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This article provides a college wide approach to closing the achievement gap and therefore faculty, staff and administrators may find this article useful. It has a well-developed literature review at the end should an employee at the college wish for more information on the topic. Abstract: “This study identifies the key practices of California community college programs that have demonstrated success in improving (or that have shown significant potential to improve) the achievement of underrepresented groups whose educational attainment often lags behind the attainment of relatively well-off White students. Unlike many examinations that focus only on the transfer mission, this study includes other vital areas of the community college, including preparation and developmental education. Study findings reveal that the practices of these programs had four common characteristics: cohesion – the ability of program personnel to operate as a unit in which behaviors and actions mesh or are rationally consistent; cooperation – the degree to which program personnel work together toward common goals and form good working relationships with each other and with students; connection – the ability of program personnel to sustain interdependent relationships with internal and external entities, such as other departments within the college and industry representatives; and consistency – the presence of a distinctive and stable pattern of program behaviors that promote program goals. In addition, study results show the central and critical role played by the faculty in assuring program success.”

The Recipe for Promising Practices in Community Colleges

This study identifies and examines the key **practices** of California community college programs that have demonstrated success in improving (or that have shown significant potential to improve) the achievement of underrepresented groups whose educational attainment often lags behind the attainment of relatively well-off White students. Unlike many examinations that focus only on the transfer mission, this study includes other vital areas of the community college, including workforce preparation and developmental education. Study findings reveal that the **practices** of these programs had four common characteristics: cohesion — the ability of program personnel to operate as a unit in which behaviors and actions mesh or are rationally consistent; cooperation — the degree to which program personnel work together toward common goals and form good working relationships with each other and with students; connection — the ability of program personnel to sustain interdependent relationships with internal and external entities, such as other departments within the college and industry representatives; and consistency — the presence of a distinctive and stable pattern of program behaviors that promote program goals. In addition, study results show the central and critical role played by the faculty in assuring program success.

Key Words: Achievement gap; At-risk students; Exemplary programs; Program effectiveness; Faculty role

[Introduction and Problem](#)

Community college practitioners have been looking for decades for the magic potion of effective practice that leads to substantive student outcomes. Recently, with large numbers of underrepresented minority populations enrolling in community colleges, practitioners have increased their expectations for institutional performance to include improvements in what has been referred to as the achievement or opportunity gap (Levin et al., 2009). This gap indicates that underrepresented minority populations do not meet the same levels of achievement as their majority counterparts. Although we can and do question the appropriateness and legitimacy of measures of achievement — associate's degrees, transfer to a university, grades in courses, and even program completion — this acknowledged gap is of concern because it undermines the idea that the community college is "democracy's college" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Even though community colleges, including the California community colleges, have expanded educational opportunities for adults, they have received substantial criticism concerning student outcomes, including low rates of program completion and transfer (Shulock & Moore, 2007). More disquieting is the large number of students who do not even complete one term or semester of college. One report indicated that 50% of the students in community college credit programs do not complete their programs or remain continuously enrolled for 9 months (Horn & Nevill, 2006).

Community colleges and their faculty members and administrators are used to both critiques of their missions and complaints about their outcomes. Since their inception, community colleges have been berated by policy makers, scholars, and others for focusing too much on practical skills rather than on rigorous academic preparation; for watering down their academic

curriculum; for allowing themselves to be subject to the whims of business and industry; for failing to transfer more than one quarter of entering students who state an intention to transfer; for perpetuating gaps between the haves and the have-nots; and for many other offenses (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 1994; Frye, 1994; Grubb, 1999; Levin, 2001; McGrath & Spear, 1991; Meier, 2004; Pincus, 1994; Shaw, Rhoads, & Valadez, 1999; Valadez, 1996; Weis, 1985). Recent reports by research groups have followed suit, and in the first decade of the 21st century, community colleges continue to be the subject of unfavorable scrutiny (e.g., Shulock & Moore, 2007).

Although examining community college outcomes and demanding better performance is no doubt a noble endeavor, such reports and scholarly inquiries are frequently greeted by community college faculty members and administrators with one of two common refrains: (a) that research reports provide general findings that are not relevant to individual campuses or (b) that researchers have little understanding of community college students, who include those who are part-time attenders of college, part-time and full-time workers, low-income individuals, and academically underprepared students. As a result, these critiques — which make up a significant portion of all published material pertaining to community colleges — have a limited impact on actual practice in community colleges.

Furthermore, these reports ignore what particular community college campuses may be doing well, often ignoring the context in which community college education takes place (e.g., low per-student funding, open-door policies, students with an extremely wide range of goals and abilities, and a large workforce of part-time faculty members). Although critiques and outcomes reports have their place, making substantial improvements to community college outcomes will require us to identify and examine programs and **practices** currently taking place on community college campuses that have demonstrated positive results in raising student achievement.

The purpose of this article is to identify examples of California community college programs that have demonstrated success in improving (or that have shown significant potential to improve) student achievement. In addition, because low-income, Latino, Native American, African American, and undocumented students continue to lag behind their White, Asian, and more affluent peers in entering, persisting, and completing many community college programs (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Horn & Nevill, 2006; Leinbach & Bailey, 2006), we focus primarily on programs and **practices** that are closing — or that are demonstrating a strong potential to close — the achievement or opportunity gap.

Furthermore, we intend to remedy what we perceive as a fundamental limitation to many examinations of the community college: the seemingly unavoidable focus on the transfer mission to the virtual exclusion of workforce preparation, developmental education, and community service functions as well as the students who choose to enroll in these programs. This narrow conception of the community college exists not only in reports and scholarly articles that criticize the institution's low transfer and degree attainment rates but also in reports and multimillion dollar quality improvement programs, which assume that strengthening instruction, programming, and student support will enable all students to improve, regardless of students' needs, aspirations, and life circumstances (Levin & Montero-Hernandez, 2009; Pusser & Levin, 2009). Unlike other projects and reports that fall victim to this limited view of the community

college, our research examines **promising practices** and programs across all of the community college's missions and multiple purposes, taking into account the institutional, political, and regional contexts in which these programs exist. This approach has a scholarly and a practical benefit, addressing actual institutional behaviors and outcomes and characterizing community colleges by their actions, as opposed to their perceived inaction or resistance to change.

California community colleges over the past two decades have created and redesigned instructional and student support programs to improve student learning and educational attainment and close the achievement gap (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2006). These programs exist in all areas of the community college — including transfer education, workforce preparation, basic skills training, English as a second language (ESL), and community education — and they have focused on different student populations, employing distinctive approaches to address student needs. We note that there is considerable variability in the outcomes of these programs for students, particularly for underrepresented populations, and that there are a limited number of programs that have advanced the chances these underrepresented students have for educational advancement and occupational attainment (Levin et al., 2009). The problem that we address is the variation in program outcomes for this population of students at California community colleges. That is, why and indeed how are programs able to close the achievement and opportunity gap?

