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Editorial Corner



Dr. Jason Watts
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Community College: Completion and Access are Equally Important.

There can be no doubt that education matters both at the individual and societal levels. And there is also no doubt that a community college education is valuable. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, weekly earnings for associate degree holders are 19% higher than for people with a high school diploma. Unemployment rates for associate degree graduates are also significantly lower than for those with only a high school

education (5.4% vs. 7.5% in 2013). Clearly, community colleges make a difference

The “Completion Agenda” is five years old this year. The movement, which calls for the United States to double the number of annual college graduates by 2020, has been widely embraced by policy makers, philanthropists such as Bill Gates, AACC, and President Obama. Many colleges have embraced it and achieved remarkable results. NCIA has highlighted Completion Agenda success stories in the past, including the success we have had at my own college, Snead State Community College (AL).

President Obama’s more recent call for free community college is a logical extension of the Completion Agenda. Students cannot finish what they never start. Changes in the economy have made it such that a high school diploma is not the ticket to a middle-class lifestyle that it once was. For most people, a college education is the best avenue to earning a good living. Community college for all is a noble

goal. When viewed alongside the Completion Agenda, it is clear that we must emphasize both access and success and work to increase both.

Both initiatives have their critics. Some fear an overemphasis on graduation rates will lead colleges to restrict access to key programs to increase graduation rates. Others fear the opposite saying an overemphasis on graduation will erode quality, as colleges lower standards to increase overall graduation numbers. I have even had a faculty member ask, “If they made it free, where would we put them all?”

While there is merit to these concerns, what cannot be disputed is that community colleges exist to provide opportunities students would not otherwise have, and earning a degree is the pinnacle of what we have to offer. If we value our degrees, we should try to make sure as many students as possible achieve them.

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Capsules: Agree to Degree @ Moraine Valley



Dr. Pamela Haney
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Moraine Valley Community
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With increasing concerns nationwide about the number of college students who leave the system without completing their educational program, Moraine Valley has placed an even greater emphasis on program completion. As part of Moraine Valley Community College's goal to increase college graduation and completion rates, and as part of our continuous improvement strategic priority, the college began the Agree to Degree Campaign. The college's Agree to Degree campaign, which encourages students to sign a pledge that they will commit to earning their associate's degree or certificate, was launched in fall 2011. The campaign was widely promoted in internal and external marketing, advertising and publications.

As part of the campaign, faculty and staff also were encouraged to sign a pledge that they would support students in their efforts to complete their degree or certificate program. All instructors attached information on the importance of completion to their syllabi and discussed the Agree to Degree campaign in their classes. Students, faculty and staff have embraced the project, and more than 8,000 signatures were generated during the first year of the program.

The effort is working. In 2013-14 Moraine Valley awarded a total of 3,079 degrees and certificates, a 13 percent increase compared with 2012-13 and a 50 percent increase over the past five years. The total number of degrees and certificates awarded by the college to date is 57,680. The latest U.S. national data indicates that only 22 percent of first-time, full-time community college students graduate in three years. Since the launch of the Agree to Degree campaign the completion rate for Moraine Valley has risen from 18 to 21 percent.

The college's Graduation and Completion Project Committee monitors the success of these initiatives. They also review systems and programs that track students' progress, implement changes when necessary, and are developing ongoing strategies to maximize the number of degree and certificate completers.

MORaine VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

MY AGREE TO DEGREE PLEDGE
I commit to earn an associate's degree or certificate at Moraine Valley Community College.

By signing this pledge, I agree to

- Attend my classes
- Get good grades
- Meet with my academic advisor at least twice each year
- Talk to my instructors when I am having difficulty in my classes
- Meet with my counselor when I am challenged by an academic or personal issue before walking away from my educational goals.
- Make education a priority in my life

My associate's degree or certificate means I have earned

- A recognized higher education credential
- Increased chances of finding a job, especially in a tough economy
- Easier acceptance into a four-year college or university to earn a higher degree
- What future employers value in a potential employee – the ability to succeed

I AGREE TO DEGREE

Student Name _____ Student Name Printed _____

Date _____ Student Email Address _____

My Agree to Degree Pledge Card
I have signed my Agree to Degree Pledge to commit to complete my associate's degree or certificate program at Moraine Valley Community College.

Student Name _____
Date _____

Moraine Valley Community College
Changing Lives for a Changing World

Studies show that the average community college graduate earns \$8,320 more a year than someone with just a high school diploma.

Moraine Valley Community College
Changing Lives for a Changing World

MORaine VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

AGREE TO DEGREE

morainevalley.edu/completion

COMPLETE YOUR ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE OR CERTIFICATE

<p>CERTIFICATE HOLDERS WORKING IN THEIR FIELD EARN</p> <p>38% MORE</p>	<p>ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE HOLDERS EARN</p> <p>42% MORE</p>
<p>THAN THOSE WITH A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA.</p>	

Moraine Valley Community College
Changing Lives for a Changing World



Crystal Ball

The Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) at Community Colleges

By Pamela Haney, VP for Academic Affairs, Moraine Valley Community College (Palos Hills, IL)

More than 20 states allow community colleges to offer bachelor's degree and other community college administrators are optimistic that they will soon join these select institutions. While the discussion of baccalaureate education at community colleges continues, the debate over the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) has sparked increasing interest.



In 2010, the Institute of Medicine released a report on the *Future of Nursing*, suggesting that 80 percent of the nursing workforce have bachelor's degrees by the year 2020. This recommendation was based on the premise that advanced education will help meet the needs of the diverse and changing health care system and provide enhanced quality care for patients.

