

**The “Traditional” College Student: A Smaller and Smaller Minority and Its
Implications for Diversity and Access Institutions**

Regina Deil-Amen

Associate Professor
University of Arizona
Center for the Study of Higher Education

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What happens when a norm of behavior becomes the exception numerically, yet the social construction of that norm remains prominent? In such a situation, those who do not conform to that norm tend to be marginalized despite their existence as the collective majority. Conceptually, they become, in essence, a *marginalized* majority. This is exactly what has occurred for the majority of postsecondary students in the United States.

The Other Half

Our conceptions of the typical idealized college student are based on traditional notions and an imagined norm of someone who begins college immediately after high school, enrolls full-time, lives on campus, and is ready to begin college-level classes. Yet, such an assumed norm does not reflect the diversity of today's college students.

Although the community college sector is often treated as an adjunct to U.S. higher education, it...constitutes the first stop for roughly half of today's college students.

Rebecca Cox (2009)

In contrast to popular images of who a college student is, enrollment data reveal a different picture. Over the past half-century, the greatest increase in access to higher education has occurred through the doorways of community colleges, which have grown and expanded far faster than the four-year sector. Since the mid 1960's undergraduate four-year institutions have doubled their enrollments, yet two-year colleges have expanded at more than twice that rate, and now their enrollment is approaching half of all undergraduates (Cox, 2009; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006).

In fact, as *Table 1* (below) displays, there are just as many undergraduates in community colleges (44%) as they are in four- year public and four-year private not-for-profit institutions combined (43%). And the rapidly growing for-profit sector now enrolls the next largest proportion (12%) of students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009, Table 74). Apparent from this table, focusing attention on the traditional four-year sector as the norm is quite dismissive

of a clear majority of our nation’s students and the institutions that serve them. They are the relatively neglected *other half* of U.S. higher education.

Table 1: Headcount of students enrolled as a percent of the total undergraduate enrollment in U.S. institutions, 2008-2009 academic year (23,668,037 students)

4 year institutions (50%)	2 year institutions (47%)	1 year institutions (3%)
4 year public (30.6%)	2 year public (44.2%)	1 year public (.4%)
4 year non-profit (12.5%)	2 year non-profit (.3%)	1 year non-profit (.1%)
4 year for-profit (7.2%)	2 year for-profit (2.8%)	1 year for-profit (2%)

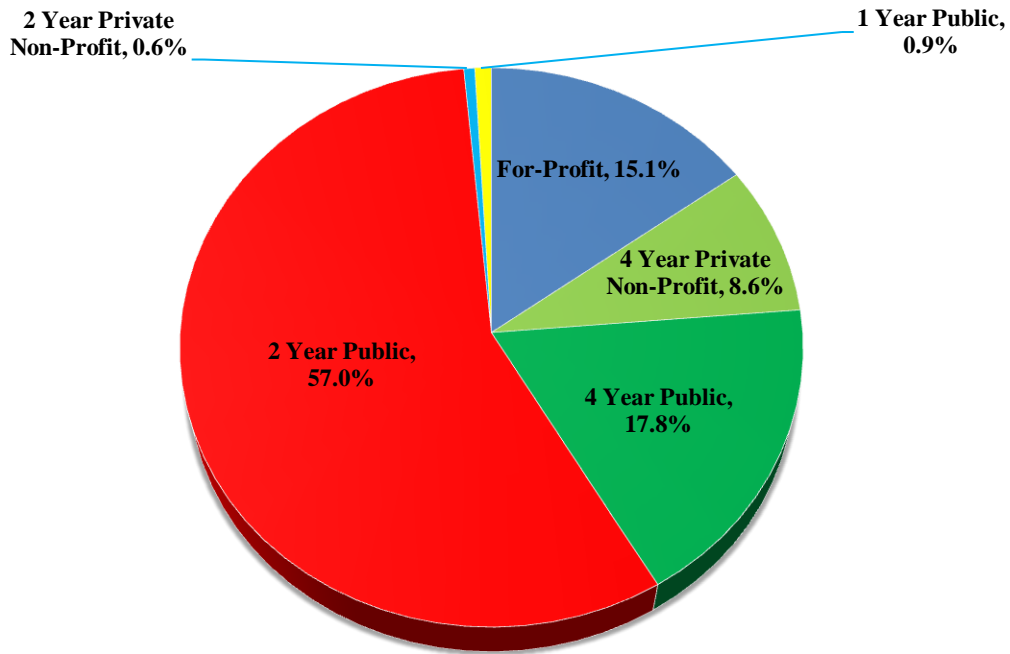
When only first-year students are considered, the freshman class is even more distributed away from traditional four-year contexts, as *Table 2* shows (below). The majority of first-year students (57%) is enrolled in community colleges while only slightly over a quarter (26%) is enrolled in four-year non-profit and public colleges and universities. And the growing popularity of for-profit colleges is reflected in their 15% share of all first-year student enrollments (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010, Table 241).

Table 2: Percentage of first-year undergraduates in each type of U.S. postsecondary institution, 2007-08 academic year

4 year institutions	2 year institutions	1 year institutions
4 year public (17.8%)	2 year public (57%)	1 year public (.9%)
4 year non-profit (8.6%)	2 year and 1 year non-profit (.6%)	
2 year to 4 year for-profit (10.6%)		1 year for-profit (4.5%)

Figure 1 (below) graphically illustrates the same distribution across institutions types.

Figure 1: Percentage of first-year undergraduates, 2007-08



First-Year Undergraduate Enrollments

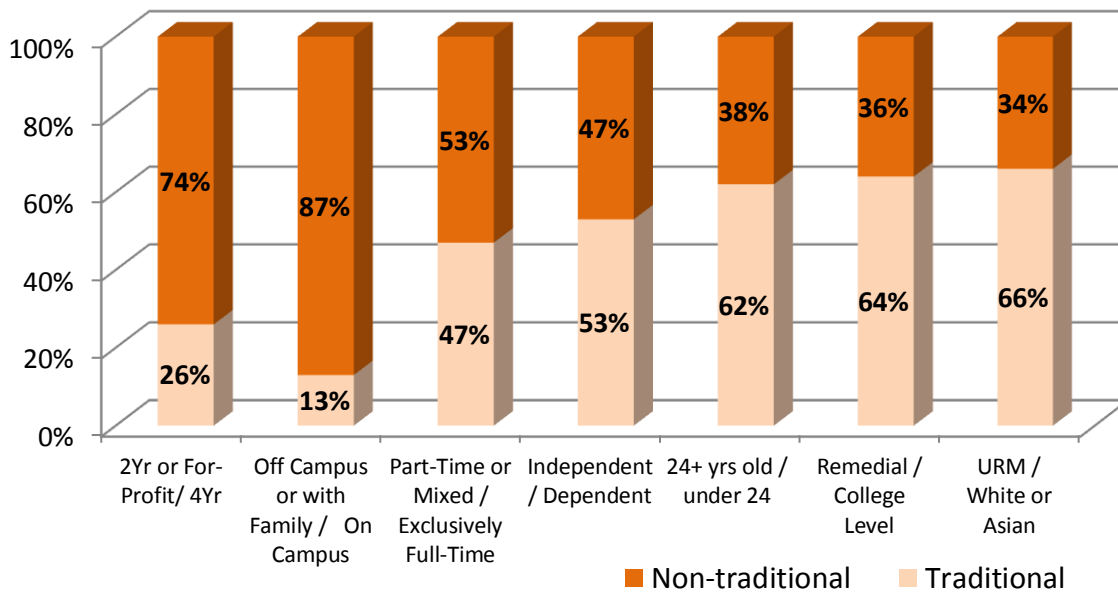
Clearly, the dominance of community colleges and for-profit colleges as entry points for almost three-quarters of our nation's students is out of line with the attention traditional four-year sector institutions receive as bastions of opportunity. Even among those students beginning in four year colleges, only half of those entrants maintain continued enrollment in a single institution, with many swirling between the four-year and two-year sector (Goldrick-Rab, 2006). Realizing that the *other half* noted above is actually more the *other three-quarters* of undergraduates entering higher education, makes the extreme marginalization of this majority especially troubling. Perhaps such marginalization contributes to marginalizing policy actions, such as the recent movement of the funding allocated to community colleges from the Department of Education to the Department of Labor as workforce development funds. This shift occurred despite the fact that, for decades, an overwhelming majority of community college students have desired and continue to desire bachelor's degrees (Dougherty, 1994).