[Theoretical Orientation](#)

Two overarching theoretical frameworks guided this research: organizational theory and educational practice theory. However, what motivated the investigation was more aligned with social justice and equity because we understood the gap in performance in California community colleges as a product of structural inequalities (Massey, 2007): one set of outcomes for White and Asian students; another set for African-American, Latino, and Native-American students. We therefore wanted to investigate programs that addressed these gaps and reduced inequality, at least in educational outcomes.

[Organizational Theory](#)

To address this problem, we used the specific program and its **practices** as the unit of analysis. Furthermore, we defined the program as an organization in and of itself because programs exhibit many of the characteristics that define an organization. For instance, an organization is understood "as a social system oriented to the attainment of a relatively specific type of goal, which contributes to a major function of a more comprehensive system" (Parsons, 1956, p. 63). We conceive of these programs as working toward the intended goal of closing the achievement gap while they also contribute to the functioning of the community college as a whole. We understand community colleges to be comprised of units (e.g., other programs, departments, etc.) that vary considerably in their functions, purposes, personnel, and student clientele. We thus rely on organizational theory, particularly the branch that theorizes about organizational adaptation and effectiveness, to explain why and how some programs can show progress in closing the achievement or opportunity gap (Cameron, 1984; Scott, 1998). We do not assume that organizations can be managed or are managed strategically to align them to their environment as in contingency theory (Burns & Stalker, 1961), nor do we assume that

organizational units are chosen by their environments and that adaptation is thus accomplished without organizational strategy and agency (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). However, we do recognize that the community college and its associated programs are characterized by malleability, a tendency to respond to the environment, and a "proclivity to embrace practice not theory [and] action not reflection" (Levin, 1998, p. 3). We also highlight that the use of power by individuals and groups enables organizations to adapt and realize their goals (Mintzberg, 1983).

In the case of this research, we conceived of the programs under investigation as containing the aforementioned characteristics of malleability and adaption, and we conceptualized the "environment" to which these programs adapt as a student population primarily comprised of low-income, nontraditional, minority students (Levin, 2007). The community college student population is comprised of a large number of nontraditional students who tend to be members of minority groups and who face a host of challenges, such as family conflicts, financial constraints, low academic skills, psychological distress, and immigration issues (Levin, 2007; Levin, Montero-Hernandez, & Cerven, 2010). For these students (and the college as a whole) to perform at an optimal level, programs must be flexible and enact strategies that are effective in both retaining these students and in supporting and securing outcome goals. One of the primary goals of the community college is to serve its population and ensure student development and progress. Recent research has noted the key role of individuals and groups working within the college who harness the power to realize these organizational goals (Levin & Montero-Hernandez, 2009). We therefore examined the actions and behaviors implemented by individuals and groups within the programs under investigation. By examining the behaviors and actions of program personnel, we are able to understand how programs adapt to the needs of the populations they serve. Because this research is primarily concerned with the achievement or opportunity gap, we focused on how programs enact behaviors that seek to ensure the development and educational attainment of underrepresented minority students. We examined the **practices** within programs to identify their characteristics and consequences.

[Educational Practice](#)

Any examination of an educational practice must begin with a simple question: What is a practice? Based on Rockwell's (1995) description of the construction of school scenarios, we understand an educational practice (in this case, an educational practice taking place at a community college) to be a specific form or way of organizing the educational experiences of individual students and college employees (i.e., faculty members, administrators, and staff members). Consistent with this understanding, entire instructional programs can be based on one educational practice or several **practices** might be evident within one program.

An educational practice has several different dimensions (Rockwell, 1995), including its structure (i.e., the use of the time and space, norms, forms of communication, structures of participation, and power relationships); the conditions of teaching; the content (i.e., the academic curriculum); the conditions of learning; and the transmission of value orientations that enable individuals to develop a perspective about themselves and their context (Rockwell, 1995). To understand how educational **practices** are produced, attention must be given to the processes and conditions that enable the organization of educational experiences. To do this in our investigation, we drew on three theoretical approaches: an educational ecology model

(Bronfenbrenner, 1989), an historical-cultural perspective of how educational experiences are constructed (Rockwell, 1999), and an organizational model (Bidwell, 1965, 2001; Scott, 1998). These three theoretical approaches are used later in this article as an organizing framework for the discussion of the study findings.

An educational ecology model (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) calls our attention to the dynamic relationships that a college establishes with other organizations in the external environment. The use of an ecology model allows us to analyze two aspects of community college practice: (a) the ways in which programs work with other colleges, universities, business communities, or federal or state agencies and (b) the ways that community college programs and their **practices** are influenced by their surrounding contexts (e.g., budget cuts). In short, an ecological framework encourages us to examine if and in what ways interorganizational networks are associated with the construction of educational practice. As a result, in examining a specific community college vocational career-pathway program, for example, our educational ecology orientation reinforced the necessity of asking questions about how administrators and faculty members create links to the labor market or develop curricular structures that allow students to earn college credit (and develop relevant work skills) by participating in internship programs.

Our historical-cultural perspective (Rockwell, 1999) helps us to understand how historical, cultural, and subjective factors influence educational practice. Drawing from this perspective, we sought to examine if and in what ways local and larger traditions have contributed to the development of specific educational **practices** within, for example, a community college basic-skills program. To understand the historical dimension of a program, we examined the patterns of continuity and change in the development of **practices**. We also explored how and why individuals abandon, preserve, or create new organizational behaviors to adjust to a dynamic context. We assumed that college **practices** are nonfixed and adaptable to new cultural traditions. College **practices** may preserve long-established processes and structures, such as student support services or flexible scheduling, and simultaneously incorporate new strategies such as revenue-generating behaviors. Ultimately, this historical-cultural approach helped us to observe how ongoing interactions between students and college personnel enable the construction of college **practices** by appropriating cultural and academic traditions.

Finally, an organizational model of educational practice (Bidwell, 1965, 2001; Scott, 1998) calls our attention to the fact that educational **practices** are the result of constitutive action within formal organizations. This orientation reminds us that **practices** are developed by organizational members whose actions are framed by the intersection of social structures, goals, technology, and the environment. As Giddens (1991) has noted, **practices** in formal organizations, such as community colleges, are influenced by institutional constraints as well as by opportunities for agency. Thus, viewed through the lens of this organizational model, institutional members (in our case, community college faculty members, staff members, or administrators) developing a specific program or practice must identify and integrate organizational resources, structures, and processes to accomplish shared goals.

