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***Increasing Student Participation in Higher Education—
New Collaborations for New Populations***

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As global democracies emerge slowly from the challenges of the last great economic upheaval, their leaders accept, if they did appreciate it before, that the key to continued economic growth and cultural cohesiveness is educating its citizens to something beyond secondary education. The “knowledge economy,” so often predicted, has arrived. Ironically, however, at the very time these nations wish to step-up their higher (tertiary) education agenda, they find a depleted treasury and predictions of continued austerity. In the meantime, ethnic minority groups predicted to post the greatest population gains in the coming decades are the ones that have been long underserved or underrepresented in higher education (Reindl, 2007). Thus, education costs are multiplied not only because of the need to educate *more* students, but the need to educate more underserved students (Carnevale and Rose, 2011). Moreover, the issues that these students face are sometimes vastly different from those of traditional student populations. In the United States, for example, ethnic groups, such as African Americans, Latino/Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans, along with individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, are less likely to graduate from secondary school or, if they do, less likely to receive the kind of academic preparation necessary to excel in higher education (American Council on Education, 2010). Moreover, those students that do enroll are typically the first in their family to attend college.

These challenges — less government support for education and the need to educate more citizens in a global competition for economic growth — have forced education leaders to think creatively about new cost-effective models of higher education and innovative collaborations to support minority student success. It has brought new players to the discussion, including leaders of America’s philanthropic and not-for-profit communities. Aligned with no special

constituency, nor beholden to government mandates or philosophical bents, these entities, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, have emerged as influential thought-leaders in grappling with fundamental issues facing higher education. These entities fund applied educational research and, in the process, focus attention on new and sometimes radical educational interventions.

The College Board, a century-old, not-for-profit organization, is a part of this emerging constituency. Chartered as a membership organization that now includes over 6,000 institutional members in primary, secondary, and higher education, the College Board is an educational collective composed of a variety of education leaders grappling with major challenges facing education. Although long associated with admissions testing (SAT) and curriculum (Advanced Placement), the College Board has branched out into an advocacy role that sees access and excellence as mutually complementary educational imperatives.

The College Board's member institutions are devoted to a multifaceted approach of boosting college achievement, with initiatives that span pre-school interventions through adult education (College Board, 2008a). Special emphasis is placed on the needs of students from underserved groups and the ways innovative institutional structures, such as community colleges, hold the key to greater higher education access for these students. Moreover, the College Board views these efforts as directly relevant to an overriding global concern: How do we increase the number of students, especially those from underserved groups, who earn certificates and degrees in ways that are morally equitable, academically rigorous, and cost-effective?

To address this question, our paper offers two case studies designed to delineate policy interventions that engage students from underserved groups to complete college; we also describe new, forward-looking education models that hold promise to provide greater access to

higher education at a lower cost. The first case study focuses on the needs of students from Latino backgrounds, a group whose numbers are predicted to grow more significantly than any other group in the U.S., but whose college participation rate is disproportionately low. The second case study focuses on the American community college and how the mission and components of this institution hold promise, not only to increase higher education access for underserved students, but also to offer options for governments looking for cost-effective ways to educate more students.

Case Study 1: The Latino Student Surge

The future of higher education in the United States cannot be considered without focusing on the Latino community. Simply stated, the political and economic well-being of the United States rests upon significantly increasing the number of Latinos completing college because they are the fastest growing segment of students in the nation and the largest minority group in primary and secondary schools (Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education, 2008). Yet the academic achievement of these students as measured by high school graduation rates, state assessment scores, and college attendance is lower than that of white or Asian American students (Ryu, 2010). Latino students are more likely to receive inadequate secondary schooling. Forty-two percent of Latino students attend secondary schools where three-quarters of the students are at, or below, the poverty line (Aud, et al, 2010).