In short, the traditional college student is no longer the typical college student

(Rebecca Cox, 2009)

The “ideal” student model is certainly no longer typical, and in fact, many non-traditional characteristics are now more prevalent than traditional ones. Further considering incoming first-year students in college credit classes, *Figure 2* (below) shows that well over a third (38%) are now aged 24 or older. More than half (53%) are *not* enrolled exclusively full-time. Instead, they attend part-time or part-year. Almost half (47%) are financially independent, and half of those (25%) have financial dependents of their own. A shocking mere 13% of beginning students live on campus, while about half commute from off-campus, and close to a third live with parents or family (NCES, 2010, Table 240).

Figure 2: First-Year Undergraduate Students



The degree to which students are prepared for college level coursework is another nontraditional characteristic, arguably the most critical. More than a third (36%) of beginning college students take remedial/developmental courses in college. Interestingly, although the vast majority of all remedial students are enrolled at public two-year colleges, the percentage of first-year students at public *four-year* non-doctorate institutions who take remedial classes (39%) is

almost as high as the percentage of first-year remedial students in public *two-year* colleges (42%) (NCES, 2010, Table 241). And these percentages are relatively low, since they exclude those referred into remedial level classes who chose the option to forego those classes. At many community colleges, more than 80% of students test into remedial/developmental level, as is the case in the CUNY community college system (Jaggars & Hodara, 2011).

The Norm of Multi-Dimensional Diversity

Diversity in higher education is too often framed narrowly as the inclusion of non-white students into America's elite private and public colleges and universities to create a more "multicultural" student body. The framing of this pursuit decries the scarcity of such "diverse" students. However, in many broad access public universities and small, private, less selective colleges, a diverse and multicultural student body is present and growing. In fact, currently, in the *other half* of higher education, especially in community colleges, such diversity abounds, and this abundance occurs along multiple dimensions, not just race/ethnicity and SES. In this sense, diversity is the norm, not the exception.

In addition to SES, gender, and race/ethnicity, parameters of non-traditional diversity that need to be seriously considered include: the type of institutions students are accessing; on or off-campus residence and commuting choices; patterns of full, part-time and part-year attendance; age; financial status as dependent, independent, or independent with dependents; and level of college preparedness. In fact, each of these dimensions of diversity reflect greater proportions of non-traditional status than does race/ethnicity (*Figure 2*, above), which makes attention to them even more compelling. Furthermore, under-represented minority students are disproportionately underprepared, which make these dimensions of their college experience inextricably linked. Latina/o and low SES students are concentrated disproportionately in community colleges and broad access universities, so any discussions of these subgroups should contend with these conditions. Patterns of work and parenting while enrolled inevitably affect students of different ages differently. Which students are more likely to commute, live with family, or be financially

independent? Are older students more likely female with children? Any given dimension of each student's college experience cannot be extracted. Should institutions respond in ways that better address these multiple dimensions of diversity? Several decades ago, feminist scholars of color discussed their insights on how race, class, and gender cannot be disentangled because each is simultaneously relevant in lived experience. Similarly, scholars should be unwilling to continue to ignore the fact that diversity is so common as to be considered a norm in all but a minority of higher education contexts. It is the water in which open and broad access institutions swim. And this diversity extends far beyond race, class, and gender, and so should our frameworks and the scope of our research efforts.

Unfortunately, the discussion of diversity in terms of scarcity at the top reifies the notion that larger systems of inequity can be addressed by focusing on inclusion into the more elite four-year sectors. Such a focus overshadows the ways in which access to college is inherently structured to exclude the broader majority, which masks the inequities inherent in the stratification of higher education institutions and opportunities. Discussions of diversity and equity need to be broadened to address who has access to what institutions and resources, and how elite institutions and their students benefit from this structured inequality (Labaree, 1997). Limiting the "diversity agenda" to a narrow focus on letting underrepresented minorities "in" to the top tiers of higher education once again excludes and renders invisible the realities of the vast majority of non-traditional students with non-traditional pathways who are worthy of inclusion in the diversity agenda – the other three-quarters flooding the gates of entry into our postsecondary institutions every year.

Who Counts?

A conceptual overemphasis on a student 'ideal' that predominates while marginalizing open and broad access institutions can operate surreptitiously to exclude and de-prioritize. There are ways in which our professional behaviors (our speaking and writing) entirely exclude, or section off, the broadest access postsecondary contexts and their students, sending a signal connoting they 'don't really count.' In reality, community colleges, private two-year colleges, for-profit colleges,

and four-year commuter institutions and their students, staff, faculty, and administrators do count in the larger equation of postsecondary access, funding, instructional labor pools, the wider economy, and the societal mission of opportunity higher education fulfills. Our parameters for considering issues of diversity need to expand to recognize postsecondary institutional diversity, along with the diverse college-going behaviors among the *other half* of postsecondary students. It is important for scholars to be self-conscious enough to understand how our own language and framing contributes to marginalization and the continued reification of the traditional college student and traditional college-going patterns.

To exemplify what tends to ‘count’ in our conceptual popular imagination and what does not, I draw from a recent widely discussed, acclaimed, and important books published on U.S. colleges, *Academically Adrift* (2011). The book focuses on traditional-age students beginning at four-year colleges and universities. Despite the narrow specificity of this sample, this book begins in the first 19 pages with commentary on “U.S. Higher Education,” “colleges and universities,” “undergraduate learning,” “undergraduate education,” “student cultures,” “the college professoriate,” and “the higher education system” that excludes and ignores community colleges (and other non-traditional institutions) altogether. And it frames “college culture” as the culture of residential college life for traditional-age students engaging in peer cultures dominated by social activities, fraternities, and sororities. Authors find that professors do not expect undergraduates to work very hard to earn good grades, and undergraduates are focused more on social experiences than academic achievement.