Taken together, our educational ecology, historical-cultural, and organizational perspectives helped us to understand that community college **practices** are (a) mediated by local and larger contextual factors, (b) constructed under specific historical traditions, (c) based on the

negotiation of official and everyday norms that result from the existence of various ideologies and personal backgrounds, and (d) continually reinvented by individuals to serve contextual demands.

Research Methods

To identify and examine **promising practices** in California community colleges, we conducted qualitative case-study analyses of selected community college instructional programs. The following provides more information about our selection criteria and methods, data collection, validity, and data coding and analysis. We followed the advice of scholars on field-methods research both in data collection and analysis processes (Burgess, 1984; Le Compte & Preissle, 1993; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Mason, 2002; Maxwell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Seidman, 1991; Yin, 1994).

Selection Criteria and Method

We used a purposeful sampling method to identify six promising¹ community college instructional or support programs for our case studies. The first step in identifying and selecting programs was to draw on the expertise and knowledge held by high-profile community college practitioners and policy makers in California. Thus, we convened a "panel of experts" consisting of state-level officials, community college presidents and chancellors, members of the executive committee of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, and other knowledgeable practitioners.

We asked each member of the panel of experts to recommend two or three exemplary community colleges in nine different instructional areas (ESL programs; basic-skills programs; science, technology, mathematics, and engineering transfer programs; rigorous transfer programs targeting Latinos, African Americans, or Native Americans; career pathway or workforce education programs; vocational transfer programs; trade certification programs; high school programs offered at community colleges; and collaborations with business and industry).² Based on the panel's recommendations, we used data from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, the U.S. Department of Education, the California Postsecondary Education Commission, individual college websites, and other databases and reports to evaluate each recommended instructional program and compare them using what we termed effectiveness indicators. These indicators related to student outcomes such as course pass rates, job placement rates, certificate or degree attainment rates, and progress through instructional sequences. The effectiveness indicators were specific to each type of instructional program (e.g., we looked at transfer rates to compare transfer-oriented programs and job-placement rates in short-term certificate programs). Where possible, we used data broken down by ethnicity, gender, age, and socioeconomic status to assess if and the degree to which each college program had closed or was closing the achievement gap. This analysis allowed us to narrow our list of recommended community college programs to those that have demonstrably improved student attainment outcomes and closed the achievement gap (or that have at least demonstrated the potential for doing this).

We also collected demographic information about each recommended college, including the region of California in which it is located; whether it is located in an urban, suburban, or rural area; its enrollment (both total and full-time equivalent); and the ethnic, gender, and age composition of its student body and local community. Using this demographic information (as well as our analysis of effectiveness indicators), we compiled a sample of six community college instructional programs stratified by region (urban, suburban, or rural locale) and enrollment size. Information about the composition of student bodies and local communities was not used to obtain a stratified sample because our focus on the achievement gap necessitated selecting colleges that have high proportions of Latino, African-American, or Native-American students.

Although we identified six programs through this process, only five ultimately proved to serve substantial numbers or proportions of underrepresented minority populations. Thus, the data reported in this article draw from those five programs only:

1. In the area of ESL, we studied the ESL program at the City College of San Francisco (CCSF), which is in northern California (the "Bay Area").
2. In the area of basic skills or developmental education, we examined the Success Centers at Chaffey College, which is in southern California.
3. In the area of transfer (targeting African Americans or Latinos), we studied the Latino Center Adelante Program at Santa Monica College (SMC), which is in southern California.
4. In the area of trade or certification programming, we studied the Fashion Program at Los Angeles Trade-Technical College (LATTC), which is in southern California.
5. In the area of vocational programming, we examined the Accelerated Careers in Technology (ACT) Program at Modesto Junior College, which is in central California.

We then contacted each of these community colleges and asked if they would agree to participate in our examination of **promising practices**. After receiving letters of support from each institution, we completed our institutional review board (IRB) application. As part of the IRB compliance procedures, we indicated that participating institutions would be identified in our study reports, but for the sake of confidentiality, individual names and exact titles of participants would not be used. Beginning in October 2007, we initiated our field research investigation using in-depth qualitative case-study analyses of our **promising** programs.

[Data Collection](#)

Following case-study methodology (Eisenhardt, 1989; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994), data collection was conducted by a team of researchers (usually 3-4 researchers per site) and consisted primarily of one-on-one, semistructured interviews with faculty members, administrators, support staff members, and students involved in the programs; focus groups (primarily with students); participant observation; and document analysis. Relevant faculty members, administrators, students, and staff members were identified through program documents as well as via a snowballing technique (Merriam, 1998; Mason, 2002) in which participants referred us to other appropriate participants.

Potential participants were sent an email message that described the purpose of the study and asked if they would consider participating in a focus group or one-on-one interview. Participants were assured that they could opt out or terminate the interview at any time, and they received copies of their interview transcripts to check for errors and delete any information they did not want to be included in our final report. All interviews ran for approximately 1 hour and took place in convenient, quiet, private settings on campus. In some cases, interviews were conducted by telephone when this proved to be a more convenient option for the interviewee. Focus groups ran between 1 and 2 hours and also took place in convenient, quiet, private settings.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted as open-ended conversations, but they were conversations with a purpose (Burgess, 1984). Interview questions were shaped by **practices** identified in the literature as **promising** ways to improve student learning and close the achievement gap, and they focused on the processes used by participants in the implementation and ongoing maintenance of the programs under study as well as on the experiences of college personnel and students. Interviewees and focus-group participants were encouraged to talk freely about their experiences, perceptions, and beliefs; informal prompts were used when necessary to gather as much relevant information as possible. Throughout data collection at each institution, interview prompts were revised to understand information that emerged in previous interviews. Interviews and focus-group conversations were digitally recorded.

In addition to conducting interviews and focus groups, members of the research team carried out observations in relevant locations on each community college campus for a period of approximately 4 days. In this investigation, the researchers functioned as observer-participants (Mason, 2002; Spradley, 1980) in that they informally interacted with college personnel and students but were not themselves members of the institutions under investigation. Sporadically, we observed classroom instruction as well as faculty and student interactions. Throughout the observations, members of the research team took field notes on the behaviors and activities of individuals at the research sites. Researchers also recorded their observations and reactions through a daily debriefing session to identify patterns and check on researcher bias.

