FOREWORD

The National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good (National Forum) at the University of Michigan (U-M) strives to increase awareness, understanding, commitment, and action in support of the public service mission of higher education. As part of this mission, the National Forum collaborated in April 2013 with the Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education (CCCIE) to convene a day-long program of discussions and presentations focused on the critical role of community colleges in the United States as facilitators of immigrant student access to educational and workforce opportunities. This report details key points of information shared and the conversation that ensued during the symposium entitled, Open Access: Integrating Immigrant Students in America’s Community Colleges. It also places the work of integrating immigrant student populations in the context of ongoing policy change at the state and national levels affecting immigration and postsecondary education.

CCCIE represented a natural partner for this convening. The Consortium is a national network of institutions serving high percentages of immigrant students, as well as national research and professional organizations. These organizations include the Migration Policy Institute and American Association of Community Colleges. Hosted by Westchester Community College in Westchester County, New York, CCCIE facilitates sharing of institutional practices that support immigrant student success, publishes research on the growing presence of immigrant students in community colleges and the imperatives of serving this population, and advocates for policies and practices that promote an inclusive posture toward immigrant students.

The National Forum and CCCIE, in collaboration with U-M’s Community College Interdisciplinary Research Forum (CCIRF), convened members of the university’s faculty—as well as graduate and undergraduate students—at the Michigan League in Ann Arbor on April 9, 2013.

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Each presenter offered a unique contribution, ranging from long-time institutional views to national policy perspective. We at the National Forum hope this report not only documents a series of important and interesting discussions, but also sparks action and continued research into the vital role of community colleges as facilitators of the American Dream.

We acknowledge the generous support of the Lumina Foundation, which made this convening possible.

National Forum
October 2013
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States faces a clear choice: enact policies and provide resources for a growing immigrant student population that enable new Americans to achieve their full potential, or persist in allowing a patchwork of policies and practices to inhibit the ability of millions of people to participate fully in this country’s economy and civic life.

Community colleges have historically been designed as access points for immigrant students. To address the role community colleges play as facilitators of the American Dream for this population, the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good and the Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education convened a day-long symposium at the University of Michigan to examine ongoing challenges and opportunities in serving an increasingly diverse immigrant population.

The convening identified a set of challenges faced by community colleges serving large numbers of immigrant students that included:

- **Emerging demographic trends**, especially growth of the Latino/Hispanic population
- **Public funding support** for postsecondary education and **cost containment**
- **Changing economy and the need for community colleges to adapt** to prepare students to fill the jobs of the future
- **Assessing the legal and political environments** in which colleges are situated regarding provision of public benefits such as in-state residency tuition to undocumented students
- **Maintaining affordable tuition rates** as public financial support for postsecondary education declines
- **Providing focused resources** to support immigrant student success, **given budgetary pressures**
As community colleges face these challenges and others, growing populations of immigrant students also present opportunities that include:

- **Opening space for postsecondary education to participate in public discourse** about the role and future of new Americans in the workforce
- **Growing a network of engaged community colleges** focused on immigrant student success
- **Developing energy behind a national degree/certification completion agenda**
- **Empowering immigrant students as leaders** and supporting student social networks to facilitate and encourage immigrant students’ completion of high school and community college and transfer to four-year institutions
- **Participating in institutional and professional networks** committed to supporting immigrant students
- **Advocating for both economic and moral imperatives of in-state residency tuition benefits for undocumented students** in keeping with the open access mission of community colleges
- **Establishing partnerships with local foundations and other sources of financial support to ease financial burdens** associated with college attendance for immigrant students from low income backgrounds.

Institutional leaders play an essential role in identifying resources to serve immigrant students and ensuring students can access available resources, regardless of their first point of contact with a community college. Institutional leaders can also advocate for policies and practices designed to facilitate, rather than inhibit, the educational and personal success of immigrant students, including undocumented students.
Reflecting on the day’s discussions, convening participants identified a set of three challenging questions for further examination

1. How might comprehensive immigration reform and state policy changes affect the ability of community colleges to serve and support immigrant students—including undocumented students?

2. How can more institutions and their leaders learn about and implement approaches to immigrant student support and success?

3. What data are available on immigrant and undocumented students? How can the quality of data be improved, and how can researchers and educational leaders put data to use in allocating resources, tracking student progress and outcomes, setting policy priorities, etc.?

