

Building Relevant Research on Broad-Access Higher Education

Daniel Klasik, Kristopher Proctor, and Rachel Baker

Policy-makers, administrators, and researchers face a daunting challenge as they search for ways to improve the US postsecondary system: the wide-ranging field of higher education research that would support improvement does not always apply to the diverse array of postsecondary institutions. Existing scholarship on postsecondary education tends to assume that most institutions of higher education look like the large research universities in which higher education researchers work. In fact, such schools are rare in the population of all postsecondary institutions. The majority of US postsecondary students are enrolled in broad access colleges—schools that admit nearly all students that apply. These schools operate under very different conditions than the archetypal school of most higher education research. Recently, the growing body of research on community colleges has helped to remedy this problem; but despite these efforts, many postsecondary institutions remains outside of the spotlight of scholars. Additionally, research has tended to focus narrowly on student characteristics and outcomes rather than broader organizational features and outcomes (Kirst, Stevens, & Proctor 2011). These shortcomings call for a new direction in research on postsecondary education.

If efforts to improve outcomes at postsecondary institutions are to be successful, it is important that researchers, policy-makers, and school administrators have a clear understanding of how these schools work. Reaching such an understanding can prove difficult for several reasons. First, there are a number of biases inherent in the existing literature. Researchers often make implicit and explicit assumptions about how schools operate, the relative importance of different outcomes, and what the modal student looks like. But the US postsecondary system is

diverse: a one-size-fits-all approach to research will not work. In such a diverse system, improvement models that are successful in one portion of the higher education sector may not produce predictable, or even positive, outcomes in others. Second, many higher education scholars focus narrowly on certain issues (e.g., student completion or the creation of academic programs) at the expense of understanding broader organizational and institutional contexts in which these phenomena occur and how these contexts might affect outcomes of interest (Stevens, Armstrong, & Arum 2008). As a result, we learn a lot about how academic factors affect the likelihood of, for example, student persistence, and also how certain college characteristics may be associated with measures of student learning. These insights, however, rarely are brought together in a way that illuminates the workings of a full college organization. Lastly, research on higher education has generally considered institutions as independent actors, removed from outside influences; studies that consider systems or groups of schools and actors are rare.

These challenges are exacerbated by the bimodal focus of higher education research. Most early literature focused on elite colleges and universities, while many recent studies have focused on community colleges. Broad-access four-year colleges are tacitly ignored. Most postsecondary education in the US does not occur within selective research institutions, and the degree to which findings about these schools generalize to other types of higher education institutions is unclear. Similarly, research on community colleges, while valuable, might not apply to student bodies either at other community colleges outside of the studied system, or at other types of broad-access schools such as open-access four-year colleges.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, we will discuss the nature of the assumptions contained within higher education scholarship and how they affect our

understanding of postsecondary education. While this discussion will by no means be exhaustive, it will highlight those assumptions that could particularly influence the efforts to improve the performance of postsecondary institutions. Second, building upon the existing work of Kirst, Stevens, and Proctor (2011), we will propose a framework to organize existing research and highlight areas where much more research is needed.

Explicit and Implicit Assumptions

All higher education scholars necessarily make implicit and explicit assumptions about the subjects of their research. Completion studies assume that a postsecondary degree is the main goal of the students in the study and that this degree should be completed in a certain amount of time. Studies that examine many different schools assume that these schools operate in similar ways and serve similar sets of students—or students that are different in observable and measurable ways. The scope and appropriateness of these assumptions determine whether the results of a study generalize to other students, institutions, and contexts. The explicit and implicit assumptions in higher education research are a function of the types of postsecondary schools that researchers study, the research questions they ask, and the design of the study.

Assumptions about Students

Student populations vary in their overall composition along a number of dimensions: race, gender, socioeconomic status, full- or part-time enrollment, and campus residence. These differences in composition can have important consequences for school functioning, and postsecondary research must recognize these differences and their impact on potential policies and practices.

Despite the fact that a growing and non-trivial number of students in US higher education do not follow the traditional path through college, the literature on higher education is rarely

focuses on these “non-traditional” students. The distinction between traditional and non-traditional students serves as intellectual shorthand that summarizes student characteristics related to age and marital status/family situation and how these factors shape a student’s pathway through higher education. The moniker “traditional student” is typically used to refer to those who are 18-22 years of age, unmarried and childless, live on or near campus, are enrolled full time, and maintain uninterrupted enrollment until degree completion. In contrast, non-traditional students include single parents, transfer students, students who undergo interrupted spells of enrollment, students who take time off after high school before enrolling in college, and students who have academic goals other than degree attainment—such as career-skills development.

