As the seasons change, we often are torn between looking forward to the new and regretting the departure of the wonders of the season we are in. So while we are sad to say goodbye to Priyadarshini Chaplot, we are happy to welcome Willard Hom as the new editor of Perspectives.

Over her four-year tenure as editor, Priya has provided us with issues that were full of important national, state, and local research, planning, assessment, and professional development news. Working with many of us in the California community, Priya has had an incredible talent for getting each of us to write timely and significant articles about our work. However, with her move to New York City last summer, it has become more challenging to keep a pulse on all the California stories and efforts, and Priya suggested that we seek a replacement. Though she is leaving her Perspectives role, Priya will continue to work closely with the RP Group on research projects and other organizational communications efforts.

Looking for a new editor was a daunting undertaking. Yet, through a series of serendipitous meetings, we realized that the perfect person was in our midst. Willard Hom is a happily retired former CCCCO director as well as a respected youth tennis coach in Sacramento who also happens to be a former journalist. From our vantage point, he has the perfect mix of community college experience along with the analytical mind of a researcher and reporter. When we met with Willard, it was clear that he was an excellent fit for this work. Welcome Willard!

Priya, thank you for your creativity and leadership. We particularly appreciate your good spirit and support to all who have authored articles over the past four years--especially those of us who may have rushed our writing or fumbled our deadlines! We are grateful!

Sincerely,
Mike Howe
Director, RP Group

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Register for a Post-Conference Workshop at the SSS Conference

Attend a post-conference workshop, whether or not you are participating in the Strengthening Student Success Conference. These workshops provide the opportunity to explore a range of topics in-depth, including understanding the new accreditation standards, expanding community engagement, facilitating the transition from high school to college, developing leadership, increasing equity, developing a growth mindset, and exploring a new take on general education. Workshops will be held on Friday, October 9, 10:30 - 3:00 (lunch included) at the Oakland Convention Center. If you register for only a post-conference workshop and not the main conference, you are also welcome to attend the last Interactive Breakout session during the main conference (Friday, October 9, 8:30 - 10:00 am) at no additional cost. To learn more about each post-conference workshop and register, click here.

STATEWIDE SPOTLIGHT | Innovations in General Education: Giving California Students a Compass

Author: Debra David, Senior Advisor for Liberal Learning Partnerships, California State University, Office of the Chancellor

Too few students who begin their postsecondary education in a California Community College (CCC) or California State University (CSU) ever reach their goal of earning a bachelor’s degree. Of students who entered a CCC in 2007 and demonstrated intent to transfer, just over one-third had transferred after six years (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2013). Of degree-seeking students who entered a CSU that same year, just over half graduated six years later (California State University, 2013).

In light of these and other data, our colleges and universities are deepening their focus on student success, not only by increasing degree completion but also by ensuring high-quality learning for all students. General Education (GE)--the part of the curriculum that all students must take to graduate with a baccalaureate degree--offers an area of experimentation and reform designed to achieve this goal.

In 2008, the CSU joined "Give Students a Compass" (Compass), sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), a project designed to explore how higher education systems could collaborate with campuses to promote inclusive excellence and high-impact educational practices (HIPs) like learning communities and service-learning.

That project inspired CSU leaders to seek funds for a second phase of Compass, with a twist: a focus on strengthening the GE transfer curriculum in partnership with CCCs. Since about three in five CSU graduates begin at CCCs, they realized that the systems needed to work together for meaningful change. The central animating question was, "How can we design and scale promising models to reach all undergraduate students in California public
higher education, regardless of where they begin?"

From 2011 to 2015, teams involving 14 CSUs and 25 CCCs pilot-tested innovative GE models. Innovations in General Education: Giving California Students a Compass summarizes lessons learned from this initiative. The report features profiles of five models that show promise of improving student success and can be adapted and scaled up in both CCC and CSU contexts. Among them:

- **Thematic GE pathways** delivered through a collaboration of Pierce College and CSU Northridge, that allow students to begin at either campus and continue in upper-division work; completing 18 units in a pathway leads to a minor
- A "public sphere pedagogy" model that engages first-year students in community "town halls" or "great debates" on social issues of local interest; while it began at CSU Chico, Butte, Shasta, and Chabot Colleges have launched similar events

The report includes three emerging approaches that have been influenced by Compass. For example, Santa Barbara City College designed an alternate GE program that embeds learning outcomes across other courses and incorporates multiple HIPs. Several new CSU-CCC projects that build on Compass, such as Faculty Collaboratives and the Threshold Project, are also highlighted.