As a final method of data collection, we collected and reviewed documents related to each instructional or support program under investigation. These documents included grant proposals, written program goals and expectations, written communication among partners, notes from advisory or curriculum committee members, in-house evaluations, funding information, course syllabi, and other materials given to us by college personnel. We viewed these documents as an institutional record (Scott, 1990) that would reveal both intentions and behaviors of institutional participants as well as the structures that both enabled and constrained action. Analysis of these documents was intended to triangulate themes identified in interviews, focus groups, and participant observations. The document analysis also provided valuable information about the context, processes, and challenges involved in implementing and sustaining the programs under study.

Validity

We addressed validity concerns in three ways. First, we used several different methods of data collection to triangulate themes and provide us with as much information as possible about each

instructional and support program and about the **promising practices** they employed. Second, we sent interviewees a copy of their transcript to ensure that we represented their thoughts and experiences accurately. Finally, after each interview, focus group, or participant observation, the researchers recorded their observations, reactions, and potential biases in a field journal. At the end of each day of data collection, research team members convened to reflect on their experiences and observations and to discuss their reactions and potential biases with the rest of the team. Notes from these sessions were digitally recorded, and they helped the team contextualize and make sense of the interview and focus group data as well as identify any possible researcher bias or reactivity (Maxwell, 1996).

Data Analysis

After fieldwork was completed, we transcribed interview and focus group data. Subsequently, we coded and analyzed data as a group or team effort involving four researchers. The group was trained by an international expert to use the software program ATLAS.ti to analyze and code the interview and focus group data.

Data were coded in two phases. In the first phase, we drew on the organizational effectiveness literature (Cameron, 1981, 1986; Jones & James, 1979; Lysons & Hatherly, 1992; Lysons, Hatherly, & Mitchell, 1998) and coded data according to the following five characteristics of educational programs: (a) institutional and program leadership, (b) human resources, (c) financial resources, (d) the nature of the curriculum and academic planning, and (e) organizational performance assessment. Following this, a second level of coding was added that organized the data along the three dimensions identified as primary characteristics affecting organizational functioning: (a) the ecological context in which the college program was embedded (i.e., ecology), (b) the historical-cultural forces comprising the college program (i.e., history-culture), and (c) the organizational structure of the college program (i.e., organization).

Because analysis of the data was a group effort, team members regularly met to discuss the coding process and decipher how specific program characteristics discussed by interviewees should be coded. This was done to ensure parsimony between each team member's coding of the data. Furthermore, team members also met to discuss the patterns and findings that appeared to be arising during their coding and analysis of the data. The regular meetings served as a mechanism by which team members could collaborate, share ideas, and make sense of how these programs operated; what **practices** were shared between the programs, and which were unique; and how these **practices** promoted or impeded the goal of closing the opportunity gap. This collaborative effort offered researchers multiple perspectives from which they could make sense of how the program affected students, including their development and their progress.

Findings

Interview and document analyses revealed specific characteristics or principles that appeared throughout the five community college programs. These characteristics comprise a **recipe** for **promising** practice in community colleges, and we organize them according to our three theoretical lenses: ecological, historical-cultural, and organizational.

Ecological Characteristics

The ecological portion of the **recipe** for **promising practices** underlines the potential influence external forces have on community college programs and the need for programs to adapt to those influences. Programs in our study were prepared to work with the students they served while addressing their surrounding social, geographic, and economic contexts. The college program with **promising practices**, often as a result of faculty behaviors, develops and maintains relationships with local communities, industries, institutions, and agencies.

Connections. The first item in our **recipe** is program connection with external bodies in their immediate environments. Community college programs in our study performed this task in a variety of ways, and it was particularly important to the career-training and workforce-development programs.

The Fashion Program at LATTC has thrived on its relationships with local industry. Since the program's inception in 1925, the program and the industry have maintained a strong reciprocal relationship in which, on one hand, the Fashion Program meets industry needs by supplying a constant stream of well-trained workers and, on the other, the industry provides expertise in the form of both curricular guidance and capable faculty. Such a relationship is consistent with scholarly research on effective vocational program **practices** (Rosenbaum, 2001).

To help facilitate the relationships with local industry, the Fashion Program has relied on its faculty members. The program requires faculty members to have a minimum of 5 years of industry experience to be considered for employment as instructors. In the merchandising department, faculty members must have experience in manufacturing as well as in retailing. One student we interviewed underlined this point, suggesting that faculty members were the key to the success of the program:

I think it's the instructors, the teachers. I think that's what makes the program work. I think they have the correct teachers because they've been in the industry so they know what employers are going to look for, and I think that's what they emphasize on. To give you the right tools so you have the right tools when looking for a job.

These requirements for the faculty have contributed to the quality of training the students receive and have helped the program curricula stay current, ensuring that program faculty members have up-to-date knowledge and experience with industry trends and technological advances.

The connection between the faculty and industry has also ensured that the program connects students to potential employers. According to one Fashion Program administrator, a particular faculty member was instrumental in the development of their internship program.

What [the internship coordinator] has done – and this is a woman, again, coming out of the industry, being very familiar, knowing people, knowing who's around in the industry, having the contacts and

connection ... – she was able to call in connections and actually place students to some degree in some kind of a job [such as] answering phones, following someone around... . [S]ome of those students have, through their internship, been able to develop a relationship with the employer. "Gee, when you finish, I'd sure love you to come back and keep working at my company."

Here, the relationships between the program and local industry led to the development of connections between students and potential employers. Similarly, the Fashion Program has held an annual fashion show for its students. Serving as the students' final project, the fashion show entries are judged by a panel of program faculty and staff members who are joined by esteemed industry officials. These **practices** have contributed not only to student employment in local industry but also to recognition of the program in the community.

In addition, Fashion Program faculty members have continually addressed program needs in such areas as student recruitment and the improvement of student skills. For example, faculty members described their involvement in a plan to reach out to high schools in the Los Angeles area in an effort to both encourage the development of basic skills and connect students to the world of fashion and garment making by providing on-site instruction. As one faculty member observed,

And we've been talking about here, maybe ... an academy model. So [in] the academy, what they do is the classes actually come to them. And the classes are taught contextually. So that's what we're after here ... [but] it hasn't been implemented yet.

This outreach effort, faculty members reported, has helped increase the Fashion Program's already strong connections to the local industry environment while reducing dependence on the LATTC campus departments that typically offer developmental classes. In the process, improved connections with local high schools have also decreased the basic-skills barrier that deters some students in the program from completing an associate's degree.