The distinction between these two student types is important because traditional and non-traditional students tend to face different challenges and thus have different academic needs. Research and policy conducted under the assumption that all students fit the traditional model may not be of much use when applied to non-traditional students. Rosenbaum and colleagues [2012 POLICY BRIEF], for example, have shown that the organization of the community college curricula can disadvantage non-traditional students: courses are often scheduled during the day when non-traditional students may have to work and course scheduling can vary from term-to-term in ways that make it difficult for students to plan ahead. Community colleges also regularly adopt a “cafeteria” style curriculum in which students choose from a wide variety of courses to take towards degree completion; however, non-traditional students may perform much better when programs are highly structured and clear (Scott-Clayton 2011).

Research that focuses on traditional students can also miss differences in the complexity of the lives of traditional and non-traditional students—differences that matter for how students experience and succeed in college. For example, Deil-Amen (this volume, chapter X) found that

schools often assume that the parents of traditional students maintain a certain amount of distance from the college lives of their children—partially because those students are more likely to attend college farther from home, but also because many traditional students treat college as a time for learning to live independently. In contrast, non-traditional students—often from minority backgrounds—regularly maintain familial obligations during college. Some have children of their own or are responsible for providing for an extended family. Such responsibilities can make it difficult for these students to fit traditional course schedules and pathways into their already crowded schedule of demands.

Assumptions about Postsecondary Institutions

Some researchers do make efforts to control for factors that characterize non-traditional students. Many fewer efforts are made to control for differences between institutions. Even decisions as banal as what outcomes to measure can carry consequential assumptions about colleges. California Community Colleges (CCC) provide a salient example. Federal and state policy makers are currently pushing to increase degree completion among college students. This completion agenda assumes that degree-granting is central to the mission of the colleges researchers study. This assumption does not hold: for nearly the entire CCC system, the primary goal is to help students transfer to schools in the California State or University of California systems—degree-granting is secondary to this transfer goal.

The CCC system also provides an example of another common assumption in research in higher education—that colleges exist in relative isolation. The transfer mission of the CCC system is codified in the California Master Plan, which guides all of the public postsecondary institutions in the state. That this plan exists, and that it links every California postsecondary institution to the others, illustrates that most colleges do not exist in isolation; public schools, in

particular, are typically part of interconnected systems. Many studies instead tacitly assume operational independence between public and private institutions.

Different types of colleges also require diverse assumptions about the composition of the faculty and staff. The use and balance of tenured and adjunct faculty can vary widely between different sectors of schools. These types of faculty can differ in terms of their training, campus roles, and budgetary needs. Further, even within the tenure/adjunct faculty, the amount of time and attention that faculty members devote to research, administration and teaching can vary widely. All of these factors, in addition to whether teaching and research staff are unionized, can have wide ranging implications for how a school is run and the experience students have as they engage in their coursework.

Some areas of research make explicit these assumptions about students and schools and address how they affect research results and implications. For example, in the area of college persistence, Vincent Tinto's theory of academic and social integration long stood as the main theory of college persistence. Researchers began to notice, however, that this theory may not apply cleanly to all students. For example, community college students, who attend schools where there are fewer co-curricular offerings than at four-year colleges, might require a different theory on social integration. Indeed, researchers like Halpin (1990) have found that social integration plays a smaller role than academic factors in predicting persistence at community colleges. Similarly, Karp, Hughes, and O'Gara (2010) found in a small sample of community colleges in the northeast that students did show signs of social integration, but that it did not look the same as at four-year institutions. Vincent Tinto himself has revisited the subject to discuss how to encourage the college success of specific groups of students such as low income and first-generation college students (Engle & Tinto 2008).

The many implicit and explicit assumptions of higher education research make it difficult to know which research is generalizable across the diverse sectors of higher education.

Postsecondary schools vary wildly in terms of the characteristics of their students, the pathways students follow toward degree or certificate completion, and the organization of the schools themselves. Such variation means generalizability should be explored, not assumed. As our base of research continues to grow, it will become increasingly difficult to keep track of across which dimensions and under which circumstances not examining assumptions is most dangerous.

A New Research Framework

In addition to these concerns about important assumptions and generalizability, there are also large gaps in our understanding of post-secondary institutions. To better understand variation in higher education and holes in existing research, we propose a research framework that serves to organize existing research, proposes meaningful categories of comparison for higher education phenomena, and suggest areas where future research could greatly enhance our understanding of higher education. Taking into account the complexity of the field of higher education, the diverse set of assumptions that must be taken into account when considering research in the area, and the rapidly growing base of research, we propose an organizing framework for higher education research. The purpose of this matrix is to serve as a heuristic that can both organize existing research and point to new areas of exploration. It formalizes the framework sketched initially by Kirst, Stevens, and Proctor (2010).

Illustrated in Table 1, this framework is a matrix of levels and domains. On one dimension, research questions are organized around the level of analysis: from the broadest level of institutional organizations down to the level of the student. Within each level, questions are organized across a number of different domains such as learning and careers. We begin by

introducing the main domains contained in the matrix. The following section then describes how these domains apply to questions at each level of analysis. In this section, we draw attention to existing or potential research that can increase our understanding along the dimension of interest.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Matrix Domains

There are five main research domains in our higher education research matrix: fields, markets, governance, learning, and careers. We briefly discuss each below.