These questions and others will continue to guide scholarship on the role of community colleges as access points to socioeconomic mobility and civic engagement of new Americans in the twenty-first century.
INTRODUCTION

Nearly half of undergraduate students in the United States are enrolled in the nation’s community colleges. Among the community college student population, an estimated one in four students comes from an immigrant background. While community colleges have been the gateway to educational access, they have not been as successful in leading to deeper attainment. Unfortunately, graduation rates at community colleges on average lag behind those of four-year institutions. Further, U.S. postsecondary graduation rates lag behind those of many other developed nations. To address this achievement gap, President Obama has set a goal of increasing attainment rates in the United States to their previous top position by 2020. Aligned with these national efforts, the Lumina Foundation has worked toward a goal that 60 percent of Americans obtain a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential by 2025. Much of the work to achieve this goal must be done by community colleges; much of the growth in degree attainment must come from the diverse student populations they serve.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

As one component of the administration’s pursuit of this goal, the Department of Homeland Security is now processing applications from young people brought to this country without documentation by their guardians and who desire to remain in the United States to live and learn. This initiative recognizes the important contribution current undocumented students could make to the U.S. economy, if they have the opportunity to acquire the skills they need to achieve their potential.

On June 15, 2012, President Obama announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which allows qualifying minors lacking immigration documentation to

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iv Century Foundation Task Force on Preventing Community Colleges from Becoming Separate and Unequal. Ibid.

v Ibid.
remain legally in the United States, provided they maintain clean criminal records and either pursue or have received a high school diploma or equivalency. Eligibility for “deferred action” can also be obtained through honorable discharge from a branch of the United States military. According to Joseph Hankin, president of Westchester Community College in New York, DACA presents a “powerful incentive” for community colleges to pursue an active agenda serving undocumented immigrant students in pursuit of postsecondary education and the improved workforce outcomes a postsecondary credential makes possible in the twenty-first century economy.\(^\text{vi}\)

Further, the open access mission of community colleges compels these institutions to facilitate educational success for this under-served student population.\(^\text{vii}\) DACA presents great promise for the estimated 65,000 undocumented students who graduate from American high schools each year, only to then face fear of deportation as they pursue postsecondary education or employment.

During the time of this proceedings report’s development, members of Congress introduced proposals for comprehensive immigration reform that would enable a path to citizenship for some 11.2 million undocumented immigrants residing in this country. As stated in the final bill that passed the Senate on June 27, 2013 (S.744), this path is contingent upon regular employment or enrollment in secondary or higher education, demonstration of English language skills and knowledge of U.S. history and civics or enrollment in a course of study in English and U.S. history/civics, among other requirements. An expedited road to citizenship would be provided for undocumented young people, including those who entered the U.S. before the age of 16, graduated from high school (or received a GED) in the U.S., and attended at least two years of college or served four years in the military. Streamlined procedures may be adopted for DACA recipients.

The bill also repeals section 505 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, and this repeal would provide more options for states that want to offer in-state tuition to undocumented students who are otherwise eligible.


\(^\text{vii}\) Ibid.
National Convening

The National Forum and CCCIE convened a series of panel discussions and presentations, *Open Access: Integrating Immigrant Students in America’s Community Colleges* in the context of these demographic and policy developments. The convening sought to engage members of the U-M community and featured presenters in a day-long conversation about the role of community colleges as facilitators of educational and personal success for immigrant students, and especially undocumented students.

The day’s activities considered three primary questions

1. **What is the role of community colleges in serving immigrant students?**
2. **What policies and practices facilitate immigrant student success?**
3. **What role can community college leaders play in positioning their institutions to provide resources needed to enable immigrant student success?**

The following report details how presenters and convening participants engaged these questions, and then presents compelling questions for further investigation.
COMMUNITY COLLEGES: ACCESS POINTS FOR IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

Teresita Wisell, Associate Dean of Westchester Community College and Executive Director of the Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, opened the conference in deliberation by framing the work of the Consortium, she noted, “Prior to CCCIE’s founding, there was no national voice for community colleges on their role in immigrant education.” CCCIE provides this voice, recognizing the imperative for community colleges to serve a large and growing population of new Americans in the twenty-first century.

The Consortium pursues this goal through a varied approach

- raising visibility through website resources, articles, and conference presentations
- encouraging innovation through research, technical assistance and sharing promising practices
- impacting policy changes and strengthening the field through strategic partnerships

CCCIE’s activities are supported by a Blue Ribbon Panel of institutional leaders, professional association representatives and researchers in the field of immigrant education. The panel gathers annually to examine the field and to set priorities for the following year. Between meetings, CCCIE conducts conference calls, presents research and findings at conferences, and develops toolkits for institutions serving high proportions of immigrants in their student populations. These activities enable leaders and scholars to share promising practices and exchange resources that better equip community colleges to address the needs of their students.