The entire discussion of these topics revolves only around public and private four-year colleges and research universities, without an apology or acknowledgement that half of all institutions and *well over half* of today’s undergraduates are excluded from the discussion. Yet, because of our prioritizing of four-year traditional notions and normalized marginalization of other college-going patterns, it seems entirely appropriate to a reader to begin reading a book about “college” without a single mention of any two-year or for-profit institutions. It also seems entirely reasonable that esteemed scholar, James Rosenbaum, would suggest this book “might be the most

important book on higher education in a decade.” However, it would rarely, if ever be deemed appropriate, or publishable, to write a book (or article) about community colleges and discuss their history, student culture, faculty composition, and system of funding for more than the first tenth of the book as if the content represented or could speak for *all* of higher education. In fact, most commonly, qualification about a specific institutional focus on community colleges appears in the title or abstract (see the work of Bailey, Bragg, Dougherty, Laanan, and Perin).

To further emphasize my point, when the sampling for *Academically Adrift* is detailed on page 20, the authors state they carefully considered the representativeness of their student sample generated from the twenty-four colleges included by comparing it to “U.S. Higher Education more broadly.” Yet their comparison extends only *to traditional-age students in four-year institutions* nationwide, as if this was an adequate representation of the entire population of students and institutions in the U.S. Despite this narrowing of who “counts” as college students, the remainder of the book continues to frame the discussion as relevant to “college student life” generally (e.g., p.81) and the experiences of the “typical college student” (e.g., p.88). The methodological and statistical rigor of the sampling and analysis is sound, yet the book suffers from an ailment common to most of us – prioritizing a traditional college student minority and inappropriately extending that minority experience to the majority. This, I argue, marginalizes, and sometimes renders nearly invisible from the conversation, the functions and circumstances of the other half of our postsecondary system. Multiple studies have shown that students commuting to two and four-year colleges and non-traditional aged students *do not* prioritize the social aspects of campus life, and in fact, often actively avoid them to preserve time to focus on their academic obligations and other work, family, and community obligations. Where do these students, and the instructors and faculty who work very hard to teach them, fit into this framework?

Another example of scholarship marginalizing the diversity of institutional types while prioritizing one sector is the research on one of our most compelling issues of diversity – the experiences and challenges of under-represented racial/ethnic minority males. This subgroup is possibly the most at-risk subgroup in U.S. higher education, with males constituting only slightly

more than a third of all African-American and Latina/o undergraduates (NCES, 2010, Table 74).

Over the last decade, research on experiences, pathways, and attainment among African-American and Latino males *in four-year colleges* has grown considerably. Some studies address enrollment, persistence, and attainment gaps (Aborna & Nora, 2007; Bowen, Chingos & McPherson, 2009; Fry, 2002; Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007; King, 2010; Ryu, 2010; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008). Others examine institutional policies and practices (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008; Zell 2009) and qualitative student narratives regarding identity, racism, and organizational experiences (Baber, 2010; Donovan, Schwartz & Guido-DiBrito, 2009; Harper, 2009; Harper & Davis III, 2011; Harris III and Harper, 2008). All of this research, however, focuses on students attending four-year institutions, despite the reality that 43% of African-American male college students and over half of Latino male college students are enrolled at community colleges (Table 74). In fact, 60% of Latinos begin their postsecondary education at community colleges (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Padilla, 2005).

Studies of minority males *not* attending four-year institutions are less prevalent (Harris III & Harper, 2008) yet extremely valuable in providing some empirical evidence that African-American and Latino males at community colleges behave in ways distinct from their four-year counterparts and from females of the same race/ethnicity. For example, in contrast to African-American males attending four-year institutions, those at community colleges are less likely to talk with faculty outside of class time, meet with an academic advisor, or participate in co-curricular activities. (Flowers, 2006; Pope, 2006). In community colleges, Latino males are less likely than Latinas to engage ‘help-seeking’ behaviors, utilize academic services, or participate in learning communities (Saenz, Lee, Kim, Valdez, Bukosi, and Hatch, 2010). Also, net of other factors, African-American and Latino males who perceive a supportive campus environment are more likely to persist to degree completion (Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2001), and more diverse institutions, such as Hispanic-serving community colleges, are positively associated with Latinos’ perceptions of support (Perrakis & Hagedorn, 2010; Nunez, Sparks & Hernandez, 2010). Similarly, Perrakis (2008) finds African-American and White male students attending racially diverse community

colleges in Los Angeles feel more positively about campus climate and their ability to complete coursework and degree requirements than males in less diverse colleges. Finally, qualitative research by Zell (2009) provides an interesting twist, revealing Latinas in community colleges who credit their partners (husbands, fiancés, and boyfriends) for their successful persistence through college. The women describe partners who themselves do not have a college degree, and in some cases, put their own college goals aside to support their female partner. Attention to minority males outside of four-year college contexts is scarce, but clearly informative, for improving our knowledge of college-going among minority males.

Re-conceptualizing the Perceived Norm

What problems emerge when we draw from traditional theories to understand this collective majority of students? One major consequence is that those who don't fit the mold are framed as deficient. When students are measured against a traditional norm of college-going that is no longer an actual behavioral norm, not surprisingly, nontraditional students are found wanting. Our centering of the traditional norm turns attention to remedying the deficiencies of the deficient students rather than remedying the deficiencies of institutions inadequately serving the new collective majority. By deconstructing this fictional ideal student norm, we can refocus attention to the aspects of postsecondary education structured to perpetuate inequities.

Traditional theories of college student persistence illustrate the limitations of operating under this perceived norm. These theories were based on norms of college-going for predominantly white 18-23 year olds, enrolled full-time, residing on campus, and for the most part, beginning with college-level classes (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993). Critics rightly denounce Tinto's framework in particular for assuming a disconnection from a home community must occur before integration into a college community can happen, which discounts the experiences of students whose racial/ethnic community of origin remains salient (Guiffrida, 2006; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tierney, 1992, 1999). Furthermore, frameworks centered on traditional residential students discount the experiences of *more than half* of the undergraduate population -- two-year college and four-year

commuting students who enroll in college while *remaining* in their communities of origin. This has left a void in our understanding of how integration – a sense of connection, belonging, and congruence with the college community – happens for commuting students who do not break former connections in order to forge new connections in some semi-isolated residential college social world.

However this does not render such traditional theories completely useless, and they should not be dismissed altogether. As Deil-Amen (2011) and Karp, Hughes, and O’Gara (2010) contend, aspects of these frameworks, such as the concept of integration, can be expanded to include realities of students traditionally marginalized by such theories. Research shows commuting two-year college students challenge the dichotomous notion of integration occurring along purely academic or social lines. They experience “socio-academic integrative moments,” or events, activities, interactions, and relationships in which academic and social elements combine simultaneously to enhance learning, information acquisition, procedural knowledge, feelings of college belonging, college identity, connectedness, and intellectual competence. Oftentimes these moments occur within and just beyond the classroom, the most common place where commuting students meet other students and faculty, develop a sense of belonging, become involved in opportunities for engagement, and learn success strategies (Hughes, Karp & O’Gara, 2009).