Improvements in Latino student achievement are sometimes hampered by the fact that their parents only have a limited understanding of the U.S. education system. While all parents aspire for a better future for their children, many Latino parents have not attended U.S. schools themselves and, as a result, are less able to guide their children through the intricacies of the system. For example, over half of all Latino students in primary and secondary schools have at

least one parent who is an immigrant. And nearly 40 percent of Latino students had mothers who never finished high school, compared to only five percent of white parents (see Contreras, Flores-Ragade, Lee, and McGuire, 2011).

Still, familial bonds are generally strong among Latino/Hispanic American families, which is part of the reason that nearly 50 percent of Latino/Hispanic college students enroll in community colleges—geographically and financially convenient institutions that allow students to live at home while attending college (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2011). However, only a relatively small proportion transfer to four year institutions to earn their bachelor's degree. As we will discuss in the second case study, the transfer pipeline is vital to increasing the number of Latino/Hispanic Americans who earn college degrees.

Given the rapid rate of growth of Latino students in the educational pipeline, finding solutions is essential. No one entity, however, has the resources to address these challenges and opportunities alone. Collaborations among primary/secondary schools, higher education institutions, government, educational associations and media are necessary to identify and implement large-scale interventions. The College Board has initiated two national demonstration projects to focus policymakers' attention on the education needs of Latino students, with the goal of identifying promising practices that would be broadly applicable to students from other underserved groups.

The Latino College Completion Agenda

In 2010, the College Board launched its College Completion Agenda, a national effort to increase the number of 25- to 34- year-olds with an associate degree or higher to 55 percent by 2025 (see Lee, Edwards, Mensen, and Rawls, 2011). Unlike similar initiatives, the College Board's member

institutions are devoted to a comprehensive approach toward boosting college achievement, with a strategic plan that involves 10 specific recommendations spanning pre-school interventions through adult education (College Board, 2008a):

1. *Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families.*
2. *Improve middle school and high school college counseling.*
3. *Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs.*
4. *Align the K–12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations.*
5. *Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention.*
6. *Clarify and simplify the admission process.*
7. *Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying and making financial aid processes more transparent.*
8. *Keep college affordable.*
9. *Dramatically increase college completion rates.*
10. *Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs.*

The goal of increasing national college completion rates, however, cannot be met without significantly increasing the number of Latinos enrolling in and graduating from colleges and universities. Unfortunately, the proportion of Latino 24 to 34 year olds completing an associate's degree or higher is less than half the national average (Contreras, et al 2011). With this in mind, a new element of the College Completion Agenda was launched in 2011 that focuses solely on Latino students. In addition to tracking the college completion rates for all students, this new component follows the academic progress of Latino youth, highlights policy interventions showing special promise in increasing the college attainment of these students, and convenes

scholars, researchers, and policymakers to initiate new research on behalf of Latino students. As Latino student advocate Peter Negroni has emphasized, “We cannot expect educators, policy makers and legislators to understand the needs of the Latino community, or for that matter respond to them, without focused research and clearly articulated conclusions based on that research.”

The Latino College Completion initiative has produced an unprecedented level of collaboration among educators, researchers, and policymakers throughout the United States. Initial findings have led to the publication of *College Completion Research and Context Brief* (Contreras, et al, 2011) and *College Completion Agenda State Policy Guide-Latino Edition* (College Board, 2011).

- The *Research and Context Brief* provides an analysis of the research on the Latino community as it relates to the 10 recommendations outlined in The College Completion Agenda. The *Brief* describes the substantial body of academic research that focuses on the Latino educational pipeline; outlines a compelling rationale for significant investment in Latino students’ college success; offers strategic direction as to how resources can be used most effectively to substantially increase the number of Latinos graduating from college; and builds stronger relationships between the College Board and Latino scholars to facilitate further collaboration on projects focused on Latino student success.
- The *State Policy Guide* represents a second important model of collaboration because it was written with partners, *Excelencia in Education* and the National Council of *La Raza* — two highly regarded national organizations whose agendas focus solely on the Latino community. The *State Policy Guide* recognizes the important role state and local policies play in improving educational opportunities for students. The *State Policy Guide* is also organized around the 10 recommendations. For each recommendation, it articulates what

legislators need to know to address the issue; describes relevant research supporting each recommendation; and offers low-cost, medium- cost, and high-cost solutions to the issue based on successful state programs already in place.