ATTENTION TO IMMIGRANTS CONSISTENT WITH COMMUNITY COLLEGE MISSION

According to long-time community college president Dr. Martha McLeod, institutions like hers are charged with “taking students from where they are to where they want to be.” To accomplish this mission, community colleges must develop a deep understanding of students’ needs and the workforce needs of their surrounding areas. The role of the colleges is to prepare students with the skills they will need to succeed in various environments, but especially either moving onto a four-year institution or into the job market.

Although community colleges consistently face challenges associated with acquiring needed resources for their educational programs, partnerships with local businesses, industry, and non-profit organizations offer the promise of overcoming those challenges. McLeod emphasized that partnerships with business and industry, as well as with non-profit institutions and health care providers, are critical in connecting what students learn during
their time pursuing a degree or certification and the knowledge upon which they draw in
their eventual professions. This is especially important for immigrant students trying to gain
entry to meaningful employment.

Under-resourced institutions serving students who often come from low socioeconomic
backgrounds may struggle to provide the level of financial support immigrant students need
to remain committed to their academic programs. Further, even open access institutions
require students to hold a high school diploma or equivalency to enroll. One-third of
immigrant students age 25 or older, however, lack such a credential, significantly limiting
the population of prospective adult learners community colleges are positioned to serve.

By comparison, only 11% of native-born Americans age 25 or older lack a high school
diploma or equivalent certification.iii

According to presenters at this convening, immigrant students are attracted to
community colleges because the institutions provide flexible course schedules, a large
variety of vocational programs, employer-recognized credentials, affordable course
credits, and readily available English language instruction programs. To the extent any community college
is able to offer these features, it will be well positioned to serve the needs of immigrant
students. However, expanding resources to educate the growing number of immigrant
students is becoming more difficult as states face challenging budgetary decisions. Since
this problem will likely persist for immigrant-serving institutions, supporting programs
through a mix of public and private sector funds and developing community-based
partnerships that effectively leverage resources becomes especially critical.

**Strategic Resource Development**

In order to connect available resources that could support the educational attainment of
immigrant students, institutions are starting to designate full-time staffing to these issues or
to create resource centers to serve this portion of their population.

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iiii U.S. Census Data, as cited by Migration Policy Institute’s Migration Information Source. (2013). Retrieved May
Erin Howard, Latino Outreach and Student Services Director at Bluegrass Community and Technical College (BCTC) in Lexington, Kentucky, fills one such position.

Although Howard’s position focuses primarily on students from Latino backgrounds, her office is prepared to serve all immigrant students by providing them the information and direction they need to navigate processes including financial aid, enrollment, and academic support.

According to Howard, BCTC maintains a “no wrong door policy.” Regardless of the office a student first approaches with a question or concern about enrollment at BCTC, he or she will leave with the guidance needed to advance in pursuit of the designated goals. This approach grows out of a task force established by BCTC’s president to examine how the institution could best serve the Lexington area’s growing population of immigrants.

BCTC’s institutional commitment to serving immigrant students is also reflected by the outreach efforts Howard coordinates through her office to encourage middle and high school students to plan for college as part of their future.

The Office of Hispanic Outreach and Services provides a comprehensive set of services, including:

- leading BCTC’s effort to serve the growing Hispanic community in Lexington and central Kentucky
- developing a rich cultural and family oriented environment in which students feel accepted and able to succeed
- assisting students in all processes (admissions, advising, etc.) during their enrollment at BCTC
- facilitating transfer to a four-year university or to the workforce upon completion of an associate’s degree, certification, or pre-baccalaureate study
- coordinating cultural and social activities
- providing a mentoring program composed of community leaders and professionals as well as faculty, staff, and established students of BCTC
- serving as a bilingual resource for BCTC faculty, staff, students, and alumni
- developing fundraising events for BCTC’s Hispanic Scholarship Fund

BCTC has been able to provide this comprehensive set of services as a result of commitment from the institution’s executive leadership, the resourcefulness of its Latino Outreach Coordinator, and partnerships with local business and schools. Efforts such as BCTC’s, however, must become part of an institutional culture to be sustainable beyond presidential administrations and personnel turnover. CCCIE seeks to share examples such as BCTC’s to demonstrate for campuses across the country the possibilities of taking a comprehensive approach to immigrant student support. A 2011 CCCIE report included a Framework for Supporting Immigrant Student Success that describes 11 key factors contributing to the innovative practices of its member colleges. The framework provides community colleges with a strategy for launching and sustaining comprehensive immigrant education programs.\(^x\)

BCTC receives support from the Lumina Foundation’s Latino Student Success Initiative to provide its set of services. The Initiative seeks to enable 78,000 Latinos in Kentucky to “attain a high-quality degree or credential by 2025.”\(^xi\) Even without external support, however, institutions serving high proportions of immigrant students can examine their existing resources and streamline processes for students seeking postsecondary credentials. They can also provide staff training and establish “no wrong door” policies of their own.