The Fashion Program illustrates the importance of direct connections with external organizations, industries, or groups, but these connections may be indirect in programs that are not closely tied to the economy. For example, the Success Centers at Chaffey College have not interacted with external bodies themselves, but these Centers have reaped the benefits of this **promising** practice indirectly. Chaffey College has a student service program called Smart Start. As one interviewee noted, the Smart Start program provides a pathway for incoming "students who are identified as 'at-risk' based on assessment/placement test results and their self-reported information from high school." These students, who scored low on placement assessments and claimed to have struggled in secondary education, are connected with the Success Centers in an effort to offer them academic support that helps them access and keep pace with class content as soon as they enroll. As a staff member in the Success Center noted,

So they're going to be in the Success Center working on their reading, their writing, their math, or the

multidisciplinary. They could be ... in ... a psychology class and then you know with a psychology tutor there, whatever, you know. The idea is to provide for them the support that they need to be successful so we kind of break down some of those barriers, you know, sometimes that are mental more than anything else.

Here, the Success Centers have played a crucial role in the support system for students who require additional learning opportunities, and the Smart Start program has initiated and maintained the relationships with those students. Establishing and maintaining relationships with external organizations, agencies, and institutions solidifies the college program's place in the community while ensuring that local industry, educational institutions, and students are well-served.

Financing. Sufficient funding is of pivotal importance to the continuity of community college programs, new and old, and, historically, community colleges have articulated that funding is rarely sufficient and rarely equal to that provided to other educational sectors (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Katsinas, Tollefson, & Reamey, 2008). This item in our **recipe for promising practices** emphasizes the institution's ability to respond to and persevere within an ever-changing economic milieu. Findings from our study underscore that solid connections to local communities and a strong internal commitment to funding are essential to the life of a program.

Relationships with local industries, government bodies, and organizations have been crucial to Modesto Junior College's ACT program in its efforts to secure other sources of funding. According to one administrator, the College has collaborated with industry committees to place a staff member at Alliant, the local business development and research center. In this position, the staff member spearheaded the "Center for Excellence," which, as one interviewee noted, is responsible for "environmental scanning of workforce trends in the region." The committees have utilized this information to discuss the feasibility and viability of potential ACT Program opportunities, considering both economic need and the availability of external funding. As a program administrator observed,

And as you see on the whiteboard behind you, I list some things and I use this whiteboard sometimes to just sort of list ... local ventures and regional ventures. Some of these are in process; some of them are just dreams that we're looking at as a community. And we're looking for the right people, right place, right time to make them happen, or the right funding from the right source to make them happen. Because we know the need is there, but we don't today have the wherewithal to make it happen so we just keep it on the board and we go after it as the opportunity arises.

The search for funding has been opportunistic, conducted through partnerships in the community in an ongoing process. One administrator stressed that this determination, combined with an "entrepreneurial" and "innovative" spirit, has been essential to sustaining the program and changing "the normal course of business to make something like this happen." Substantial commitment is required to fund community college programs at a sustainable level.

The Success Centers at Chaffey College provide an exemplary model of institutional response to fluctuating funding. The Success Centers were initially funded, in large part, by partnership-for-excellence grant funds that were intended to "significantly expand the contribution of the community colleges to the social and economic success of California" (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 1999, p. 1). However, once that grant program expired, the college assumed the fiduciary responsibility for the Centers from district funds based on full-time equivalent enrollments. Discussing the partnership-for-excellence funds, one administrator focused on the overall flexibility of the program as an important aspect in the design of meaningful support systems for community college students.

[The] partnership for excellence was ... a windfall of sorts, meant to support success and retention among community college students, and pretty much colleges up and down the state could do whatever they wanted with the money... . We ended up spending all of our partnership for excellence money on [the Success Centers].

The key to Chaffey College's accomplishments with the Success Centers has been their approach to allocating and expending partnership supplemental funds. Typically, claimed one college administrator, the distribution of grant monies and other external funding has been fragmented, similar to "being pecked to death by a duck: everyone gets their little piece and at the end of it you really have nothing to show." In contrast, Chaffey's approach has been highly focused and consistent, and the College's leadership has refrained from dividing funds in an attempt to support multiple projects. Instead, administrators reported that the college's former vice president was a "stickler," insisting that funds be focused on one major project that would support all students and improve outcomes at the college. One administrator described the institution as united and focused when allocating supplemental funds, indicating that

we're trying to make that ... the norm that when we get these extra pots of money ... that it really goes to support the goals of the institution and ... the goals of what the Success Centers are designed to do.

While maintaining an uncompromising focus on serving students through the Success Centers, administrators have simultaneously been cautious about the college's dependency on auxiliary funding sources — sources that they know may vanish should state priorities or budget capacities change. One administrator indicated a resistance to the use of grant funds because of their tenuous nature:

[T]wo years down the line, or 5 years down the line, when that grant money disappears, I don't want to be having a bake sale and a car wash to make sure students should get what they should get free.

In the context of these concerns, Chaffey College administrators and faculty members made a commitment to students and the Success Centers to ensure longevity of the programs, indicating that in the absence of supplemental funding, the majority of the financial burden would be assumed by the college.

Institutional responses to financial concerns may not directly affect the achievement gap, but, as evidence from our study indicates, they directly affect the continuity of programs. Without continual and consistent efforts to maintain funding, programs that possess the potential to close the achievement gap may be terminated. In addition, the ecological portion of the **recipe for promising practices** calls attention to the multi-faceted contexts in which community college programs find themselves. Career and vocational programs in particular need to solidify their place in these contexts by maintaining interdependent relationships with local industry. Interdependency, in turn, renews or perpetuates sources for funding and ensures that program curricula remain current and market relevant. However, these relationships may not be enough to ensure adequate funding for some programs, in which case internal efforts emerge as important to program continuity. These internal efforts hint at the development of historical-cultural characteristics, the second theme of our **recipe for promising practices**.

Historical-Cultural Characteristics

The historical-cultural component of the **recipe for promising practices** attends to the presence of long-lasting cultural beliefs, traditions, behaviors, and interactions that aid programs in adapting to their environments. The community college programs in our study manifested these characteristics through their faculty members, suggesting the importance of the faculty in programmatic efforts to close the achievement gap.

Faculty. Faculty members demonstrate a long-term commitment to student learning to the extent that they act as missionaries (Levin, 2007). Faculty commitment to serving students was a common finding in our study. In some cases, faculty commitment directly affected students, but in other cases that commitment was channeled into curriculum development or other forms of support for the programs.

Referring to the faculty members within the ESL department at CCSF as "missionaries" is apt, given the faculty behaviors we observed and heard about in interviews. According to one administrator, the department's mission is to "bring services to the students and bring it to the community that they live or they work in." This unified vision of service has permeated the ESL department and its faculty. Terms such as engaged, involved, helpful, and caring were used by administrators and students to describe both full- and part-time faculty members. One administrator asserted that faculty members approach their work with the commitment of Peace Corps volunteers-not an exaggeration when one considers who has been employed by the department. As one program faculty member conveyed,

So, I was thinking about people who have retired who started the trend, and then the next person after that, and then the next person after that. And I started to think of them as the Peace Corps group. And I realized it was because ... they all started in the Peace Corps ... So I think it's always, you know, people were interested in the culture, were interested in language, interested in helping people.

