identifying effective strategies and tools.

#### *Developing external partnerships*

- Partner/connect with social agencies, foundations, and community-based organizations that can serve as referral resources for students.
- Create a resource manual for advisers so that they can know where to refer/connect students.

#### *Broadening the function of advisers*

- Expand the role of the advisers to include social support.
- Communicate to all staff why the change is necessary to get them on board.
- Foster ongoing communication between advisers and faculty.

#### *Training staff to meet the needs of the expanded role*

- Define the advising role with students, with a focus on being non-intrusive.
- Sensitize advisers to the varying needs of students.
- Focus on building a rapport to enable a trusting relationship with students.
- Assess students' academic and social support needs.

- Create action plans with students on the steps, tasks, and timeline toward their goals.
- Set expectations with students for personal/academic growth, with periodic check-ins to monitor progress.
- Promote student success by training advisers to set boundaries. Advisers must avoid enabling dependency by teaching students to design their own problem-solving process over time, with guidance from the adviser.
- Observe students' behavior and ability to focus on their academic work.

#### *Identifying effective strategies and tools*

- Identify successful case management strategies.
- Develop assessment tools.

Several ongoing questions were identified that will be addressed in the "case manager" training model being developed by Portland Community College and the Seattle Jobs Initiative:

- Since terminology is important, what term other than "case management" is appropriate for the expanded adviser role in the educational setting?
- How do you keep the quality of the "case manager" approach with larger numbers of students?
- How can colleges identify and make connections with agencies in the community that offer social services to students?
- How do we help students know what questions to ask and to advocate for themselves when referred to social services?

A Working Group of other colleges is being formed to provide additional input on the development of this model by PCC and SJI. For more information, please see [www.breakingthroughcc.org/calendar.php](http://www.breakingthroughcc.org/calendar.php).

## IDENTIFYING SUPPORTIVE STATE POLICIES

## State Policy Workshop

*There is widespread and growing interest in state policies that improve outcomes for low-skilled adults in their efforts to succeed in college and careers.*

At the recent National Council for Workforce Education annual conference, Breaking Through offered a workshop on “State Policies that Support Low-Skilled Adults’ Advance to College.” There is widespread and growing interest in state policies that improve outcomes for low-skilled adults in their efforts to succeed in college and careers. Strategies that connect low-literate adults to community college occupational and technical degrees are frequently supported by state policies that either create incentives or remove barriers to implementing practices at the college level. A panel of state administrators, researchers, and funders discussed various efforts underway across the country, focusing on how these policies came about and how they are financed.

Hosted by Nan Poppe, NCWE’s incoming president, the session presenters included Heath J. Prince of Jobs for the Future (who also facilitated the session), Amy-Ellen Duke of the Center for Law and Social Policy, Kristin Ockert of the I-BEST initiative, and John Colborn of the Ford Foundation.

The session highlight several challenges facing community colleges and identified some proposed policy solutions:

- *The pipeline is broken.* Amy-Ellen Duke gave a comprehensive overview of the many reasons why transitions from ABE/ESL/GED to postsecondary, from developmental education to for-credit college work, and from non-credit workforce training to for-credit workforce courses are not effective. Challenges facing adults seeking to make these transitions include lack of alignment, the difficulty in measuring results, high attrition in developmental education, lack of supportive services, lack of adequate financing, long waiting lists, low graduation rates, and insufficient professional development for teachers.
- *It’s about the money*—how states support low-skilled adults. Heath Prince, in an overview of two forthcoming Breaking Through papers, focused on how low-skilled adults fund their own education and how states are finding solutions to problems with community college financing. These papers seek to address these issues from the point of view of adult learners. There are two common denominators in innovative states that are working to address financing issues: advocacy on this issue is cast in economic development language; and states are aligning and coordinating their resources.
- *States can develop systems to increase basic skills and prepare low-skilled adults for work and post-secondary education.* Kristin Ockert described the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) initiated by the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges. Combining basic skills and vocational instruction in the same classroom, and often at the same time, I-BEST has shown significant results for low-skilled adults. I-BEST students earn more college credits than their peers in basic skills. These students also have a higher completion rate than other ABE/ESL or workforce students.
- *Community colleges need to be effective policy players.* John Colborn shared the Ford Foundation’s commitment to helping community colleges collectively make the case for their institutions. He urged participants to consider: What are the policy systems that can help community colleges be successful in the policy arena? Who are the stakeholders that need to be organized to support community colleges in this work? For example, Ford funded a conversation between the New Mexico Community College Association and ACORN. These two organizations worked together to increase financial aid for students. Several strategies were noted for community colleges seeking to play a more effective policy