Fields. We base our use of fields on the work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), who define organizational fields to be “those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (148). By incorporating the concept of organizational fields into our framework, we emphasize that many actors—students, alumni, faculty, high schools, accrediting agencies, state and federal agencies, professional associations, media, donors, etc.— participate in the field of higher education. These actors are responsible for the flow of resources, have the power to legitimate postsecondary institutions, actively regulate and govern schools, and greatly influence the organizational practices of colleges and universities. Within the proposed framework, we discuss how the concept of organizational fields can inform our understanding of postsecondary schools, leaders, faculty, staff, and students. Scott (this volume, Chapter X) provides a more thorough treatment on a how a field approach can be used to better understand higher education.

Markets. In the strictest economic sense, markets refer to the buyers and sellers of particular goods and services. Markets in higher education need not require the exchange of money for these goods and services. For example, the competitive market for faculty will set

prices for faculty hires, but the market for students, unless we want to consider financial aid a price, will not. This latter example of student markets also serves to illustrate the oddities of some markets in higher education. In fact, when it comes to student enrollment, colleges and students can be both buyers and sellers—colleges have a demand for students and try to “buy” students by offering a particular variety of academic and social offerings. Conversely, in this same exchange, students state their demand for education by paying tuition to “buy” education from colleges. In higher education, when we consider markets, we are particularly interested in the ways in which institutions meet their demand for various resources, including students, staff, and other forms of capital.

Governance. For our purposes, governance concerns the ways in which oversight and accountability influences the behavior of postsecondary schools and their leaders, faculty, staff, and students. Higher education is comprised of many governing actors: state and federal governmental regulatory agencies, accrediting bodies, professional associations, for example. To help guide thinking about governance, our framework emphasizes that governance includes regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive dimensions (Scott 2008).

The regulative dimension of governance includes the rules, laws, or sanctions that coerce desired behaviors (Scott 2008). Postsecondary institutions are subject to many regulatory forms of governance. The US Department of Education (ED), for example, requires all postsecondary institutions to be accredited by ED-recognized accreditation agencies to be eligible for federal student financial aid programs. The regulatory dimension is perhaps the most frequently discussed dimension of governance in higher education because it describes policies aimed at reforming higher education through laws and regulations.

The normative dimension of governance includes the degree to which expectations, obligations, norms, values, and morality influence institutional behavior (Scott 2008).

Postsecondary institutions are often influenced by normative concerns to the same extent as regulatory ones. For example, accreditation agencies evaluate schools' mission statements, which can be heavily influenced by the values of other actors in field. The mission statements of Catholic colleges and universities, for example, may contain values derived from the Catholic Church.

Finally, the cultural-cognitive dimension of governance emphasizes how shared understandings and common beliefs influence both how individuals perceive institutions and how institutions act to sustain these beliefs (Scott 2008). The annual US News & World Report College Rankings is a widely-consumed source of authority on the quality of US postsecondary schools. Few agree on what these rankings actually capture. Yet, the rankings are powerful enough to influence where students apply to college, and institutions are concerned about improving their standings in them (sometimes enough to report false statistics (Jaschik 2012a, 2012b)).

These three dimensions of governance are not mutually exclusive. All three types of governance are at play in the for-profit sector. For-profits are strongly influenced by cultural-cognitive belief that for-profits are inferior to "real" colleges or that their profit motive is working against the normative higher education ideals of truth, learning, access, and mobility. These schools must make decisions knowing that they will be judged by the general public through these prisms. Additionally, specific regulations are often targeted toward for-profit schools, whose revenue is largely tied to tuition and various federal student aid programs. Recent federal regulations now require that at least 10 percent of for-profit revenue come from sources

other than the US Department of Education. Research that explores how these multiple dimensions of governance affect numerous actors in the field of higher education could greatly enhance our understanding of it.

Learning. In the context of our framework, questions of learning involve how, from whom, and how well organizations and individuals learn and how such learning is assessed and evaluated. This training and acquisition of knowledge takes place at many levels. Faculty and students may learn from explicit training, while institutions may learn from their own successes and mistakes or from the experiences of peers and competitors. Questions of learning differ for the different groups represented in the matrix: they can involve topics such as training and the effectiveness of different interventions, the nature of learning, where and how learning takes place or how it is measured. In some rows on the matrix, learning is the subject of much recent research: standardized student assessments are becoming more widely used for accountability and measurement, for example. Faculty training has also received attention. Many other questions, such as how college leaders read signals from the larger environment or what a “classroom” is in the age of digital education, remain largely unexamined. Across all dimensions, however, the role of data collection, organization and analysis is incredibly important, and largely understudied, when discussing how institutions and groups of individuals learn.