Faculty members in the ESL department were united by similar missionary backgrounds and transferred that energy and focus to their work with students.

Personal interactions alone, however, are not sufficient. Faculty members in the programs we studied had a history of high standards for student performance, and they communicated these standards. By establishing shared expectations between faculty members and students over time, the colleges have developed a reputation and institutionalized program **practices**. For example, although community college counseling programs are shrouded in reports of "cooling out" (Clark, 1960) and "gatekeeping" (Erickson & Shultz, 1982), the counseling agenda in the Latino Center at SMC has worked to "warm up" the aspirations of the target population along the lines described by Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, and Person (2006). One administrator described the need for altering students' expectations for themselves:

The one thing, though, is that a lot of our students, and I think this is true of our Latino students, is that they don't realize the capability that they have within themselves, and so sometimes it is the counselor's role to help them realize that they can actually dream larger dreams than they actually have.

One of these larger dreams is transferring to a 4-year institution, and one counselor offered an example of how students have been gradually nudged toward this goal:

[M]aybe they don't have [transfer] as an option yet and we bring up, "Down the road you may want to think about this. These are the benefits. This is what you can do if you go straight into work. Think about this and then further down the road you can incorporate a bachelors." We'll talk to them about it.

By establishing high and shared expectations regarding students' futures, the Latino Program at SMC has made significant strides toward closing the achievement gap for the Latino students who join the program.

These shared expectations are connected to patterns of interaction between the faculty and students. High levels of faculty-student interaction help to ensure that students have adequate learning opportunities, and these interactions also prevent students who feel uncomfortable or do not understand material from fading into the background. This characteristic was manifested in multiple ways in the programs we studied, ranging from the efforts of individuals to programmatic requirements.

In the Success Centers at Chaffey College, the high levels of faculty-student interaction were programmatically based. The Success Centers are the outcome of a cam-puswide, basic skills reorientation. Chaffey College abandoned an older, ineffective model in which basic-skills courses were taught in several pockets of the college. In the present Success Center model, basic-skills courses have been aligned with disciplinary course structures, and tutoring has been moved from peripheral areas to the centralized Centers. All classes and student services funnel students in need of supplemental instruction or basic-skills development to the Success Centers. This feature at Chaffey College distinguishes the program from the typical array of support services that are designed for all students but that are typically accessed by those with more advantaged backgrounds (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009).

In addition, increased faculty-student interaction has occurred through the efforts of individual, highly committed faculty members, or collectively through courses that require students to participate in additional learning opportunities with the faculty. Over time — almost a decade — the services of the Success Centers have been incorporated into course requirements mandating that students access the Success Centers for a specified number of hours each quarter. One reading instructor stated that her current syllabus instructs students "to fulfill a 15-hour requirement per semester." An ESL instructor indicated that his courses incorporated similar requirements, asserting that "students in my pronunciation classes have to come to the Success Center for a minimum number of hours each semester; currently it's 14 hours." English courses have similar requirements.

Long-term patterns of practice have also extended to group solidarity among program faculty members. Group solidarity is an important component of the way these programs have responded to their multifaceted and dynamic environments. This solidarity suggests a coherent set of educational values among faculty members, which provides a level of consistency to student experiences. Faculty cohesion has served the programs overall by helping them cope with pressures from within the college as well as with pressures emanating from outside the college.

The faculty members responsible for the Success Centers at Chaffey College projected a united front, and their solidarity is part of a larger college culture of support for students. Data collected in the study indicate that the campus culture was such that nearly all administrators, faculty members, and support staff members defended and supported the Success Centers, a commitment evident in the financial support the Centers have received from within the college. One faculty instructional specialist recalled the response of campus representatives during a committee meeting, illustrating the College's level of commitment to the Success Centers:

[S]omeone had presented that the Success Centers needed some supplemental funding from that pot of money, and ... it went to the committee of about 50 people representative of across campus — administrators and faculty, and I think I was the only instructional specialist there, and I didn't even have to say anything really. So many faculty from all over the place just were like "Yes! We have to support the Success Centers!"

The response of faculty members to ensuring the continuance of the Success Centers took the form of a moral imperative to provide all students with the tools they need to "succeed" in their coursework; this imperative surpassed concern for individual and departmental financial issues.

Collectively, the historical-cultural characteristics of the **recipe** emphasize the influence that traditions, **practices**, and interactions have on the relative adaptability of community college programs. The program **practices** we found to be **promising** exhibited active, committed faculty members and a sense of group solidarity and cohesion. These characteristics supported the programs' adaptability to their particular circumstances.

[Organizational Characteristics](#)

The organizational component of our **recipe** for **promising** community college **practices** isolates the internal, structural aspects of programs. These **recipe** items address the status of program faculty members within their respective colleges, the mechanisms programs use to place and track students, and the sequence of program curricula.

Faculty. College treatment of the program faculty members — both full-time and part-time — was respectful, and generally equitable, including, in one college, benefits for part-time instructors. This positive treatment of faculty members was correlated with a cohesive faculty culture, which faculty members viewed as instrumental in effective **practices**. The ESL department at CCSF offered a salient example in the treatment of part-time faculty members who are given access to the same benefits and development opportunities as their full-time colleagues. Part-time faculty members received health and other benefits and resources, such as funds to attend professional development conferences. According to one part-time faculty member, the support at CCSF was superior to the assistance available at other community colleges: "I think [the part-time faculty members] receive a lot of support. I mean, I'm comparing my job here from the job I have at [another community college]. So, here we get, for example, funding for professional development."

Full-time faculty members were also accorded a level of respect for their efforts, including release time for administrative duties. This enabled faculty members to support other faculty colleagues, as noted in the interviewee comment below:

I take care of the library and I make sure that the library has ... the latest publications for teachers... . [We] really support the classroom teacher. [Instructors] can email or call the library to get materials, and we mail it out if they cannot physically come... . [S]o we have the textbooks here for their review and for their adoption if they so choose to.