This report concludes with recommendations for action, including a call for CCCs and CSUs to take advantage of flexibility in current regulations and funding to make the GE transfer curriculum more engaging, integrative, and meaningful on their own campuses.

**Resources:**

- Innovations in General Education: Giving California Students a Compass (Full Report)
- Innovations in General Education: Preparing Students for the Future (Video)
- General Education and Student Engagement Teaching Commons (GE Tools and Resources)
- CSU Give Students a Compass Initiative (Project Website)

**STATEWIDE SPOTLIGHT | Keeping an Eye on the Boom and Bust of CCC Enrollments**

**Author:** Matt Wetstein, President, The RP Group and Assistant Superintendent/Vice President of Instruction, San Joaquin Delta College

The nation's community colleges are used to the boom and bust cycle of the state of the economy, funding levels, and overall enrollment patterns. For six years, we have endured a steady run of slow growth emerging out of the 2008-2009 mortgage meltdown...and funding for the California Community Colleges has finally just about returned to 2009 levels. However, one problem that is occurring is that student head count
enrollments are not returning to those pre-recession levels. The main reason behind this problem is the different timing between enrollment demand and instructional capacity (or supply in the economist's view).

A couple of factors drive the boom and bust cycle of community colleges.

First, enrollment numbers tend to spike up at community colleges during a recessionary period. One of the main reasons is that our colleges provide workforce training at a time when adults particularly need it (during periods of job losses and severe unemployment). The relationship between unemployment and head count enrollment is evident in the graph below, suggesting that for every increase of 1,000 unemployed California residents, on average there is an increase in CCC head count enrollment of 120 students (at least over the 1992-2015 period). As a simple bivariate relationship, unemployment levels help explain roughly 15 percent of the variance in year-to-year enrollments in our system. Put simply, the harder the times, the greater the enrollment demand we face. But looking at the opposite side of the coin, when long periods of economic recovery take place, it gets harder and harder for community colleges to sustain enrollment growth. This is partly true because jobs are available and when the economy is humming along, fewer classes are needed by adults in the workforce.

![Graph showing the relationship between unemployment and head count enrollment at CCC's, 1992-2015](image)
The second factor relates to the lagging effect of state revenue surges and declines. Since recessions result in lower income tax revenues, the impact of them doesn't typically show up in the budget documents of a community college until a year after the start of a downturn. That's when the rubber hits the road - or rather - that's when a greater number of students faces the class section reductions that colleges have been forced to make.

So why bring these issues to light in one of the strongest budget years in memory? Because memories tend to be short, and few people have time to plan for the coming recession until it is too late. As community college leaders and practitioners, we need to remind legislators that it is good to put money away in a rainy day fund so that the boom and bust swings are not so devastating for our students. It is also important to keep this in mind to tamp down expectations of enrollment growth when the past data trends tell us the growth expectations are far too rosy.

Many districts are struggling to meet enrollment targets this year. A good number have entered into a pattern of "borrowing" enrollment from inter-session and summer terms to "make" enrollment numbers pencil out from year to year. In my view, state policy makers need to be alerted to this trend and re-think the funding approach for CCC's in this current stage of the economic cycle. Growth can only be pushed so far in a positive economic climate. It is time to think of funding college operations with cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) or changes in the funding allocation that recognize there are legitimate reasons why colleges are struggling to meet growth targets. It's because Californians are increasingly back to work.

**RESEARCH | A Review of the New Federal College Scorecard**

**Authors:** Ryan Fuller, Research Specialist and Stacy Fisher, Research Specialist, California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office - Technology, Research, and Information Services Division

On Saturday, September 12, 2015, the US Department of Education (DOE) released its College Scorecard to help students and parents choose a postsecondary institution. While the data underlying the scorecard are more extensive than what is produced by a query, the dashboard focuses primarily on variables relating to the cost of education, student financial aid and debt, graduation rates, and wages after graduation. The reactions to this tool indicate agreement over its importance and a need to promote understanding among consumers.