Careers. Careers refer to the various histories, trajectories and paths taken by actors in higher education. In the case of faculty and other institutional employees we mean careers in the most familiar sense—how these individuals’ working lives unfold over time from their first job through promotions and transfers to other institutions and finally to retirement. Students and institutions have careers, as well: they similarly develop over time through their time in higher

education. Careers likely vary greatly across different types of institutions. Students at broad access schools, for example, are more prone to periodically entering and leaving college at a number of institutions (McCormick 2003), while the career of a broad-access adjunct professor probably looks quite different from a tenured professor at a research institution. Understanding how and why these careers look so different may offer clues for how to reduce, for example, the number of transitions students make throughout their college career, or train a more effective population of adjunct professors.

Organizations

The study of higher education at the organization level concerns the study of institutions themselves. At this level, colleges can be actors that act for themselves, are influenced by the actions of others, and can learn and develop over time.

Fields. As noted by Scott (this volume, Chapter X), the field of higher education is comprised of multiple organizations and actors that influence or carry out postsecondary education. However, scholars have a limited understanding of the ways in which these actors and their interrelations influence higher education outcomes. Questions at the intersection of organizations and fields in our research matrix are directed at understanding exactly what actors are at play in the higher education field and how they interact with and influence each other.

At the most simple level, it is easy to see that postsecondary institutions are tied to multiple governmental agencies, organizations, and constituencies that oversee and influence the operations of college and universities. However, performing research that helps us to understand how these actors operate, how they form relationships with other actors to influence postsecondary schools, and how postsecondary schools themselves adapt in response to these external actors is not so simple. There are some examples of research that begin to answer these

questions. Kraatz, Ventresca, and Deng (2010) demonstrated that the consolidation of admissions and financial aid offices within liberal arts colleges led to the adoption of similar practices by competing schools, particularly ones where the institution's president had previously worked at institutions where these operations were consolidated. Likewise, research by Brint et al. (2011) has shown that the adoption of new academic programs is influenced by factors such as the number of schools within a region adopting the same program, or the number of people residing in the geographic region of the school. More research is needed to catalog the number and types of actors operating within the field of higher education, to demonstrate how these various actors influence higher education (e.g., by providing or possessing resources), and to show the various ways in which schools react to and attempt to shape the organizational field around them.

Markets. Even though most colleges are not for-profit, they must still compete with each other for resources to be successful and sustain their operations. As colleges and universities carry out their activities they must meet institutional demand for everything from faculty and staff, to students, to governmental, private, and philanthropic funding. The cell in the research framework concerned with these organizational markets includes research that asks questions about the nature of the competition between organizations for these resources. There is sparse literature on the various markets in which schools compete, particularly with regard to broad-access schools. Breneman, Pusser, and Turner (2006) have described how market forces have led to the proliferation of for-profit postsecondary schools. Further, work by Brint et al. (2012) explored how curricular changes and the growth of academic fields in US baccalaureate granting institutions are influenced by student demand, donor preferences, and labor market signals. Much more research is needed to answer other questions in this domain, such as: What are the various markets in which postsecondary schools participate (e.g., for students, resources,

legitimacy, or prestige)? And, how might participation in markets vary depending upon institutional characteristics (e.g., size, mission, curricular offerings, reputation)?

Governance. Institutions of higher education typically enjoy a great deal of autonomy and self-governance. Most make their decisions under the leadership of a president and board of trustees. Yet even these basic governance structures may not exist in recognizable ways at all institutions. Further, some institutions, such as those belonging to a state system, often have yet another explicit layer of governance that coordinates the entire system. Questions of governance can address the nature of these basic structures, as well as look at the more complex web of governance that sets the regulatory tone at institutions. From accrediting agencies to the National College Athletic Association, from religious hierarchies to the general public, institutions of higher education face a very complicated and extended governance structure.

Research on higher education has just begun to describe the dizzying array of forces governing postsecondary schools. Richardson and Martinez (2009) describe the various ways in which several states organize their higher education systems, with the relative control of particular state agencies and actors differing significantly from state to state. Research by Weisbrod, Ballou, and Asch (2008) has examined how the missions and finances of postsecondary schools govern their operations (see also Weisbrod 2012, Chapter XX in this volume). Preliminary research by Scott, Proctor, and Baker (2011) revealed many actors—including various governmental agencies, alumni, private foundations, professional association, unions, religious organizations, and accrediting agencies—influence the operations of higher education institution (See Scott this volume Chapter X, Figure 1). More research is needed to answer questions, such as: To which actors are postsecondary institutions most responsive? How do the various regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive dimensions of governance affect the

day-to-day operations of postsecondary schools? How do these governance forces impact desired outcomes, such as student retention and completion?