Unlike expectations of more “traditional” students, purely social relationships are often devalued by two-year commuters and even described as unwanted obstacles or distractions (Deil-Amen, 2011). Rather than connecting through social ties with college peers, nontraditional college-goers view the social aspects of college life as distracting, and instead reinforce their motivation and commitment to goals through a clear sense of purpose (Zell, 2009). Subjective college experiences that cultivate development of a “college-going identity” and validate pursuing college goals are also important for non-traditional groups in ways that may not be as salient for students originating from social class communities with strong college-going norms (Collatos et al., 2004; Saunders & Serna, 2004). These findings are consistent with what other researchers have found regarding the importance of feelings of community and belonging for community college, commuter, and

Latina/o students in particular (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Deil-Amen & Rios-Aguilar, 2011; Karp & Hughes, 2009; Rendón, 1994; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Torres, 2006).

Reframing of our views of diversity in higher education exposes how the conceptual practice of confining the diversity agenda to a discussion of “getting in” to selective institutions is limited at best and absurd at worst. No, we don’t want to render the diversity concept useless or ridiculous by including too many subpopulations, and this fear often leads to confining diversity to particular vulnerable (often legally defined) subpopulations. However, is this practice of drawing boxes around a targeted set of diversity characteristics the most effective approach? What if we took the definition of diversity to its logical extreme and attempted to map it and its interrelationships more carefully? What if we made the study of these interrelationships and their impact on opportunity the focus of a research agenda centered on equity? This exercise might effectively make visible the invisible majority. It might reveal with more clarity exactly which institutions “need” to increase diversity and which (the majority of institutions) do not. The uneven playing field is not only about SES and underrepresented minority student status. The discussions of the uneven playing field need to be about *the uneven playing field* and how that shapes trajectories into and through the hierarchy of higher education. By limiting diversity to only particular student characteristics without acknowledging other dimensions of diversity – including diversity in institutional type – we are shortchanging the equity agenda.

There is *no doubt* that diversifying the student body and faculty and administration of our most elite colleges and universities is valuable and necessary. However, the diversity agenda needs to expand to recognize that privilege is structured, and equity needs shift as the institutional context shifts. For instance, there is almost no discussion of how non-selective, non-prestigious four-year colleges and universities have increased their racial/ethnic minority enrollments drastically. We assume this spells opportunity, but one study reveals how such an institution’s career center responds to pressures to preserve its reputation and legitimacy with employers --- by mitigating inequality for some while reproducing inequality for others, namely African-American and Latina/o students, regardless of their qualifications (Damaske, 2009).

Where Subjectivity Meets Objective Diversity

Some of the most meaningful aspects of students' diverse backgrounds are difficult to quantify and categorize. For example, the ways in which students give meaning to their college pursuits in the context of their family relationships can vary substantially, and more elite institutions tend to reward students who fit only one particular mold in this regard. For instance, in my study of low-income university students, many of them (mainly Latina/o) consider interdependence and mutual obligation between family members to be of high moral value. This is not unlike prior ethnographies detailing the interdependent systems of families surviving and functioning in contexts of poverty (Stack, 1997). Students who separate from their families to attend college on-campus experience the psychological and emotional stress and anxiety of removing themselves from interdependent systems within their family and extended family. They feel guilty about any additional financial burdens their absence might cause. Rather than feeling entitled to the financial support of their families, hard-working, committed, high achieving students are concerned and uncomfortable about their "selfish" pursuit of college for individual gain while their families are struggling (Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, Irwin, & Gonzalez Canche, 2010).

Students with this perspective differ sharply from our notions about millennial generation students and their "helicopter parents," which are based on middle and upper class norms. Therefore, these nontraditional students find themselves operating within a university context that privileges one set of norms over another. Rather than welcoming and educating parents who are not as familiar with college life and helping students deal with the pressures of feeling obligated to continue helping their families, university staff instead keep parents at arms-length, encouraging separation from presumed 'overly-involved' parents. Consequently, lower-income or Latino students are left to deal alone with the pressures of trying to straddle school while helping and remaining present with their families and of informing their parents of the expectations of college work. One low-income white female student said:

My family has a lot of financial problems, so that's another stress that I'm constantly dealing with. I have to call them like, "Mom, are you gonna be able to pay rent this month?" ...I've actually used some of my loans to help them pay their rent this year.

A commuting Latino who lives with family was asked if they are supportive. He explained:

I think they try to be, but a lot of the time, because they were so used to me being there all the time, and always helping out...it's sort of hard for them to deal with the fact that I have ten papers to write, three books to read...that I have all these teachers, and all these things that I have to do.... Sometimes it's with help like moving a lot of stuff, since we're downgrading since we can't afford anything, so we're selling a lot of stuff, so it's...just little things like going to the store for them. Just simple things, because they're busy too.

Another Latino who talks to his mom twice a day by phone revealed:

I'm the first person to go to college in my family so they don't really understand the time and dedication I have to put into this. Sometimes they get upset when they invite me somewhere and I have to say no. But they get over it, and they're kind of adjusting to my schedule too. Like I'm usually at school. If I have any time left over, that's when I go visit them.

A Latina whose father left school after third grade and whose mom completed secretarial school after high school described her “frustrating” predicament “because I’m over here, and they’re over there. ...and I just kind of had to deal with it until they learned.” Her parents who “just didn’t like” the idea of her living away at an in-state college rather than commuting to one close to home would say, “Why are you doing this? You really don’t need to do this.” She elaborated:

I had homework to do and...other stuff to do. For them, it wasn't that important. They just couldn't believe that it would take me a whole weekend to do homework. Then it's just also the financial situation... coming here I kind of had to ask for more money, and they were just like, “Why do you need all this money?” And I'm like, “Well, it all adds up – textbooks, food, and everything.” So it's just little stuff like that became a big deal in our family.

Another Latina expressed guilt about living on campus and not being available to help her parents and 9-year-old brother, who is now alone through the evening after school while her parents work multiple jobs:

It's horrible. I used to cry myself to sleep just saying, “I'm not there, and I'm not being good to my parents. They've given me so much, and they've always been there, and now I'm not home.” Especially my little brother (tears)...I'm his big sister, and it makes me so sad not being there for him.

Another example of a more subjective, yet very meaningful aspect, of diversity difficult to quantify involves a study by Naffziger and Rosenbaum (2011), which shows how expectations for the purpose of college vary by SES. Poorer and working class students view college as means to acquire the skills they need to avoid an undesirable job, while middle to upper-class students define

college as a space for personal exploration. Brint and Rotondi (2008) similarly report middle-class undergraduates extend the meaning of college beyond the value of the degree to the chance to participate in "the full college experience," which includes "a style of life in which opportunities to spend time with friends, participate in campus activities, and 'enjoy life' were abundant" (p. 15).

Perceptions of the "college experience" may be the same as they were 30 or 50 years ago, particularly among middle and upper-middle class college students. However, as nontraditional students become a numerical majority, is this old model of college as a separate place and space to explore identity and possible career interests giving way to a new model of college as a tool, an instrumental pathway, to a better job or career future than what your social origins would dictate? A postsecondary system truly responsive to these forms of diversity would welcome and support such diverse perspectives rather than expecting a different approach.