Of primary concern is that the core measures appear better suited to judge four-year institutions as opposed to community colleges. For example, the scorecard uses graduation rates of first-time, full-time students to calculate institutional success. This excludes a large proportion of community college students who are part-time or not degree-seeking. The completion metric also excludes students who transfer to four-year colleges. The impact of this approach can be substantial; one randomly selected California Community College (CCC) shows a graduation rate of approximately 26% in the federal scorecard. Compare that rate to the completion metric generated by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) Student Success Scorecard, a measure where part-time students and transfer outcomes are included. The CCCCCO method results in a 46% completion rate.
Similarly, the earnings data displayed (using IRS wage records) conflate a variety of issues that can affect conclusions about school success. One of the biggest concerns is that earnings are aggregated by school rather than by discipline. This leads some institutions to fare much better than others because of differences in the distribution of majors. For example, if one ranks all two-year colleges in the nation by earnings 10 years after entry, all of the top 20 schools specialize in the health professions. Additionally, the wage data indicator only captures the small subset of our students who were awarded federal financial aid and conflates the earnings for both completers and non-completers. The effect of this selection bias is apparent when comparing the federal scorecard to the CCCO’s Salary Surfer tool. The federal earnings are significantly lower than earnings from the Salary Surfer, which matches student records to state unemployment insurance data to determine earnings for completers only.

Finally, the College Scorecard omits some CCCs from queries. In its first iteration, the DOE excluded any schools producing more certificates than degrees. Twenty CCCs do not show up in a search, even though almost half of these schools confer between 1,000 and 2,000 Associate degrees per year. Such omissions indicate that the College Scorecard misses about 17% of the nation’s community colleges.

The federal scorecard is an ambitious start to help parents and students to choose a college or university. It is clear from the documentation on the website that the DOE knows about its shortcomings. It is also important to remember that while not all data are available through the search engine at the College Scorecard, there are additional data that you can download from the site to study an institution in depth. Media outlets, like National Public Radio have already begun to do so, with some insightful results.

**Resources:**
- US Department of Education College Scorecard and College Scorecard Data
- California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Student Success Scorecard
- California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Salary Surfer

**FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT | Running to Keep Up: Reviewing the First Two Courses in the Coursera Data Science Specialization**

**Author:** Erik Cooper, Dean of Planning, Research and Resource Development, Sierra College

Last month, I introduced you to my personal conundrum—how could I learn R on the cheap with some support? After perusing the Internet, I found the [Coursera Data Science Specialization](https://www.coursera.org/specializations/data-science). The specialization is a series of modules crafted to help the user develop “the concepts and tools you’ll need throughout the entire data science pipeline, from asking the right kinds of questions to making inferences and publishing results” (Coursera, 2015). I’m a little over a month in, so how’s it going?

Let’s talk about the structure. First, although this sequence is being offered via Coursera, a team from Johns Hopkins University developed it. Sure, I shouldn’t be name-dropping, but nevertheless that’s one of the attractions; presumably I’m getting high quality education from experts in the field. Second, Coursera does a nice job of organizing the tools (i.e. they have a good LMS). I’ve used Blackboard and Canvas, and I really like how simply Coursera
has things organized. And, although this is a MOOC, this particular set of courses has
defined start and end dates. Each course runs for four weeks and has homework
assignments that are due each Sunday afternoon. Since everyone in the MOOC is working
on the same assignments and running into the same problems at roughly the same time,
there is a vibrant online presence and plenty of support. It doesn't hurt that nearly
everyone involved seems to be a sharp operator. The “faculty” members encourage
students to use online resources and to collaborate with their peers. There are student
moderators who are able to answer some questions and provide guidance in order to find
solutions.

With all that said, I was not pleased with the first course--The Data Scientist's Toolbox. If
you're paying for the courses on an individual basis, the low $29 cost is reflective of the
depth of the content in the first course. The major objectives of this course seem to be get
R and Git installed on your computer and setup a Github account. That's it. While I
appreciate that both of these are good tools, I was hoping to do more with the tools than
look at them. (For those of you not familiar with Git and Github, they're a combination of
tools that support revision control and online collaboration.) Although the assignments
clearly supported those objectives, the instructors could have done more to ensure student
learning.

I'm more pleased with the second course--R Programming. I'm halfway through the course
and this is what I wanted from the course: clear instruction with relevant assignments and
support. I've dabbled in R for a couple of years now, and this course is helping me close
some of my knowledge gaps and get a better understanding of the software. However, one
of the appraisals I've seen about this course is that it's not for beginners, and I agree. I
cannot imagine someone coming into this course and being successful without some
previous experience in programming.

**Resource:**

- Coursera Data Science Specialization