Learning. It may at first seem strange to think about how organizations might learn; yet higher education institutions do have a variety of ways to acquire knowledge. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE), and Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), for example, all provide colleges and universities with opportunities to gain insight about the functioning of education on college campuses. Additionally, colleges and universities compile institutional data in offices of institutional research and report large amounts of organizational information to accreditors and the Integrated Post Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to maintain accreditation and eligibility for federal financial aid programs. But many colleges and universities lack the resources to carry out research beyond what is required by accreditors and state and federal agencies (Stevens, Proctor, Klasik, & Baker 2012). This cell in the research matrix is thus primarily concerned with questions that help us understand how exactly institutions use their own institutional data, or information from other sources, to learn and make decisions. How does this capacity vary between schools? What information is most useful for institutional decision making? Is there evidence of organizations learning from past successes or mistakes or those of their peers and competitors? While researchers may sometimes have interest in institutional data for their own research purposes, understanding the ways in which institutions are successful at learning may help institutions use data more effectively to help themselves.

Careers. The career of an institution concerns how its position in the ecology of other colleges changes over time. Researchers have given this area of research some attention. Labaree

(2010), for example, discusses how new colleges and universities tend to be founded at the bottom of the postsecondary hierarchy, but slowly build prestige over time as new schools develop below them. Some researchers have also considered the particular trajectories of community colleges and other broad-access schools. Research on community colleges (Brint and Karabel 1989, 1991; Dougherty 1994) has demonstrated that community colleges originally prepared students to attend baccalaureate granting institutions. As such their curriculum largely served to educate students in the liberal arts. However, the desire of community college administrators to transform community colleges into vocational institutions, combined with increased demand by students for employment credentials rather than transfer to baccalaureate institutions in the 1970s, led to the vocationalization of the community college curriculum (Brint & Karabel 1989, 1991). Dunham (1969) looked at a different breed of broad-access colleges. He described how many state comprehensive schools were originally founded as normal schools, later became teachers colleges, and ultimately became owned by states as states sought to expand public higher education.

As colleges and universities have evolved over time, a great deal can be learned by studying how colleges and universities have forged particular pathways, as well as which pathways have led to success and failure. This cell of the matrix organizes questions such as: What are the various ways in which colleges and universities have adapted to the changing landscape of higher education? How have schools carved out niches for themselves? What strategies have proven successful? Which strategies have resulted in failure, or worse, the death of schools?

Leaders, Faculty, and Staff

We apply the matrix similarly to each of the levels capturing leaders, faculty, and staff. We use the term “leader” here broadly. While the most obvious example of an institution’s leader is its president, we also include leaders such as trustees, deans, provosts, and department chairs. “Faculty” refers to teaching staff in general and may include non-tenured or adjunct teachers. Finally, “staff” are all other university employees that do not hold a leadership or teaching role. Staff can include, among others, custodians, administrative support staff, or paid research assistants. Despite the importance of each of the three groups individually, we recognize both that the divisions between these three groups (particularly faculty and leaders) can be quite fuzzy and that the research questions we ask within each of our domains will be similar. As a result, for our descriptive purposes here, we will consider them as a group, except for the case of fields.

Fields. With respect to institutional leadership, field-related questions address where and with whom organizational leadership occurs. Here, a researcher will want to investigate among which constituencies broad-access leaders do their work. Do they work primarily at the state- and national-level? Or within professional organizations and unions? Do they work among public agencies, within the political arena, or with private corporate offices? Research in this area has tended to focus on individual leadership roles such as that of Chief Academic Officer in both four- and two-year colleges (Mech 1997; Anderson, Murray, & Olivarez 2002)

Faculty, naturally, exist within a different field from leaders and staff. Here we are interested in the forces that affect the work of faculty both within and external to their home college environment. How do the characteristics and relations of faculty members vary among differing types of college organizations? When and how do faculty balance work between several institutions?

Finally, the intersection of field and staff is concerned primarily with the space in which broad-access staff work. As with all questions related to field, we want to know about the universe of influences on the work of staff. We imagine these questions will center primarily on the roles and functions of staff now and over time and how what has lead to the increase in both the number and influence of broad-access staff members.

Markets. Questions related to markets and leaders, faculty, and staff, all relate to how colleges compete for and find the leaders, faculty, and staff they employ. Likewise, they refer to the domain in which leaders, faculty, and staff compete with each other to be hired by institutions. As is true in K-12 education, improved organizational performance in postsecondary schools will require clear understanding of how the best employees find jobs, how their performance is assessed, and how they are rewarded for work well done. As such, it is important to ask questions about who is drawn to leader/faculty/staff positions at broad-access institutions. What prior experiences to job seekers in this area have? Are positions at broad-access institutions seen as fall-back options—and if so, for whom and from what?—or their own end? Do job seekers in the broad-access market compete with other applicants and a local, regional, or national level? How to job seekers signal quality? Are these signals valid and reliable? What are employees paid in this sector? Is this pay tied to performance?