Unexpected Diversification

In a somewhat bizarre, yet logical shift, community colleges across the nation are currently diversifying their campuses by adding on-campus housing. In colleges where the vast majority is commuting, students who live on campus are now a small, but growing minority. When viewed from this perspective, diversity is turned on its head. The relative absence of the "ideal" traditional student makes their intentional "inclusion" a mechanism for diversifying the clientele community colleges serve. In the wake of the huge recession we have experienced, those student groups who had traditionally attended four-year campuses are now turning to the more affordable community college as an option – an option becoming particularly popular in rural communities.

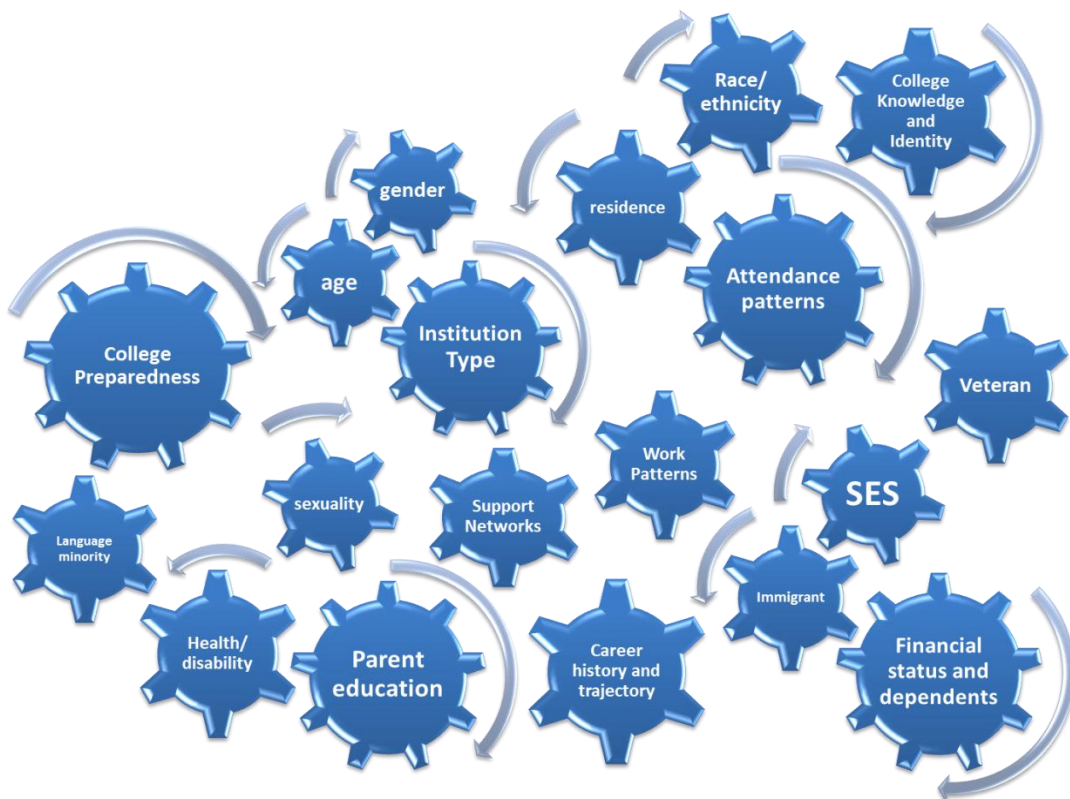
Along with several other SUNY community colleges, Onondaga Community College in central New York is a good example. On their website, their admissions page boasts, "Over the past five years, we have invested over \$50 million in improvements including three new residence halls..." with an attractive photo of the residence buildings and the text, "Living on Campus" plus the subtitle, "the total college experience." The "residence halls" link leads to another page that claims, "Onondaga is a residential campus! Our state-of-the-art residence halls offer students the opportunity to affordably experience the benefits of on-campus living. Students live in a single,

double, or triple room within an attractive suite, complete with comfortable living room, full kitchen, and access to technology.” A picturesque slide show of the living options is accompanied by the option to view a virtual tour, followed by an explanation of “The Benefits of Living on Campus” which includes, among other benefits, “Greater Academic Success” and reads, “Studies have shown that resident students have consistently achieved higher grades than their nonresident counterparts.” The number of community colleges incorporating or expanding on-campus living options is growing rapidly, with more than 300 now nationwide.

Multi-Dimensional Diversity

The studies included above have much to contribute to discussions of diversity. For example, interrelationships of gender, nontraditional family dynamics, perceptions of support, frameworks of understanding, and college behaviors are clearly relevant and prevalent once the full diversity of postsecondary contexts are considered. *Figure 3* compiles the dimensions of diversity discussed in this paper and a few more obvious components that have not been discussed.

Figure 3: Interactive Multiple Dimensions of Diversity



The dimensions are configured as a system operating interactively as connected realities for students, not as disembodied characteristics. Researchers should make every effort to address how multiple dimensions of diversity operate simultaneously for individuals, and their relevance varies across different college contexts. Dimensions pictured include: type of institution; on or off-campus residence choices and commuting patterns (residence); full, part-time, and part-year attendance patterns; age; financial status as dependent, independent, or independent with dependents; and level of college preparedness; frameworks for understanding the relationship between family and college (family dynamics); college knowledge; college-going identity, networks of support; SES; parent education; race-ethnicity; disability status; sexuality; gender; patterns of work; career history; career trajectory; veteran status; immigration status; language minority status.

Broader Societal Impact

Understanding how each dimension in *figure 3* can operate in concert with other dimensions can help broaden our theorizing of student pathways. For instance, the inclusion of work patterns and career trajectories matters not only for understanding how they shape individuals' pathways through college, but also for understanding the larger labor market context in which higher education operates. Saenz and Ponjuan (2008), for example, discuss Latino male workforce patterns, including participation of Latino males in alternative (non-college) career pathways, the military, and prison to understand their college participation patterns. Deil-Amen and DeLuca (2010) describe the relevance of majors/programs as elements of diverse pathways by suggesting how two-year colleges may provide trajectories through particular selective programs into career fields that lead to greater market rewards for students.

Another broad societal impact involves changing societal norms in higher education and college-going. Given the low rates of retention in two-year and for-profit colleges, the overwhelming predominance of first-year students in these institutions is troubling. Consider a) the disproportionate enrollments of low-income and underrepresented minority students in two-year and for-profit institutions, b) the social and residential segregation of neighborhoods by

race/ethnicity and social class, c) and the high rates of stopout and dropout among lower-income, first-generation, and underrepresented minority students, where more than two-thirds do *not* complete degrees. These three realities combine to form, I hypothesize, a dominant norm across whole communities where those who go to college usually leave without completing a degree. Existence of such a pervasive cultural norm in which the idea of going to college is so coupled with the reality of *not finishing college* can have serious repercussions for how non-traditional students make decisions about going or not going to college, where to go, and how to finance it. In essence, the idea of attempting college and not finishing becomes normalized. Such subjective understandings inevitably factor into students' decisions about how to manage the financial and other risks of going to or staying in college (Deil-Amen & Goldrick-Rab, 2009). Our frameworks should better address such cultural forces.