Community Colleges understand this need and how allowing access to bachelor's degrees in nursing is an affordable and convenient option for many students. Many community colleges highlight various benefits of granting baccalaureate degrees in nursing. Those in opposition insist that this position changes the mission of the community college and increases competition with public universities. Others assert there is a risk that bachelor's degrees in nursing awarded by community colleges will not be considered as creditable as degrees from four-year institutions.

Providing a pathway for bachelor's degrees in nursing and other programs is a priority for many community colleges. Beth Hagen, Executive Director of the Community College Baccalaureate Association, said it best in her 2013 article *Overcoming Barriers to Academic Progression: Promising Strategies*: "Community college baccalaureate degrees are amazingly powerful. On a micro level, the availability of an affordable, accessible degree can transform an individual's career path and learning potential. On a macro level, access to affordable degrees can transform the quality of our country's workforce."

R&B Corner

(Research&Books)

Online Learning: Quality as Important as Quantity

By Jason Watts, CAO, Snead State Community College (Boaz, AL)

Over the last decade, many community colleges have embraced online courses as a means to expand access to a college education for students who, for various reasons, prefer not to travel to campus. Despite the growing popularity of online courses among students, many colleges have discovered that convenience comes at a cost. Most troublingly, course pass rates tend to be lower.

If your college is new to the world of online instruction, or if you are struggling with lower pass rates, here are some things to consider that can help close the achievement gap:

Go Beyond the Face-to-Face Experience: Online courses have inherent disadvantages. Perhaps the greatest is that a student sitting at home working the course on a laptop at midnight is not inclined to be as engaged as if they were sitting on the front row of a face-to-face class. Not surprisingly, designing an online class to be an exact replica of the face-to-face gets less-than-stellar results. An online course designed to replicate its on-campus counterpart can expect to have pass rates approximately 10 points lower; this is a consistent finding in much of the literature.

Design for Engagement: The phrase "students don't do optional" is especially true for online classes. There are numerous ways to require students to engage in course material. For example, courses can also be designed to "gate" the content so that students cannot progress further until certain requirements are met. One instructor at my college requires students to get a perfect score on a review assignment prior to each major test. The answers to the review assignments are readily available within the course, forcing students to engage with the course material before proceeding. Since adding gated exams to the course, the pass rate has improved dramatically.

Continued on page 4

The TalkList

New technologies provide ways to overcome the traditional barriers to global education and language learning. Text, voice, and images are transferred with a click on a cellular phone or a computer. Students sign up for online classes that are taught by educators who are nowhere near where the students live.

A significant benefit to instant global communications is that students can improve their language skills through student-to-student conversations regardless of where they live. The introduction of Peer-to-Peer video conferencing using devices students are familiar with can increase personal interaction. And it can be accomplished from anywhere – opening the world to students who do not have the time or resources to travel.

Peer-to-Peer video conferencing also creates the opportunity for students to build an international network of friends and contacts. A contact network can help students to develop business leads, find new job opportunities, and increase their knowledge of other countries and cultures. A global contact network built from having personal conversations with other students around the world will provide lasting benefits throughout the student's career. Being bilingual is more than being able to read and write in a second language. Communication through speaking is a very important element. Through the use of Peer-to-Peer video conferencing, students can study new languages and to learn about cultural differences while building a global support network.

TheTalkList - Your Virtual Immersion Program: is an online marketplace to access language tutors through video chat. By taking advantage of the latest technologies, students can improve the most important part of language learning –the ability to converse. On our site, you can practice with anyone, anywhere, and in any language. Tutors list themselves in a free enterprise system and set their own rates for their services. Students find the tutor they need for the time they need them. Because the platform handles all aspects of the transaction, we are the Uber of language tutoring. Our Peer-to-Peer Video conferencing offers opportunities to increase communication skills and language learning for all students so they can “Speak Like a Native.”

Schools can manage the experience on the site for their students and tutors by creating a school community. Schools can select tutors to work within that community and receive progress information for both tutors and students that are a part of the community. TheTalkList offers pilot programs to schools to assist in assimilation and learning community capabilities. Come browse our site today: <http://www.thetalklist.com/>



Ultimate convenience

R&B Continued...

Take Advantage of the Technology: The technological advances of the last 20 years provide instructors with remarkable tools to present content to students. The studies in the literature that show the strongest positive impact of online learning comes when the full power of the technology is brought to bear, even in complex disciplines. Software designed to create 3-dimensional models of medical phenomena have been shown to produce learning superior to face-to-face instruction on the same concepts. Instructors should constantly search for ways to utilize the online platform to the fullest so students get the best possible experience for each concept.

Set the Bar High and Provide Support: You don't have to reinvent the wheel. There are resources available to help your faculty design and deliver high quality online courses. Both Quality Matters and Blackboard have detailed, rigorous standards for online course design that show promise in closing the achievement gap. Since most faculty don't have formal backgrounds in online course design, professional development is essential in helping faculty design high quality courses.

The information provided within this article was taken primarily from three sources. For more specific information and additional guidelines, access the following:

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Harkness, S. S. J. (2014). Program administration and implementation of an online learning initiative at a historically Black College University. In M. Orleans (Ed.), *Cases on critical and qualitative perspectives in online higher education* (pp. 44-60). Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference. doi:10.4018/978-1-4666-5051-0.ch003.

Means, B., Toyama, T., Murphy, R., Bakia, M., & Jonea, K. (2010) *Evaluation of evidence-based practices in online learning: A meta-analysis and review of online learning studies*. US Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED505824.pdf>



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