Program actions. Mechanisms for placing and tracking students were important in the programs we studied. For example, after students apply to CCSF, their English language skills are assessed prior to enrollment in either the credit or noncredit ESL program. Flexible assessment schedules and locations facilitate this process for students, and ESL advisors assist students with inquiries following their meeting with a counselor. The placement test consists of multiple-choice questions, a short interview, and a writing sample, which is scored by multiple faculty members. As one ESL faculty member related,

We have a multiple-choice part of the test, but we also have a short writing sample test for the ESL test. They [students] were given like 20 minutes to write. And after they write, uh, a few of us, three or four of us, would rotate and read the papers. So, it's a pretty reliable test. It's a home-grown test. And then, on top of that, we have the writing sample. So it's not just multiple choice.

Ongoing assessments within the noncredit ESL program include level-exit examinations that determine if the student can advance to the next level of instruction and require the students to

demonstrate competency in each of four skill areas: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Faculty members participate in all aspects of the level-exit examinations, including performance-based oral interviews and the holistic scoring of writing samples. The level-exit tests are used, in part, to provide consistency and integration in regard to meeting goals and activities at both the program and classroom levels. One faculty member explained how the level-exit tests contribute to course consistency across sites:

Well, I think the value of a testing program, there are a number of good things about it. Number one ... we have classes all over the city... . [T]esting helps kind of stabilize [the program]. If ... teachers, really, at various levels, know that their students have to pass a writing test or a reading test or a listening test or an oral interview to go on to the next level, it's going to help them focus [on] what they're teaching their students. So, testing helps kind of maintain that, I don't know, like we're all speaking the same language. Level-one student[s need] ... to be the same level at each campus.

When asked how the program has contributed to closing the achievement gap, one campus coordinator suggested that information from the assessments has allowed faculty members to identify students who would benefit from additional learning in the free noncredit program, helping them to prepare for advancement to the credit program and college coursework.

Following or tracking student progress provides programs with information about students, connecting the programs' personnel to students. The Adelante Program at SMC developed a means of tracking students to improve the program's supportive efforts. On receiving a referral notice for a student, center staff members "establish a student file in order to monitor student progress," contact the student to confirm a counseling appointment, and commit to providing "adequate support services and/or referrals to other campus services in order to facilitate success." Among other goals during appointments, counselors assist students with time management; provide a model calendar so they can visually ascertain how they might balance school, work, and homework; and look at students' overall commitments.

Counselors stressed that "what we like to do we call a more intrusive counseling³ and really try to gauge where the student is at." Frequent advisement and intrusive advisement — the practice of initiating intentional contacts to develop beneficial student-institution relationships — are associated with increased levels of persistence and retention (Muraskin & Lee, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rosenbaum et al., 2006). Center counselors indicated that "know[ing] the needs of the students and try[ing] to really get to them, you know, talk to them" are critical and that positive student outcomes can be attributed to counseling and the relationships that counselors develop with students. As one counselor noted, "[I]t's the personal connection, the amount of time, the more detailed counseling that we tend to do as a group."

Curriculum. Finally, the programs we studied exhibited a consistent curriculum to the extent that courses were rationally sequenced and formed a coherent whole. Whether the program was centralized and needed to standardize its curriculum across multiple departments, or whether the program was operated at multiple branches and levels of the organization, the programs we

studied were able to navigate the curricular complexities of their institutional contexts. At Chaffey College, the Success Centers enjoyed a centralized position that was crucial to their ability to interact with large numbers of students. However, this centrality made curriculum development a work-intensive endeavor. The burden of creating Success Center curricula that were consistent with the curricula of other academic departments fell mostly on the shoulders of the instructional specialists. These faculty members interacted continually with faculty members in the various academic departments to create Success Center curricula that followed academic course curricula. Nearly all faculty respondents stressed the importance of such communication to the operation of the program and to the promotion of the Success Center culture.

The ESL department at CCSF exhibited different **practices**. Not only were there multiple levels within the curriculum but this curriculum was taught at multiple branches of the college. A salient departmental feature was the distinction between the credit and noncredit ESL programs. With six graduated levels of coursework ranging from precollege-level reading and writing to critical reading of expository prose and advanced composition, the credit ESL program was designed for students who need academic English skills to make the transition to college work (Spurling, Seymour, & Chisman, 2008). In addition, noncredit ESL classes were offered at 8 to 10 CCSF campuses and at noncampus locations across the city (Spurling et al., 2008). Nine levels of coursework were organized into six categories: literacy, bridge, citizenship, focus, general, and vocational. Literacy courses included both English and Spanish language instruction for students with low literacy skills. The bridge courses were an introduction to computers for students planning to enter business courses at CCSF, whereas the focus courses provided single-skill development in reading, writing, listening, and speaking as well as courses that focus on specific topics, such as women's issues or current events. General ESL courses, like credit ESL courses, integrated curriculum with the goal of preparing students for further academic work. The vocational ESL (VESL) courses included both general job-preparation courses and courses that apply to specific vocations. For example, Communication Skills for Janitorial Workers and Communication Skills for Health Workers were recently added course offerings within the VESL category (Spurling et al., 2008). In addition, the noncredit Vocational Office Training Program (VOTP) provided an intensive 18-week instructional experience that led to a certificate of completion, CCSF credit units, and job-placement assistance. VOTP was unique for a noncredit program in that students were required to have reached a specific level of English proficiency (at least level five) and were required to apply for and be accepted into the program.

In light of the considerable complexity of the ESL curriculum and its use on multiple campuses, consistency was extremely important. To ensure that all facets of the organization were consistently meeting faculty, student, and college needs, the department developed a means for communication and worked to secure the commitment of all participants. A variety of committees provided constituents a place to articulate questions, voice concerns, and enhance their knowledge of course curricula and other departmental or institutional issues.

The presence of a consistent curriculum, within a program itself and within areas outside the program, fostered a consistency in the students' experiences as they progressed through coursework throughout the college. By decreasing the burden on students, the Success Centers at Chaffey College and the ESL Department at CCSF created environments that promoted learning and that supported program efforts to close the achievement gap.

The organizational components of the **recipe** for **promising** practice focus on the ways community colleges structure program-college interactions, faculty-faculty interactions, faculty-student interactions, and program curricula. These **practices** incorporated and integrated programs within the institutions, exerting considerable influence on the programs' ability to address the achievement gap.