Taking Affirmative Action

There is much to learn from theories of cultural wealth and cultural integrity, funds of knowledge, and alternative forms of capital (Moll, Amanti, Neff, González, 1992; Villalpando & Solorzano; Yosso, 2005). These frameworks shift attention from student deficits to strengths inherent in underrepresented racial/ethnic minority students' homes and communities and the skills and dispositions they develop to survive and thrive in those contexts. Sedlacek (2004) offers systematic ways to assess the non-cognitive characteristics students possess that lead to college success – better than what the SAT and other standardized measures alone can predict. These approaches provide frameworks for validating and legitimately rewarding the positive attributes of traditionally underrepresented populations in the absence of overt affirmative action policies. Utilizing these frameworks to shape research agendas can provide evidence to better affirm what works for students who have traditionally not been as successful in higher education relative to more privileged groups.

Such reorientation of frameworks of meritocracy can subvert attacks on affirmative action. This reorientation is one part of a two-part method to acknowledge diversity in ways that increase

opportunity. The other half involves changing structures directly. True opportunity will not result from funding structures that starve both community colleges and broad access four-year public universities. True opportunity will not result from the underfunding and the teacher and administrative turnover inherent in under-resourced K-12 schools. True opportunity will not result when health needs and labor market realities are excluded from efforts to improve education and job outcomes. True opportunity will not result if the enterprise of educating our poor is not innovative, with successful efforts supported and rewarded.

Lack of fundamental structural change may be linked to the failure of colleges to teach teachers, administrators, and local and state policy-makers how to (structurally and instructionally) improve the success of students who are multiple grade levels behind. Our entire teacher education and educational leadership curricula are void of such content. Yes, teachers learn cultural sensitivity, behavior management, and content-based knowledge. However they do not learn specifically how to improve a student's skills within a particular time frame when the student is behind a grade level or more. They do not learn how to enter an under-resourced context and aggravate change that will actually enhance student learning to generate this type of improvement in achievement for the students who demonstrate a need for it. Such approaches need to be essential components of teacher education and educational leadership curricula.

A national network of research faculty and equivalent research personnel based in our education schools and related "centers" needs to be funded in *coordinated* state level and national level efforts to observe and share what works in such K-12 school contexts to improve student achievement and improve and support student transition into a variety of college contexts. This effort must be coordinated. Researchers and faculty waste valuable resources operating as silos to advance the interests of our profession, our careers, and our institutions by competitively seeking funding, writing academic and other publications. Yet the important work of partnering with educational practitioners (call it outreach or service) to work with students in the P-20 pipeline too often rests as a third priority at best, and more likely, researchers dedicate about five hours of time to such efforts in any given week.

Who are these school practitioners to be centrally involved in this coordinated effort?: K-12 teachers and school leaders; school counselors; community college instructors, administrators, and district leaders; school boards and community college district boards; local government officials; and college administrators and decision-makers. We also need to recognize and incorporate the ground-level organizational knowledge about how institutions are experienced by students in their day-to-day negotiation of post-secondary educational contexts. There exists a range of postsecondary “managerial professionals” (Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997; Rhoades, 1998) who advise and coordinate students’ transitions into college as well as all outreach and recruitment efforts. These positions have grown particularly prevalent as universities attempt to improve student retention and graduation and now constitute about a third of all professionals at four-year public universities (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002).

Managerial professionals are higher education employees who are neither faculty nor administrators, but professional staff performing many functions for which faculty used to be responsible, including undergraduate academic advising and teaching unit-bearing classes. Managerial professionals “... share many characteristics of traditional liberal professions—a technical body of knowledge, advanced education (and in some cases certification), professional associations and journals, and codes of ethics. Yet they also mark a break with the liberal profession of faculty, being more closely linked and subordinate to managers, and indeed being very much managers themselves” (Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997: 22). Too often research efforts examine students, faculty, or administrators while neglecting these important players who are highly educated and manage and enforce organizational policies and procedures directly with students. They, therefore, witness first-hand the impact of particular policies on student experiences, decisions, and behaviors. They witness first-hand the diversity of circumstances and challenges students face and the differential impact organizational policies and procedures have on different students.

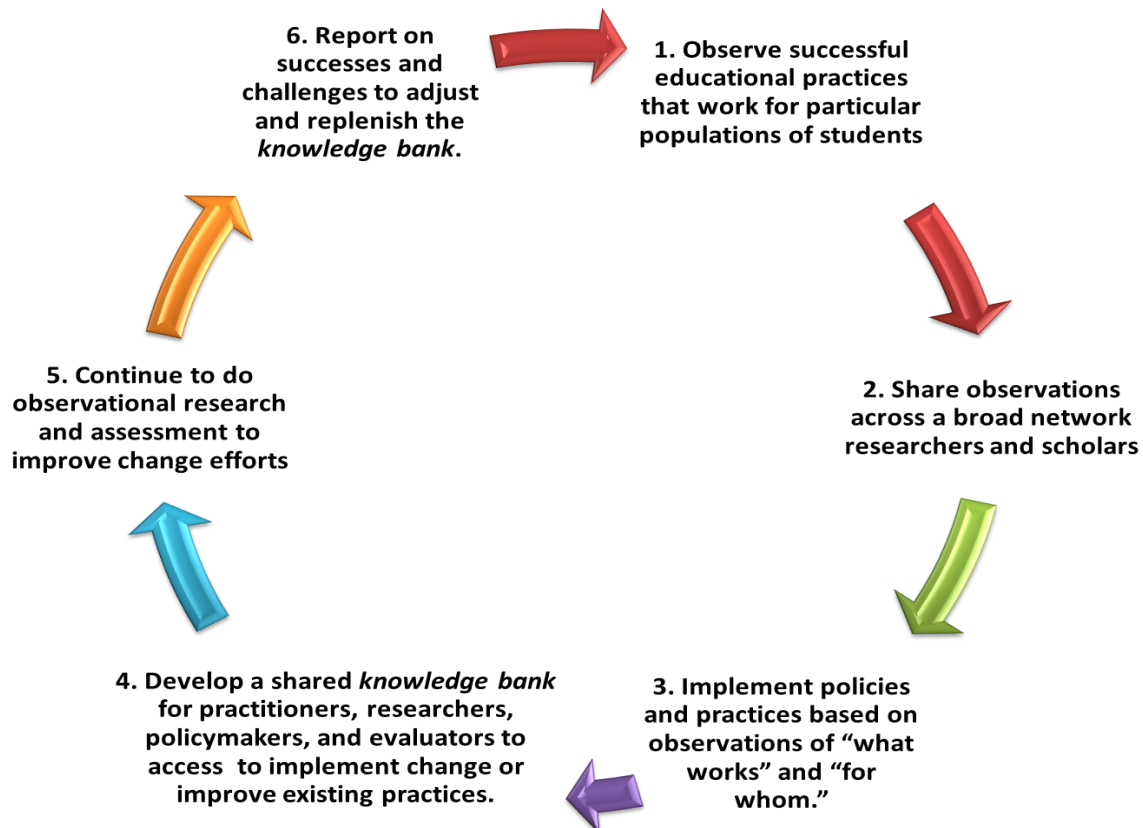
A missing piece in our efforts as researchers and “thought leaders” is lack of an incentive structure to work in a *coordinated multi-stage* fashion that incorporates the realities of the school

and college/university practitioners noted above. This coordinated effort, outlined in *Table 3* (below) and *Figure 4* (below), is compatible with four themes noted in Stanford University’s goal to build new frameworks for research on broad access higher education.