Loeb et al. (this volume, chapter X) outline what is known about these areas more proudly. The little research on broad-access labor markets has focused on labor markets for leaders and faculty (Flannigan, Jones, & Moore 2010; Gahn & Twombly 2001; Twombly 1988), but ignored markets for staff. This research finds that while a lot of hiring for leadership positions comes from other community colleges, a notable portion of community college faculty come from four-year colleges, elementary and high schools, and business.

Governance. Questions of governance concerns accountability and to what or whom leaders, faculty, and staff are accountable. For leaders and faculty, questions related to governance are probably related to self-governance and the extent to which this governance is professional or collegial and the limits to such a system. For staff, governance questions will likely deal with internal authority systems within an institutions. For all groups, questions of unionization will be among the most important. While researchers recognize the importance of teachers unions in the shaping of policy in the K-12 sector (e.g. Hannaway & Rotherham 2006, Strunk & Grissom 2010), little is known about the strength or influence of unions in higher education, and specifically in broad-access higher education. Researchers engaged in union research in the late 1970s and early 80s, but there are few examples of research on college and university faculty unions since then. Modern work has tended to look on the effects of unionization on the functioning of the college organization (e.g. Wickens 2008), but not on how unions impact the behavior and actions of union members

Learning. While it seems natural that questions of learning would apply mostly to students in the broad-access sector, there are important reasons to also study the learning of broad-access leaders, faculty and staff. For example, researchers in the K-12 sector have long been concerned with the factors associated with effective teaching and, consequently, how to train more effective teachers. In the broad-access sector it must be similarly important to understand the role of learning and training for leaders, faculty, and staff.

The bulk of existing research about learning among these populations involves the training of administrators. For example, Hull and Keim (2007) compare the different leadership training programs undergone by leaders at community colleges, while Hankin (1996) explored the training needs of community college leaders after they leave graduate school.

For leaders and faculty, open questions about learning may range from how leaders/faculty learn from their own experience or from their peers. Are there certain types of professional development that are more or less effective in training leaders/faculty? To what extent is data used to improve practice? How is effective leadership or teaching measured? With respect to staff, it is also important to understand what types of professional training may be most effective for particular task areas and how best to measure effectiveness.

Careers. The study of the careers of leaders faculty and staff also holds great value. We believe that career approaches can only enrich studies of faculty, staff, and administrative labor markets, enabling the development of policy that will honor the professional cultures of workers in broad-access schools and reward improved worker performance over entire career arcs.

Questions related to the careers of leaders, faculty, and staff should endeavor to understand what the trajectory of each of these types of professionals look like, and even the extent to which the boundaries that define “leaders,” “faculty,” and “staff” are fluid over the course of the life of a broad-access employee. Some questions that are worth answering relate to understanding what constitutes progress, regress, and lifetime success for broad-access leaders, faculty, and staff. What are important points of career entry and exit? Are there ways to improve recruitment and retention?

The research on careers for broad-access leaders, faculty and staff tends to overlap with that of the labor markets for these groups. This is natural since these professional careers tend to advance through labor markets themselves. As with the market research, scholars have turned their focus primarily to the career paths of community college administrators (Ceida, McKenney, & Burley 2001) and faculty (Fugate & Amey 2000), and paid less attention to the careers of broad access staff.

Students

Understanding the paths and careers of students is probably the most well-studied aspect of higher education research. From the search and application process to attendance decisions to persistence and completion, scholars have left a well-trod path through the student experience in higher education research. The depth and breadth of research coverage in this area provides both strong theoretical backing and increasingly well-identified, generalizable, and usable information on the student experience. However, the richness of this field of study makes the gaps in the research, both in orientation and content, more apparent.

In general, research on students in higher education suffers from three major weaknesses. First, it is predictably bimodal: much is known about students at premier research institutions and students at open access community colleges. Students who attend schools in the broad middle are dramatically underrepresented in the literature. Second, most of the studies were conducted at, and often only generalize to, one institution. The relationships between schools and other organizations, and how these relationships affect student paths, are noticeably absent from most research. Finally, the changing relationship between college and the life-course is not well represented in the literature.

Fields. With regard to students, field-related topics address such questions as how the attributes and relations among students vary by type of college and how this has changed over time. There is a great deal of descriptive research that has addressed these questions on some level. Many scholars, for example, have examined student bodies of community colleges, particularly how they compare to for-profit schools (e.g. Bailey, Badway, & Gumport 2001; Breneman, Pusser, & Turner 2000) and to the composition of elite schools (e.g. Carnevale & Rose 2003). However, similarly nuanced descriptions of students at schools from the middle of

the postsecondary status distribution—between community colleges and selective four-year schools—do not exist.