The CollegeKeys Compact

The College Board's Board of Trustees established the College Task Force on College Access for Students from Low-Income Backgrounds in 2007. Its charge was to identify challenges of low-income students in “getting-ready, getting-in, and getting-through” college (see College Board 2007, 2012). The resulting national initiative, the CollegeKeys Compact, reflects the need to put in place practices and policies at secondary schools, higher education institutions, and governments that "open doors" for college success for low income students. Since a significant portion of Latino students fall into these categories, the ultimate impact of this initiative will touch thousands of college-bound Latino students.

The core of the CollegeKeys Compact is to obtain a commitment from a critical mass of schools and colleges/universities to join this effort. Schools and school districts that join the Compact are expected to:

- Expand the rigor of high school courses and establish a college-preparatory curriculum as the default program for all.
- Mount college awareness programs and pay attention to parents.
- Provide professional development for teachers, counselors, and administrators around admission and financial aid practices.

- Enter into partnerships with higher education institutions to support recruiting fairs, campus visits, and fee waivers.
- Monitor progress and share data.

Colleges and universities are expected to:

- Create early outreach programs and new partnerships with schools, including more college fairs, school visits, campus overnights, and other strategies that emphasize the importance of college attendance to high school and middle school students.
- Expand "holistic" admissions evaluations, and to the extent possible, commit themselves to waiving application fees for all low-income students.
- Establish need-based aid and clear and accurate cost-of-attendance budgets as priorities.
- Intensify academic support and encourage degree completion through activities that provide tutoring, supplemental instruction, study skills instruction; and the development of learning communities that serve the need of low-income students.

There are currently 600 institutional members of the CollegeKeys Compact. A CollegeKeys Compact website provides members with access to effective policies and programs and showcases profiles of institutional "success stories." The program's national profile is maintained by a set of annual regional innovation awards to recognize schools, colleges and organizations that serve low-income students exceptionally well.

Case Study 2: The Community College Model and Mass Higher Education

Setting the stage for mass education at home and abroad means increasing efforts to prepare and enroll greater numbers of students from groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in higher education. Democratic ideals and economic productivity — domestically and internationally — depend on our success in reaching out to these students in educationally meaningful ways. Yet, while elite four-year institutions will continue to play a pivotal leadership role in advancing mass education, ongoing resource limitations make it untenable financially to increase the capacity of these institutions universally. What is needed are relatively low-cost education structures that provide — as a central element of their mission — broad student access and rigorous and learner-centered curricula to support training for a wide range of occupations and advancement to degrees and graduate study.

In the United States, the community college has played a pivotal role in providing higher education access at a lower instruction cost per FTE student than more traditional higher education institutions (see, for example, Desrochers and Wellman, 2011). These institutions were established early in the 20th century to provide lower-division (general) education to new students and prepare them for transfer to a four-year institution, where they would be eligible to earn the baccalaureate degree (Cohen and Brawer, 2008). Later, these institutions expanded their mission to include workforce training for a variety of occupations that did not require a four-year degree (Beach, 2011).

The growth of community colleges in the United States has been phenomenal. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), there are nearly 1,200 of these institutions throughout the United States. In all, community colleges enroll 44 percent of all

college undergraduates, more than any other higher education segment in the U.S. (AACC, 2012).

The popularity of community colleges is easy to understand. First, they are open admission, meaning that almost any individual with a high school diploma (or equivalent) can attend these institutions. There are no formal admissions requirements other than a student's ability to benefit from the programs and services of these institutions. Second, community colleges are far less expensive to attend than more traditional four-year institutions. Average tuition and fees are generally two-thirds less than the average tuition and fees charged by public four-year institutions (AACC, 2011). Finally, community colleges are geographically convenient. It is estimated that one or more community colleges are within driving distance of 90 percent of the population (College Board, 2008b).