Table 3:

COORDINATED MULTI-STAGE RESEARCH—PRACTICE LOOP
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Observe successful educational practices that work for particular populations of students 2. Share such observations across a broad network of researchers and scholars 3. Implement policies and practices that forward these observations of “what works” and “for whom.” 4. Develop a shared <i>knowledge bank</i> of sorts that can be easily accessed by those practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and evaluators involved in implementing change or trying to improve existing practices. 5. Continue to do observational research and assessment to improve change efforts 6. Report on successes and challenges that rise to the surface based on this continual research and evaluation in order to adjust and replenish the <i>knowledge bank</i>.

Figure 4: Coordinated, multistage, research-practice loop



These coordinated efforts form a loop of activities that come full circle to affect change in a way that involves scholars as leaders, experts, and resources in the enterprise. This loop of linked knowledge and implementation can be entered at any point by any participant. Many individual departments, colleges, or research centers may be engaging in something similar on a smaller scale. For instance, the Community College Research Center (CCRC), in their research on developmental education and dual enrollment, provides a working attempt at such a loop, on a smaller scale. They have noted and documented what programs and efforts are happening within institutions and the degree to which they have been empirically assessed. They have performed their own assessments and also incorporated a sense of the organizational and administrative roadblocks, the resistance, and the financial limitations preventing more effective or wider implementation.

My recommendation is consistent with scaling up such enterprises to participate with colleagues nationally in this shared effort. For the knowledge bank to operate effectively, intentional efforts to participate in national dialogue and decision-making to build consensus about what works would need to occur. This intentional effort could *not* be realized simply by the uploading and sharing of papers generated from multiple players. The success of the “loop” would need to involve designated staff and professionals to work with a national network of scholars to devise knowledge bank content tailored to practitioners for implementation and appropriate evaluation of practice and policy efforts.

Furthermore, the “for whom” component is relevant to the issue of diversity. For too long, it has been assumed that what works for dominant and more elite groups can work in under-resourced contexts with differing challenges. This is a hypothesis that thus far has not been born out in reality. Resource rich schools with great pools of upper-middle-class parental capital and assistance function very well for those students. The same structure has not been shown to function very well in the absence of such parental support. In fact, I would argue our public schools are structured to succeed dependent upon parental resources. It makes little sense to expect the same school structures to operate effectively for low-SES communities. Perhaps examples of schools over the past several decades that have experienced some success can be assessed and utilized for the

knowledge bank. The work of Bud Mehan and other reform efforts would be ideal candidates for inclusion (Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006). There are a multitude large and small success stories in states and cities across the nation. We know what doesn't work, but there is a dearth of shared information about what has worked.

Re-Prioritizing

Similarly in higher education, we need to shift our thinking from a framework of hierarchy based on selectivity to one that favors a horizontal view treating access as a positive value. As Arum and Roksa (2011) reveal, we need to give teaching and learning more serious priority. Likely, it is in open and broad access institutions that intentional efforts to improve teaching and learning are being applied. What works in this regard? Rather than accountability systems that prioritize degree completion, we need to move toward one that *prioritizes learning* and progress.

Recent agendas pushed by state boards of trustees, legislatures, and governors focus on increasing output and efficiency in public colleges and universities, like the National Governors Association's (2010) *Complete to Compete* initiative. Measuring success solely in this way (particularly when unfunded) leads to the de-prioritizing of the learning that takes place in broad access institutions, and it will always increase pressure for broad access institutions to do one of two things – increase selectivity or shortchange access (and high academic standards) in the interests of higher completion. Engaging in the loop detailed above puts scholars and researchers in a better position to lobby for an agenda based on what works in real practice, with a contextualized sense of what is feasible in terms of scale and within particular resource parameters. We will also be in a better position to advise resource allocation.

Winston's (1999) unique economic perspective on what he describes as the complicated and unusual industry of higher education may be informative. He argues, in part, in this industry "the production of education depends to some extent on peer effects generated" (Winston, 1999, p.14). He posits that elite colleges benefit from the peer interaction that occurs between the student-consumers themselves because these institutions are able to control the selection of students into

their college. In other words, elite colleges depend on their own customers to supply an important input to production. Elite institutions strive for a reputation of academic excellence as a measure of instructional quality, yet such institutions can cut corners instructionally because part of the quality of the college experience elite colleges can offer involves interaction with other ‘quality’ students. Therefore, they are not compelled to offer small classes or instructional techniques that prioritize learning outcomes because students interact with other high quality peers on campus, and that aspect of their education creates valuable learning and engagement opportunities. This is consistent with various ethnographic and historical studies of elite colleges (Karabel, 2006; Soares, 2007; Stevens, 2007).

Borrowing Winston’s framework, I suggest broad access four-year institutions and open access community colleges have considerably less to no control over student quality, so the benefits of peer interaction with ‘quality’ peers are not part of the educational goods and services such institutions can offer. The economics of how selectivity operates to ‘subsidize’ higher achieving and more desirable students who gain admission to more elite institutions needs to be addressed. Couldn’t we recognize access and diversity as a metrics of value just as we do selectivity? Furthermore, the ways in which more open access institutions invest in and achieve measured *learning* gains, particularly for more diverse and lower-achieving students, should be rewarded in ways that translates into organizational subsidies to further such efforts (in the same way donors subsidize the education of students in elite colleges).

To progress with such an agenda, data collection on such measurable learning gains would need to be prioritized at the classroom, programmatic, and institutional level. Researchers would need to contextualize each instructional approach, intervention, or academic support effort. Research would also need to focus on the value students see in particular instructional approaches and peer interactions in broad access institutions. Students may highly value socio-academically integrative opportunities within and outside the classroom, with other students, with instructors, and with managerial professionals in ways that do not mirror the integrative preferences and behaviors of more traditional students (Deil-Amen, 2011). What students in more selective institutions

perceive as valuable may not be as relevant to students enrolled at broad access institutions. The integrative moments valued by commuting, older, and lower-achieving students situated in local communities may differ drastically based on their learning needs and expectations about what college life should entail (Deil-Amen, 2011). How ‘selective’ or how involved in campus life their peers are may not be as important as how helpful they can be. The sheer magnitude of available peers may not be as useful as finding a few key matches with whom to connect and mutually benefit in meaningful socio-academic ways, especially given the more transient nature of commuting students (Deil-Amen, 2011).

The issue of racial/ethnic diversity is salient here as well. Unlike underrepresented racial minority students who live on four-year campuses and tend to seek commonality along racial/ethnic lines, racial minority commuting students may *not* view campus as the ideal place to interact with same race peers. Many come from already segregated high schools and neighborhoods, and, while enrolled in college, their primary social/cultural life remains off-campus, where they engage in same-race, same-ethnicity community interactions through friendships, churches, and other community involvements. They therefore (with the exception of highly racially homogenous commuting colleges), may likely expect their time on campus to be an opportunity to interact *across* racial lines (Deil-Amen, 2011). In this respect, they are ironically like white students who come from highly segregated predominantly white schools and neighborhoods who seek a level of diversity in their campus experience. However, commuting students differ in that the dominant purpose of such interactions is more likely to be academic than social (Deil-Amen, 2011).