Markets. The demand-side of the college student market is one of the most thoroughly studied areas of higher education research. This research has been devoted to answering questions about how students cognize their options and decide on which schools to apply to and attend (e.g. Hossler & Gallagher 1987; Grodsky & Reigle-Crumb 2010; An 2009); how much and in what way cost is a factor (Beattie, 2002; An, 2009; Avery & Hoxby, 2004); and how students think about the tradeoff between accessibility and prestige. Hoxby (1997) has examined how the markets for students have changed over time, particularly with respect to selective institutions.

There are clear gaps in this research, however. Most research focused on the application decisions of student attending selective four year schools (Avery 2004) or students on the margin between community colleges and four-year schools (Bers & Galowich 2002; De La Rosa 2006; Kurlaender 2006). Relatively little is known about how students choose, for example, between broad-access schools. Instead, the decision process of students attending less selective schools is often couched in normative terms that compare them to students attending selective schools; their decision process is described as abbreviated and less complex (Sommers et al 2006).

Governance. Questions of governance for students concern accountability: To what or whom are students accountable? How do state and federal governmental regulatory agencies and accrediting bodies affect the careers and experiences of students? Likewise, how do the expectations, obligations, norms, and shared understandings that influence institutional behavior affect students? And how do students affect these taken-for-granted beliefs? For the most part, researchers have not delved into these questions. One example of this neglect relates to student

departure and to whom students are accountable for staying enrolled in college. While the student-level causes and demographic patterns of student dropout has a long history of research (e.g. Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 2006), and institutional-level interventions that can improve persistence is a widely studied topic in higher education (e.g. Dynarski 2003; Bettinger & Baker 2011; Sommo et al. 2012), few studies have addressed the question of to what extent students are responsible for their own success/failure in broad-access schools and the role of other students, teachers, or family members who hold them accountable for their work.

Learning. Measures of teaching and learning and at post-secondary institutions have historically been an under-studied area, particularly when compared to the attention paid to this topic in K-12 education. The research that has been done has typically focused on student learning at more selective schools (e.g. Arum & Roksa 2011). The rise of for-profit and online education has led to a closer analysis of student learning at wider range of schools (e.g. Bailey et al. 2001), but there are still many questions left unanswered. Few studies have looked at the nature of learning in broad-access colleges (vs. 8-12 schooling and selective colleges). Fundamental questions remain largely unanswered, such as: What is a "classroom"? Is a "campus" important to learning in non-residential schools? How do online environments compare with classroom ones? Should we define "basic skills" for college students? What learning should we measure?

Careers. As the returns to higher education continue to increase (Baum & Ma 2007; Card 2001) and holding a stable job requires post-secondary training, college enrollment has grown among traditionally underrepresented groups. These trends, along with changes in enrollment patterns, have birthed a wide range of paths through higher education. A number of questions remain unanswered in this changing field: What is the range of ways in which broad-

access college attendance fits into the life course? Is there an "ideal" way or multiple ways? At what point(s) in the life-course is college most beneficial, and does this vary by occupation, parental status, gender, or other dimensions of difference? How does college debt shape other occupational and life decisions?

Trends in student enrollment, particularly transfer, have increasingly draw then attention of higher education scholars. Transfer from two- to four-year schools has received considerable attention over time (e.g. Bahr, Hom & Perry 2005; Roksa & Calcagano 2008), but studies of other prevalent, but more complex, phenomena such as lateral transfer (e.g. Bahr 2009) and swirling (e.g. McCormick 2003) have received relatively little attention. This is an area where data issues have prevented the type of in depth analysis that is needed to accurately inform policy.

Much of the research on student careers and paths has focused on student-level demographic characteristics that can help schools target services but doesn't help them structure support. Similarly, definitions of success are not clear, which makes it harder for schools to make and meet goals that carry meaning across organizations in a field. Research into how schools can restructure programs to increase persistence is more nascent; "though we are increasingly able to explain why it is that students leave and in some cases why students persist, we are still unable to tell institutions what to do to help students stay and persist" (Tinto, 2006, p. 2)

Conclusion

The need for new and better research that focuses in particular on broad-access colleges is especially clear given the current environment in which many broad-access schools operate. Not only do these schools face formidable challenges, but the sector is rapidly changing with the development of new digital teaching technology. Shrinking state budgets are restricting the

ability of many broad-access colleges to maintain their broad-access mission. In California alone, both the Cal State system and some community colleges experimenting with creative fee structures to manage chronically overenrolled courses (Rivera 2012a, 2012b). Broad-access schools also face increasing demands from their students. Many students now enter these schools in need of remedial coursework in math or English, a process which can delay or derails many students' college degree aspirations (Hughes & Scott-Clayton 2011). Broad-access students also enter these schools at different points in their life with different goals—some seek a degree, others want to work to transfer to a more elite four-year college, while others simply want skills training in a shifting economy. All of these factors are at play against the backdrop of clear and mounting pressure to increase completion rates at college and universities, along with calls to hold colleges accountable for failures to reach learning and completion goals, and an increased use of online education that threatens to fundamentally alter the traditional model of educational delivery in postsecondary education.