Conclusions

The programs we investigated were all initially recognized for their program outcomes, including student persistence and student attainment. We reviewed these outcomes to ascertain if the programs had helped close the achievement or opportunity gap between underrepresented minority populations and more affluent, White populations. For example, at Chaffey College, the completion rate in credit basic-skills courses was 61.3% in 2007, compared to the statewide completion rate of 60.4%; more importantly, the completion rate of Latino students at Chaffey was 57.7%, a rate that reflects a more equitable outcome for this population than outcomes in other contexts, such as the university graduation rates of Latinos compared to the university graduation rates of White students (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2008). Also in 2007, the Fashion Program at LATTC had a successful credit-course completion rate of 69.3%; the credit course completion rates for African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians were 58%, 70%, and 80%, respectively (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2008). The overall course retention rate in the Fashion Program was 88% for all students, 81% for African Americans, 89% for Hispanics, and 96% for Asians (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2008). SMC, with a reputation for high numbers of transfer students to California universities, might be viewed as riding on the success of White and Asian students, but the institution ranks first among all the California community colleges in the transfer of Latino students and first in the transfer of African-American students to the University of California (University of California Office of the President, 2007). Although the programs at our five colleges have not obliterated different outcomes of students based on their backgrounds, their **practices** have coincided with a lessening of the gap, customarily seen in the research and scholarly literature, between some groups of students and others.

These **practices** have four conceptual conditions in common that enable the programs to adapt to their contexts and that aid in student development and attainment. We refer to these conditions as the "Four Cs": cohesion, cooperation, connection, and consistency.

Cohesion refers to the cohesiveness of program elements (faculty and staff, students, and curriculum and instruction) and to the ability of program personnel to operate as a unit in which behaviors and actions mesh or are rationally consistent. The Success Centers at Chaffey College exemplified this component through their centralized and faculty-led administration. The Success-Center model brought all curricular areas (with the exception of mathematics) together such that student support functions intersected, and the model also encouraged all departments to work collaboratively toward increasing student achievement.

By cooperation, we refer to the degree to which program personnel work together toward common goals and to the extent to which relationships between faculty and students, as well as between faculty members and administrators, are respectful and supportive. The ESL department

at CCSF displayed this trait in several fashions throughout its **practices**. One significant example of cooperation was the way that part-time faculty members were afforded the same benefits as full-time faculty members. This practice shows that in the ESL department at CCSF, part-time faculty members were not only recognized as critically important to closing the achievement gap but were also treated as essential colleagues in this effort.

By connection, we refer to the capacity of program personnel to develop and maintain linkages and relationships, both within the institution and to external parties, so that interdependence is both recognized and relied on to advance the interests of the program. This facet was prominent in both the Fashion Program at LATTC and the ACT Program at Modesto Junior College. Each of these programs was highly connected to the surrounding communities through relationships with industries. These relationships took many forms, including student internships, advisory boards insuring that programs were meeting industry needs, and the active involvement of business representatives in program events. Given the vocational nature of these two programs, these connections were a crucial factor to program, and student, success.

Finally, consistency refers to the presence of a distinctive and stable pattern of program behaviors that promote regular interaction and collective events. The "intrusive" counseling and frequent advisement of students in the Adelante Program at SMC demonstrated how the delivery of a consistent message of expected success and transfer may positively influence students' decisions to take the next step in their college careers and encourage their move to 4-year institutions. This constant source of support is important for all students, but it is especially vital for first-generation, underrepresented students who may never have envisioned themselves in college.

We hypothesize that when these conditions are present within a program, the **practices** of the program — in addition to addressing and lessening the achievement and opportunity gap experienced by minority and low-income students — have the potential to be effective for all students. We suggest that in the face of almost insurmountable obstacles to the improvement of student outcomes in community colleges on a large scale, the development and functioning of these conditions — cohesion, cooperation, connection, and consistency — in instructional programs can, as has been shown through our five colleges, overcome adversity faced by students with disadvantaged backgrounds and by those identified as underrepresented minorities.

We have documented the specific items in the **recipe** for **promising practices** and arrived at conceptual conditions that support the enactment of these items. These items have enabled the college programs we studied to adapt organizationally to both college environments and larger external environments, including local communities and state political economies. They have also enabled program personnel to develop and sustain educational **practices** that support student development and attainment. We argue that these conditions are necessary for programs to make substantial steps in closing achievement gaps. We do not concur with others that improving classroom instruction (Grubb, 1999) or changing dysfunctional state policies (Shulock & Moore, 2007) are sufficient.

[Implications for Research and Practice](#)

We recommend further research on community colleges to validate our claim about the necessary conditions for program adaptation and student outcome improvements. We suggest that using both other jurisdictions and other program areas will indicate whether our hypothesis is generalizable beyond California or beyond the specific program areas noted in this research. If our hypothesis is correct, then the numerous efforts across the United States aimed at improving community college student outcomes (from Achieving the Dream to the American Graduation Initiative outlined by President Obama in July 2009) have much to gain and learn from this research and its implications. In addition, because faculty members were the visible, collective body of powerful actors in the programs we studied, we also recommend expanding research on the centrality of faculty members in community colleges. This research should consider the relationships between faculty actions, writ largely as faculty work that includes more than classroom instruction, and student outcomes across a variety of domains, such as cognitive and emotional development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) or identity and career development (Levin & Montero-Hernandez, 2009).

The implications for practice include the need for college leaders to acknowledge faculty members as essential contributors to student outcomes and ensure that faculty members are not only central to college decisions and actions but also viewed as the critical or core element of student development and attainment. In addition, they should be treated equitably, whatever their employment status, area of work, or position in the faculty hierarchy is. This will mean moving away from **practices** that view faculty members as new-economy labor, as workers without professional status, and as individuals who are unwilling to cooperate (Wagoner, Levin, & Kater, 2010). It will also mean that both faculty members and administrators will have to find ways to unlock the structural and personal tensions that exist between two communities of interest so that faculty capabilities can serve students. Program **practices** derive more from people than they do from policies, and **promising practices** derive especially from the adaptability of those involved with the program, including faculty members, staff members, and administrators.

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[Notes](#)

1. We define a **promising** instructional program as one that has demonstrably improved student learning and has closed the achievement gap, as measured by course pass rates, certificate or degree attainment rates, and so forth.

- 2. Although we only included six instructional programs in our final sample, we asked the panel of experts to provide information about nine program areas to give us more freedom in creating a stratified sample of **promising** programs.
- 3. Latino Center counselors reported conducting 2,327 counseling appointments during the 2006-2007 academic year.

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By John S. Levin; Elizabeth M. Cox; Christine Cerven and Zachary Haberler

John S. Levin is a professor in the Department of Higher Education Administration and Policy and the director of the California Community College Collaborative, University of California, Riverside.

Elizabeth M. Cox is the assistant director of the California Community College Collaborative, University of California, Riverside. Corresponding Author: Elizabeth M. Cox, University of California, 900 University Ave., 1361 Sproul Hall, Riverside, CA 92521 Email: elizabeth.cox@ucr.edu

Christine Cerven is a graduate student researcher at the California Community College Collaborative, University of California, Riverside.

Zachary Haberler is a graduate student researcher at the California Community College Collaborative, University of California, Riverside.

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