Again, this subjectivity of students and how they value, understand, and negotiate their open and broad access college contexts are severely understudied areas of inquiry. Most have some common understandings about what more traditional students seek and value in a “college experience.” Less understood is how the *majority* of students experience and find value in college-going that involves commuting to campus and incorporating college into their work and family life. Less understood is how students who struggle academically interpret their pursuit of college. All of this is about the sociology at the heart of Tinto’s persistence framework – how students perceive a

normative congruence between their own expectations and what their college offers (Deil-Amen, 2011). Without drawing from persistence frameworks directly, Rebecca Cox (2009) superbly elaborates these dynamics by describing how the fears of community college remedial students shape their actions, interpretations of, and response to remedial instruction.

Studying student subjectivity in context is also valuable for understanding how students from very similar demographic backgrounds may respond to challenges in uniquely different ways. Recent research shows students may frame and interpret the same challenges quite differently, which thereby influences how they differentially respond to those challenges (Deil-Amen & Goldrick-Rab, 2009; Martinez & Deil-Amen, 2011). The classic sociological exploration of how agency and structure intersect is relevant in this regard, and more developed theories of resiliency in higher education are needed (Everett-Haynes & Deil-Amen, 2011).

From Margin to Center

I will use remediation (developmental education) as a final example of this marginalizing of the majority. Our conceptual categories tend to measure, categorize, label, and therefore frame remedial students as deviant exceptions to the rule while “college-ready” students are framed as the norm. In other words, being underprepared for college is marginalized while college readiness is normalized. This greatly delegitimizes two-year colleges, for which serving remedial/developmental students is now a *central* function, with approximately 60 percent of community college students demonstrating a need for at least one developmental course (Adelman, 1996; Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey, 2006). Some community colleges serving mainly low-income and minority students have upwards of three-quarters needing remediation (McClenney, 2009).

Normalizing college-readiness while treating remedial students as a distinctly different group, creates a non-remedial/remedial dichotomy that downplays the tremendous *lack* of college readiness throughout postsecondary education, not just on the borderlines of remedial testing and placement (Deil-Amen, 2011). When we consider more broadly the vast number of two-year *and four-year* students who are not referred to or enrolled in remedial classes, yet are, for the most part,

equally unprepared for the rigors of their college classes, the underprepared student group swells to a majority in higher education overall. The non-remedial/remedial dichotomy masks an important reality – underpreparedness for college is now a norm in our higher education system.

This dichotomizing also marginalizes the study of underpreparedness to narrow comparisons of the outcomes of remedial students with comparable samples of non-remedial students within the same types of institutions. Many studies have analyzed the relative benefits or disadvantages of participation in remedial coursework by using complex and precise statistical tools and quasi-experimental approaches to account for selection bias and differences in the placement of students into remedial coursework (Attewell & Lavin, 2007; Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Bailey, 2009; Bettinger & Long, 2009; Calcagno & Long, 2008). Their purpose is to compare similarly prepared students exposed to different remedial ‘treatments.’ These studies have shown mixed effects and some modest positive benefits from exposure to remedial coursework but no strong evidence that access to remediation in community college substantially facilitates or hinders credit or degree completion. Taken together, the most striking yet underreported finding from these and similar studies is that *nearly all underprepared students* – both those who are enrolled in remedial/developmental classes and those who are not – struggle to persist, are at-risk of non-completion, and are significantly delayed in their acquisition of a college credential. As a whole, underprepared students (remedial or not) are more similar to each other than they are to college-ready students, yet our research tends to focus on differences *among* the underprepared.

In addition, marginalizing remediation locates discussion of it in the community college sector, which has several consequences. First, this makes community college remedial students doubly marginalized, sectioned off in our conceptual realities as fundamentally different from the rest of postsecondary students. Second, it renders invisible the experiences of four-year college and university students who face the challenges of remediation and underpreparedness (more broadly defined) within very different, yet similarly challenging, institutional contexts. Those beginning in the four-year public sector, for instance, may be just as vulnerable as those in community colleges,

especially given the contexts they face – huge lecture classes with hundreds of students and workloads and grading standards often strikingly different than their high school standards. While those students – especially those lower-income, racial minority, and first-generation college students – who gain access to universities are often viewed as the success stories relative to those who enroll in community colleges, my research reveals these students are similarly vulnerable to failure. Many find themselves underprepared to succeed at the university, and their attempts to cope intersect with other relevant components of diversity. They struggle with GPA's low enough to lose their financial aid, stereotype threat (Steele and Aronson, 1995), doubts about their ability to succeed academically, fears of being stigmatized, and reluctance to ask for help (Deil-Amen, 2011; Martinez & Deil-Amen, 2011). The words of one underprepared (non-remedial) African-American male university freshman sum up this combination of fears, particularly fear of being the example of the low-achieving minority student that his peers and instructors expect:

A lot of time I feel pressure to be a successful black man, seeing as a lot of black men are in jail, dead, at my age, especially where I grew up... You think about it like, man, I don't want to be the dumb black kid in the class. "Just because he's black, he's not smart enough." I want to prove to them we can do it too... All the time I wonder if I got this grade because they were like, "Oh he can't think at this level, so all his papers can only be a B, or all his papers can only be a C" or "Oh, this is the black kid's paper. Looks like he tried, but he's not as smart as the white kid." I think about that all the time. I want to prove everything that people hold against black people wrong. Like they're like, "Oh the black person always needs help. Oh he's not smart, they're not smart enough." To an extent, I am kind of afraid to ask for help, and all the time I think to myself, "Man, am I smart enough? ... Am I not smart enough as a person? ... or would it be, "Oh, he's black. It's ok. He's just not that smart." You know what I'm saying? Man, that's just annoying. (pressing his hands to his forehead) Got to get it by yourself. Got to understand this.... I feel ostracized a lot.

Conceptually dismantling remedial/non-remedial dichotomies can motivate a broader approach that centers on common challenges faced by all underprepared students, regardless of their institutional label/designation as remedial or non-remedial, and in light of the different institutional contexts. In fact, Adelman (1999; 2006) supports this idea, as he highlights the prominence of high school academic rigor over remedial placement and institution type in influencing bachelor's degree completion. Bailey (2009) also moves in this direction by emphasizing underpreparedness rather

than remedial designation, describing how students enter college “with academic skills weak enough in at least one major subject area to threaten their ability to succeed in college-level courses” (Bailey, 2009, p. 13).

Future Directions

Future scholarship should consider the extent to which theories and conceptual frameworks are driven by the marginalization of the majority (the nontraditional *other half*) and the prioritization of the minority (idealized traditional models) noted above. Analyses should also consider how flows of money and resources are guided or supported by this prioritization and marginalization. Attention should be focused on how policy and practice decisions are made within the context of this framework of prioritization and marginalization. Such understandings should be juxtaposed against the findings from the integrated loop of research-practice described above.

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