role. Colleges have to be clear and concise about their message. Colleges need to value the use of data, leadership, and advocacy in advancing their policy priorities. Finally, collaboration was noted as a key strategy. Community colleges should be more attentive

to related issues in low-income communities if they expect stakeholder groups in these communities to support them as well.

For more information on I-BEST, see [www.breakingthroughcc.org/calendar.php](http://www.breakingthroughcc.org/calendar.php).

## DOCUMENTING PROGRESS, CAPTURING LESSONS, MEASURING IMPACT

# Tracking the Progress of Adult Learners

*According to Dr. Peter Ewell, vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, colleges have the basic data they need to document the impact of their projects, and all plan to create special databases for project administration and case management.*

Breaking Through challenges community colleges in a variety of areas, including the ways that non-traditional adult students are taught, the kind of services they receive, and how they are guided through academic and labor market transitions. One of the greatest challenges, however, lies in diagnosing their progress in these areas. This requires knowing what kind of data to collect, how to get it, and what to do with it.

To help campuses track their progress more effectively, Breaking Through has enlisted Dr. Peter Ewell, vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. A national expert on using assessment data to improve college instruction and outcomes, Dr. Ewell also works with Achieving the Dream, a national initiative to help more community college students succeed, particularly low-income students. For Breaking Through, Dr. Ewell began by surveying campuses to find out what kinds of data they now collect on student participants, as well as what information, tools, and direct assistance the colleges need to improve their tracking of student progress. At the October 2006 Breaking Through peer learning meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico, he met with Breaking Through Leadership Colleges individually.

Also at the Albuquerque meeting, Dr. Ewell led two well-attended workshops on Data Tracking Systems. These sessions revealed that finding

and using data on non-traditional learners is far from simple. Data on student enrollment, progress, and service usage are often isolated from centralized registration systems. Institutions lack systems for sharing information across the non-credit/for-credit divide or other separations. Program staff lack models for extracting and presenting data on student transitions that do not follow traditional steps and timelines. And software programs may promise analytical power but not live up to their claims.

Despite these hurdles, Breaking Through campuses already collect a great deal of information on participating students. In addition to basic registration and enrollment information, most schools also obtain data on test scores, barriers to attendance (e.g., transportation issues), and student demographics (e.g., single parenthood, first-generation college going). According to Ewell, the colleges have the basic data they need to document the impact of their projects, and all plan to create special databases for project administration and case management. More challenging, perhaps, is collecting data on issues such as “case management” or student encounters with campus service offices and follow-up actions. Moreover, college staff want guidance about what to collect and the best ways to analyze it and assess its impact.

To respond to these needs, Dr. Ewell will produce a series of tools usable by all Breaking Through institutions, while providing some

brief direct consultation to specific campuses. Products now planned or in development include:

- *A data map* or inventory of the types of data that Leadership Colleges now collect, with each type classified by topic and whether supports impact research or project/case management;
- *Recommendations for common core data*, drawing on that data map, for every project to collect in similar ways, with definitions and suggested frequency of collection;
- *A data toolkit document*, with advice on such topics as how to capture particular data types, alternate approaches to database design and conducting research, how to conduct a “data

audit” of what is collected and who owns it, and an annotated bibliography; and

- *Useful benchmarks*, or commonly used outcome statistics for community college Adult Basic Education and vocational students, compiled from research literature and displayed as a short reference sheet.

These and other tools will become available over the coming months. Also, at forthcoming meetings of Breaking Through (Portland, Oregon, April 2007; Savannah, Georgia, during the October 2007 NCWE annual meeting), Dr. Ewell will facilitate additional group and individual sessions on data systems and tracking student progress.

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## Staying Connected

### Contact Us

If you have upcoming events you want us to highlight, to get more information, or to subscribe (or unsubscribe) from *BreakThroughs*, please contact Monique Sheen, [msheen@jff.org](mailto:msheen@jff.org).

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