Ongoing Challenges for Community Colleges Serving Immigrant Students

- Rapidly changing demographic trends, especially growth of the Latino/Hispanic population
- Contentious politics around immigration and access to public benefits
- Public funding support for postsecondary education and cost containment
- Changing economy and the need for community colleges to adapt to prepare employees to fill the jobs the future

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Opportunities for Community Colleges Serving Immigrant Students

- DACA and congressional immigration reform efforts have opened space for postsecondary education to participate in public discourse about the role and future of new Americans in the workforce
- Participation in a growing network of community colleges focused on immigrant student success
- Energy behind a national degree/certification completion agenda
- Empowering immigrant students as leaders and supporting student social networks to facilitate and encourage immigrant students’ completion of high

Recommendations for Community Colleges Serving Immigrant Students

- Conduct comprehensive reviews of local workforce needs and tailor vocational programs to equip students with skills they will need to succeed after program completion
- Provide outreach and student support services in a way that reflects a “no wrong door” policy; provide staff training to enable any office on campus to help immigrants pursuing postsecondary education
- Partner with local schools, area businesses and community-based non-profits to strengthen the educational pipeline and create hands-on educational and career training opportunities for enrolled students
- Advocate for financial aid and admissions policies that support immigrant student success, including undocumented students
- Collaborate with immigrant youth-led organizations, immigrant advocacy coalitions, and other community-based groups to increase college access and success for all immigrant students, regardless of status
POLICIES AND PRACTICES SUPPORTING IMMIGRANT STUDENT SUCCESS

Postsecondary institutions serve growing populations of immigrant students at a time of shifting policy contexts affecting immigration in the United States. In the year prior to this convening, states including Maryland and Massachusetts, for example, passed laws enabling public institutions to offer in-state tuition rates for undocumented students. In November 2012, Maryland became the first state to pass such a law by popular referendum. Just weeks after the Open Access convening, in April 2013, Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper signed into law an in-state residency tuition benefit for undocumented students in that state. In contrast, states including Alabama, Arizona, and Georgia have adopted policies placing severe restrictions on the ability of undocumented residents to receive public benefits, including in-state residency tuition.

Despite a fractured and often contentious political environment at both the national and state levels, many institutions have found ways under the law to position themselves to serve immigrant students, regardless of their immigration status. CCCIE’s Blue Ribbon Panel member institutions are situated in states with a range of formal policies in place affecting access of immigrant and undocumented students to postsecondary educational benefits. The Consortium consists of institutions in Arizona, California, Kentucky, Illinois, New York, and Texas, among others. These institutions focus resources on facilitating student success in keeping with their missions to serve all deserving students pursuing educational opportunities.

Based on the commitment of CCCIE’s member institutions, community colleges across the country can start to take action to institute policies and practices of their own to remain open access points for immigrant students, including undocumented students.

According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, only 5-10% of undocumented students who graduate from high school pursue postsecondary education.\textsuperscript{xii} DACA enables undocumented young people residing in the United States to come forward

and register their presence without fear of deportation, but high tuition rates at public institutions remain a significant deterrent to postsecondary enrollment.

CCCIE is joined in its work to enhance educational opportunities for undocumented students by both student activists and national higher education associations. During the convening, Julieta Garibay represented United We Dream, the largest network of immigrant youth-led organizations in the country. United We Dream has played a key advocacy role in increasing college access and success for undocumented students and has been instrumental in supporting DACA and comprehensive immigration reform.

Immigrant student-led organizations are also influential on community college campuses and in communities. They often work in partnership with institutional leaders to increase resources for all immigrant students.

According to James Hermes of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), institutions are bound to the workforce development needs of their regions and local communities; their ability to provide a well-prepared workforce for their area needs is bound to their ability to provide accessible, affordable postsecondary opportunities to all students meeting their enrollment requirements.