High quality, in depth and focused research can inform policy and practice in the schools that educate the majority of American college students. The questions our framework suggests lend themselves to a number of different methodological approaches, from case-studies to randomized experiments. No matter the design, the scholars who produce research that will reliably affect practice, scholars must be aware of and work to counter the deeply ingrained assumptions that currently exist in much research on higher education. The research framework suggested in this chapter provides a heuristic for organizing current research and identifying gaps in the literature.

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Table 1

	Field	Markets	Governance	Learning	Careers
Organizations	What varieties of colleges exist? How have enrollments in these forms changed over time? How do they relate to others of the same and different types? What other organizations operate in this arena to support and control colleges (e.g. professional associations, unions, accreditation agencies, state educational authorities)?	What is the nature of competition for students, employees, prestige, and legitimacy among broad-access schools?	What are the regulatory systems that shape broad-access schools and how do they overlap? How is governance tied to performance? What are the virtues and limitations of accreditation in its current form? How and to what extent are federal grant and loan programs a form of governance?	How do schools learn from past success/mistakes, from their peers/competitors, and from signals in the larger environment? What is the role of systematic data in organizational learning?	How do ecological positions of schools change over time? What constitutes enhancement/diminishment of prestige among broad-access schools? Who do so few colleges close?
Leaders	Where does field-level leadership occur?—at national and state levels, within professional associations and unions, in political arenas, in public agencies and private corporate offices? How has this changed over time?	Who is drawn to leadership positions in broad-access schools? What are occupational priors? Is broad-access administration a fallback or destination occupation, and if so, from what? Are these local, regional, or national markets? What signals of quality do employees use? Are these signals valid/reliable? How much are leaders paid? How is pay tied to performance?	To whom are leaders of broad-access colleges accountable? To what extent is governance professional/collegial? What are the limits of professional/collegial governance? Is there unionization among broad-access leaders?	How do leaders learn from their own experience? From peers? How do they read signals from the larger environment? To what extent, and how, do they use systematic data to improve practice? What professional training is most effective, and how do we measure effectiveness?	Is broad-access administration fallback or a destination career? What constitutes career progress, regress, and lifelong success? What are the crucial moments in an administrative career? What are the fateful points of career entry/exit? How can recruitment/retention be improved?
Faculty	How do the characteristics and relations of faculty members vary over time and among differing types of college organizations?	Who is drawn to broad-access teaching? Are these fallback jobs from tough competition in the selective sector? Are these local, regional, or national markets? What signals of quality do employers use? Are these signals valid/reliable? How much are faculty paid? How is pay tied to performance?	To whom are broad-access college faculty accountable? To what extent is governance professional/collegial? What are the limits of professional/collegial governance? What is the extent and impact of unionization among broad-access faculty?	How do faculty learn from their own experience? from peers? How do they read signals from the larger environment? To what extent, and how, do they use systematic data to improve practice? What professional training is most effective, and how do we measure effectiveness?	Is broad-access teaching a fallback or a destination career? What constitutes career progress, regress and lifetime success? What are crucial moments in a teaching career? What are fateful points of career entry/exit? How can recruitment/retention be improved?
Staff	How has the role and function of administrative and support staff changed over time and among the various types of colleges? How and why have their numbers and influence increased?	Who is drawn to broad-access staff positions? What are comparable positions outside of academia? Are these local, regional, or national markets? How much are staff paid? How is pay tied to performance?	What are typical authority systems in broad-access schools? What is the extent and impact of unionization among broad-access staff?	What professional training is most effective for particular task areas, and how do we measure effectiveness?	What are the salient career strands for broad-access college staff? What constitutes progress, regress, and lifetime success in these strands? What are fateful points of career entry/exit? How can recruitment/retention be improved?
Students	How do the attributes and relations among students vary by type of college? How has this changed over time? How have colleges adapted to the challenges posed by new types of students?	How do students select among broad-access schools? How do they cognize their options and decisions? How much and in what way is cost a factor? Do students cognize a tradeoff between accessibility and prestige? How should we gauge student satisfaction? Are school selection and tuition payment individual or household-level processes?	To what extent are students responsible for their own success/failure in broad access schools? What are legitimate bases for dismissal or withholding of financial support from students? Who should have the authority to make these decisions?	What is the nature of learning in broad-access colleges (vs. 8-12 schooling and selective colleges? What is a "classroom"? Is a "campus" important to learning in non-residential schools? How? How do online environments compare with classroom ones? should we define "basic skills" for college students? What learning should we measure?	What is the range of ways in which broad-access college attendance fits into the life course? Is there an "ideal" way or multiple ways? At what point(s) in the life-course is college most beneficial, and does this vary by occupation, parental status, gender, or other dimensions of difference? How does college debt shape other occupational and life decisions?