The low cost, open admissions, and geographic convenience of community colleges have made them especially welcoming to students from underserved groups, such as African Americans, Latino/Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans, as well as students who come from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds. Latino/Hispanic Americans prefer community colleges over all other higher educational options and represent the largest ethnic minority group attending two-year institutions (AACC, 2012).¹

While appreciating the broad mission of community colleges, we find the focus on transfer a compelling strategy for greater access to higher education. Transfer affords the underserved student — who is more likely to attend a community college — with entry to the nation's most elite universities. In turn, it reduces governmental education outlays since average instructional

¹ Throughout the paper, we use “community college” and “two-year institution” interchangeably.

costs at community colleges are about half of similar costs at public research universities (Desrochers and Wellman, 2011). Rather than educating students through four-years of elite education, students complete their first two years of general education at a community college and finish the undergraduate degree at the more expensive elite institution. By leveraging the economic advantages of a community college with the intellectual resources of the elite university, we have a recipe for greater higher education access.

Expanding the Transfer Pathway

Although community colleges are the most popular higher education segment in the United States, they have been criticized for low student completion rates (Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson, 2009). The number of students that transfer from a community college to a four-year college or university has never been especially productive (Dougherty, 1994; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Most analyses indicate that only about one in three students who intend to transfer are actually successful in doing so. This statistic is especially concerning given the number of students from underserved groups who are likely to begin their college careers in a community college. With this in mind, the College Board and its member institutions initiated two national projects to examine how the transfer pathway can be enhanced to increase higher education access, especially for students from underserved groups.

The first initiative, supported in part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, investigated the capacity of the transfer pathway to significantly increase the number of students who earn a bachelor's degree by first attending a community college. While the results of that study are not yet released officially, we are pleased to report several relevant findings here.

- ***Governments should establish clear institutional incentives to spur transfer expansion***— Despite the 100 year history of transfer, two- and four-year institutions receive almost no credit for the commitment they make to the transfer process (Handel and Williams, in press). Where incentives exist, they are almost always designed to increase freshman (first-year) student enrollment. National and most state reporting guidelines do not systematically require that two- and four-year institutions report the number of students they prepare for transfer, the number that successfully transfer, or the number that ultimately graduate with a bachelor's degree.
- ***Community colleges and elite institutions should work collectively to repair ruptures in the transfer pipeline***— Data indicate that many more students *wish* to transfer than actually do. In a recent national study, nearly two-thirds of all new, first-time community college students indicated transfer as a goal, but less than half of those students actually achieved that goal (Kienzl et al, 2011). This represents a significant decline from a similar study conducted eight years earlier.
- ***Community colleges and elite institutions should align their academic cultures to support transfer***— Although community colleges and four-year institutions deliver postsecondary education, these institutions have different origins, attract different students, place different demands on faculty, and receive funding from different sources. Despite the distinctive aspects of these institutions, however, both are inextricably linked because students attending a community college who wish to earn the baccalaureate degree have no choice but to transfer to a four-year institution. Therefore, the way in which education leaders at two- and four-year institutions work with one another — indeed, how well they honor the work of the other — has a profound impact on the ways in which transfer

students are assisted in making the transition from one academic culture to the other (Richardson and Bender, 1987).

The second College Board study identifies best practices among elite institutions that serve transfer students well (Handel, 2011). The institutions included in the study represent public and private colleges, public flagships and smaller institutions, and highly-selective and moderately-selective universities. Three major themes emanated from this work:

- ***To assure effectiveness, elite institutions should make a strategic commitment to transfer students***— Without a long-term, mission-driven strategy, efforts to boost transfer falter. Tactical approaches — enrolling transfers only when freshmen recruitment goals are not met — is unfair to transfer students and to the goal of authentic higher education access. A strategic vision is manifested in a variety of ways, but most centrally by institutional leaders who include transfer students as an essential part of the academic community; admissions officers who evaluate transfers in a process separate from first-year students; faculty who initiate partnerships with local community colleges in the creation of transparent transfer credit policies; and student affairs leaders who appreciate and address the unique academic needs of community college transfer students.
- ***To prepare transfer students well, elite institutions should focus their outreach messages on academic preparation***— Preparing students for the upper-division is achieved best by engaging students in their major at the community college (in pre-major/foundational courses) rather than exposing them to an unstructured general education curriculum. A student ready to dive into his or her major upon entry to the four-year institution is far more likely to make steady progress toward a degree than those students whose lower-division efforts were broad and unfocused.

- ***Elite institutions should welcome and integrate transfer students as full members of the academic community***—On most four-year campuses, especially those of elite institutions, the academic culture is largely calibrated to the needs of first-year students. A long-term commitment to transfers, however, will require institutions to reexamine the services they provide to students, with an eye to addressing the unique needs of transfer students, in such areas as academic advising, student housing, and financial aid.

Although these recommendations focus on elite institutions, enhancing transfer is a *shared* responsibility. It is our contention — supported by a small but increasingly persuasive body of work — that there is a need for a “transfer-affirming culture” on the campuses of two- and four-year institutions (see Jain, Herrera, Bernal, and Solórzano, 2010; Laanan, Starobin, and Eggleston, 2010). While space prevents us from going into detail about this emerging theoretical framework, early findings indicate that two- and four-year institutions must embrace the following commitments to serve transfer students well:

- Envision transfer as a shared responsibility between community colleges and four-year institutions;
- View transfer and attainment of the bachelor’s degree as expected and attainable;
- Offer curricula and academic support services that make transfer and degree completion possible;
- Include transfer as an essential element of an institution’s mission and strategic vision; and
- Leverage the social capital that students bring to college in service to their educational goals.

The last goal is especially apropos to our discussion of Latino student needs. As noted earlier, one of the main reasons Latino students enroll at community colleges is because they are able to remain close to family and community. Yet, educators rarely acknowledge this commitment as an important part of the college-going experience. Indeed, it is often argued that students must transition immediately and well into the college milieu for ultimate success academically, with the corresponding implication that they should diminish their family and community ties. We believe that institutions should better leverage the familial, linguistic, and community social capital that students bring to college. For Latino students who attend community colleges — institutions that have fewer resources to create campus communities as intense as elite universities — the proximity of family adds an important dimension for Latino student success and, we would argue, for all students interested in a moving steadily along the transfer pathway towards the bachelor's degree.

International Implications

Understanding that the future of an increasingly interconnected globe will depend in large measure on the availability of mass education, policymakers must increase access to higher education, especially for populations that have been underserved in their nations, while also implementing new education structures that provide education access in cost-effective, but academically-meaningful ways. In addressing the needs of underserved populations, collaboration is key, as demonstrated by the College Board's Latino/Hispanic initiatives, which are the product of researchers, lawmakers, and educators throughout the U.S. This type of collaboration is essential, not only because the challenge dwarfs the resources of any one entity, but also because of its vital connection to every nation's economic and cultural cohesiveness.

The success of the community college model has not been lost on policymakers in other countries, with variants throughout the world, including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Netherlands, Scandinavia, and the United Kingdom, among others (Grubb, 2003). In comparison with these international models, the American community college model possesses two elements especially important to education policymakers seeking balance between educating more students and doing so more cost-effectively: The first is open access to all who may benefit from higher education's programs and services. Providing an opportunity for any college-ready student to enroll not only provides access and opportunity on a broadly democratic scale, it also signals the commitment of a nation to serve the *post-secondary* needs of its citizenry. The second element is the academic pathway to elite education. Community colleges have historically welcomed more underserved students to higher education than other educational institutions. Linking "democracy's colleges" with a nation's most high-profile universities creates a unique and authentic avenue of access for underserved students, as well as a cost-effective strategy for supporting equity and excellence in a nation's higher education infrastructure.

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