Beyond this economic imperative, however, National Forum Director John Burkhardt pointed to the moral imperative of postsecondary institutions to recognize the barriers of cost and culture faced by undocumented students and to address them by directing necessary resources to enable students to overcome those barriers. The young people poised to benefit from in-state residency tuition graduated from U.S. high schools, came to this country at the direction of their guardians, and know the United State as home. Denial of these benefits effectively shuts undocumented students out of postsecondary education—the very means most able to enhance their social mobility and ability to contribute in today’s economy and civic life.
Ongoing Challenges for Community Colleges Serving Immigrant Students

- Assessing the legal and political environments in which they are situated regarding provision of public benefits such as in-state residency tuition to undocumented students
- Maintaining affordable tuition rates as public financial support for postsecondary education declines
- Providing focused resources to support immigrant student success, given budgetary pressures

Opportunities for Community Colleges Serving Immigrant Students

- Participating in institutional and professional networks committed to supporting immigrant students
- Advocating for both economic and moral imperatives of in-state residency tuition benefits for undocumented students in keeping with the open access mission of community colleges
- Establishing partnerships with local foundations and other sources of financial support to ease financial burdens associated with college attendance for immigrant students from low income backgrounds
INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS AND SUPPORT FOR IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

Throughout the convening, the essential role of senior campus leaders in positioning community colleges to serve immigrant students presented a recurring theme of conversation. President Martha McLeod of Asnuntuck Community College (CT), Erin Howard of Bluegrass Community & Technical College, and presenters from CCCIE all pointed to the need for improved data on the prevalence and educational needs of immigrant students. The nation’s patchwork of state and federal laws affecting immigration and postsecondary education complicates the ability of institutions to gather comprehensive data, for example, on the proportions of their student populations lacking immigration documentation. Without comprehensive data, institutional leaders often encounter difficulties ascertaining how best to direct resources to serve their current and prospective students.

Campuses that are committed to immigrant student success take an intentional approach to serving this population as a result of presidential leadership. Westchester Community College in New York, CCCIE’s host institution, benefits from the long-time leadership of President Joseph Hankin. President Hankin has maintained Westchester’s commitment to serving immigrant students and undocumented youth.

Demographics and economic conditions will continue to change across presidential administrations. However, even as community colleges continue to face strains on their resources, there is the educational imperative to serve students they enroll. Much of the discussion at this convening around leadership focused on how institutions can maintain their commitment to serving immigrant students in ways that span inevitable changes in personnel.

To institutionalize an inclusive orientation toward serving immigrant students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, President McLeod of Asnuntuck Community College stressed again the importance of partnerships with K-12 public schools, businesses and industry groups, and non-profit organizations, including medical care providers. These partnerships, in McLeod’s and AACC’s James Hermes’s view, should stress the workforce development imperative of community colleges. By stressing the need for a skilled local workforce, community colleges gain investment from area partners that sustain programs.
designed to build needed skills of students who often enroll in those institutions and who become part of the local workforce.

Institutional leaders have an important role to play as public advocates for policies and practices that support the educational and personal success of their current and prospective students. As policymakers address the intersections of immigration and postsecondary education, forward-thinking community college leaders have a stake in making a case for policies such as in-state residency tuition and the availability of financial aid for undocumented students. Such inclusive policies are in keeping with the open access mission and values of community colleges and postsecondary education’s public service mission to enhance social mobility.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXAMINATION

As is often the case in such discussions, the group raised as many questions as they addressed. Several important questions surfaced from the group’s consideration of the issues.

Three primary questions for continued attention:

1. How might comprehensive immigration reform and state policy changes affect the ability of community colleges to serve and support immigrant students and undocumented students?

2. How can more institutions and their leaders learn about and implement approaches to immigrant student support and success?xiii

3. How do institutions access appropriate data and improve its use?

4. How can the quality of data on immigrant students be improved?

5. How can researchers and educational leaders put data to use in allocating resources, tracking student progress and outcomes, setting policy priorities, etc.?

xiii Interested leaders might consult tools available from CCCIE (cccie.org) or the uLEAD Network (http://uleadnet.org/).
CONCLUSION

The convening hosted at the University of Michigan by the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good and the Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education explored challenges and opportunities community colleges face as they serve increasingly diverse student populations and a population that includes many undocumented students facing significant hurdles to continuing their educational careers beyond high school. The barriers to access faced by many of these students threaten to further embed a shadow population of high school graduates with few opportunities to contribute to the nation’s economy and few chances to gain the skills they need to achieve their potential. Given their open access mission, affordability relative to four-year institutions, and workforce development imperative, community colleges present a logical access point to the American Dream for many of these students.

Based on the presentations and discussions throughout Open Access: Integrating Immigrant Students in America’s Community Colleges, participants developed questions for further exploration and research. The group also developed a deeper sense of the essential role community colleges play in serving this country’s immigrant student population. Researchers, policymakers, policy advocates, and institutional leaders must work to make informed decisions that align with the public service mission of postsecondary education and enable millions of new Americans to achieve their potential and contribute to strengthening this nation’s economy and democracy in the twenty-first century.