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CHAPTER · ONE

The Time Is Now: A Call for Student-Ready Colleges

In higher education, there is growing concern and accountability for student success among college leadership, and at state and national levels, out of a growing awareness of the persistent challenges that threaten higher education opportunities for millions of today's students. While many within the higher education community desire to improve student success, they continue to aspire for students who, when they enter college, are ready for the rigors of higher education and come with better standardized test scores, from high schools with better resources, with parents who attended college, with a sense of independence, with few distractions and fully focused on college. Yet issues of college accessibility, affordability, and success remain, and student success still prioritizes college readiness. So what's the harm in defining student success this way? While it is important for students to be as prepared as possible for a college education, defining student success primarily by students' college-readiness limits the possibilities for student success almost exclusively to pre-college factors over which higher education has only limited influence and places the burden of success in college almost entirely on the students. Here we advocate for a different vision of student success: a vision of the student-ready college as the optimal setting for student success and deeply rooted in the transformative power of higher education institutions, and their commitment to ensuring the success of students and students' capacity to participate in twenty-first-century life and work.

What does it mean to be a student-ready college? Being a student-ready college requires more than a mission statement that touts expressed commitments about student-centeredness or espouses philosophical ideals of inclusiveness, excellence, or

diversity. It requires more than aggressively implementing an assemblage of disconnected, piecemeal, or niche programs and initiatives to improve student recruitment, retention, and completion. Being a student-ready college is as much about how higher education institutions define student success and their relationship with students—and how they take action—as it is about the strategies they implement. Student-ready colleges take an intentional, systemic, holistic, and transformative approach to ensuring student learning and ensuring that every student receives what is needed to be successful. At student-ready colleges, students are responsible for doing the work needed to complete the path to a higher education credential, and the college takes leadership, ownership, and accountability for everything associated with curating the path through the institution and aligning learning and post-college outcomes. And all activities and services facilitate an equitable opportunity for every student to make steady, efficient progress toward completing their studies and to become fully informed and educated for civic and economic participation in a global, interconnected society.

Being a student-ready college is about how higher education institutions enact a culture across their campuses to ensure student success, and how they engage as members of the broader postsecondary ecosystem to help ensure student success. Student-ready colleges appreciate their role as complex, dynamic organisms within the larger postsecondary ecosystem, and they operate systemically within and across their various internal functions to support students. Moreover, they fully appreciate that students operate as fluid parts, moving organically between both the college and larger postsecondary ecosystem.

In honor of the student–institution relationship, student-ready colleges challenge the status quo, and stay attuned and responsive to the opportunities presented by the broader ecosystem as well as the implications the current context may have on the needs of students.

Student-ready colleges define student success in a way that represents a paradigm shift—reframing the student success conversation from one of pre-college characteristics and student deficits to one of student assets and institutional opportunity, leadership, and accountability. Student success is defined in terms that go beyond traditional notions and predictors of completion to include a focus on student learning, growth, and development that meets students where they are and addresses the needs they have along their journey through higher education.

At student-ready colleges, all services and activities facilitate an equal opportunity for every student to make steady, efficient progress toward completing their studies and fully participating in twenty-first-century life, work, and communities. Attention and accountability extend from admissions to the classroom and to every policy, practice, budget, and business decision that affects the student experience on campus. Financial aid office? Check. Student services? Yes. Informed choice and options for scheduling classes? Absolutely. Health, wellness, and other wraparound student support? Yes. The unique mix of institutional mission and academic programs? Absolutely. All of the above.

Further, student-ready colleges enact an institutional culture in which organizational learning and improvement are central institutional values and serve as the primary drivers of

institutional and individual action. All principles are aligned with the mission of the institution and shared among members of the campus community. At student-ready colleges, the commitment to leadership and collaboration is so elevated—all members of the campus community are empowered to be engaged as leaders and educators. Student-ready colleges are committed not only to student achievement but also to identifying and removing systemic barriers to the achievement of every student. They promote excellence for every student by ensuring and engaging every student in integrative learning experiences and high-impact practices. Instead of reserving these experiences for only a select few students, student-ready colleges make these experiences universally available so that all students have opportunities to engage in first-year seminars and experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, undergraduate research, diversity and global learning, integrative and service learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects.

In the first edition of *Becoming a Student-Ready College*, we shared a new lens through which campus leaders can view existing and emerging issues and the opportunity to transform institutions for the success of their students. We highlighted promising and innovative practices that we have witnessed in our work. These practices are not exhaustive but reflect a range of interventions occurring all across the higher education community. In the second edition, we seek to do the same, and—based on ideas and practices learned and observed in years of work with colleges across the nation and internationally—we offer recommendations to minimize the threats posed by current and future challenges to higher education students,

institutions, and communities. Although individual leaders can pursue the strategies outlined in this book, we recommend a collaborative approach—bringing administrators, faculty, and staff across the campus together with the broader postsecondary education ecosystem to mobilize, scale, and sustain these efforts. We recommend steps for collaborating with those outside the campus community, as progress will require partnerships—both internal and external—that represent concerted action for impact that benefits every student. We anticipate that for many institutional leaders, the transformation necessary to become a student-ready college will require more than tweaks or marginal changes and temporary pivots. Rather, becoming a student-ready college will require transforming institutional policies and practices as well as individual and shared attitudes and values.

We are honored to have served higher education in a variety of leadership positions within and alongside higher education institutions. We have worked with higher education institution, policy, and philanthropic leaders who seek to advance and support efforts aligned with quality education, racial equity, and college attainment. Our commitment to today's students—and the institutions that serve them well—is reflected in our recommendations. We hope this book adds to the collection of tools and resources that faculty, administrators, policy and philanthropic leaders, and all those who care about today's college students can draw upon for practical solutions.

As we continue to frame the vision of the student-ready college in this chapter, key elements regarding the new lens through which campus leaders must look to transform their campuses include looking at today's students and redefining

readiness; amplifying the intentional, systemic, and holistic approach, or science, of student readiness; and connecting the importance of student-ready colleges and positive post-college outcomes in the emerging economy.

The Quest for College-Ready Students and Redefining Readiness

For most educators, the goal of becoming a student-ready college is not difficult to embrace. After all, supporting students is an aspiration of all campus leaders. Although this concept will resonate with many, we recognize that, for some, enacting these recommendations may pose a challenge. The problem is not necessarily a lack of will; rather, some colleges simply are not structured to support this level of engagement. For others, there may be no expectation or requirement to be student-centric. And still others are struggling with competing pressures and demands.

Despite increasing attention on the need to improve student success, including increasing demands from campus leaders, policymakers, and the public for accountability and efficiency, the traditional definition of student success and the resulting higher education system design remain the status quo—that is, the onus for higher education attainment rests almost exclusively on the student. In general, students are expected to come to college ready to learn and able to immediately and seamlessly transition through a labyrinth of unprecedented academic and administrative responsibilities. In this paradigm, institutions anticipate that the best students are those who enter the most college-ready—as reflected by highest test

scores; the most well-resourced and well-connected parents, families, high schools, and communities; parents who attended and graduated from college; and so on.

We agree that students are highly engaged partners in their college success, and access to effective college preparation is important for all students. However, the construct of college readiness and the deployment of institutional resources toward recruiting and retaining primarily students who fit the college-ready profile severely limit the opportunity for all students to succeed in college. This approach assumes that most students entering college today are not ready to handle the responsibilities of college. As a result, the front end of the system design for college success privileges pre-college factors over which a student has limited control. Further, it obscures other factors, in addition to pre-college factors vis-à-vis college readiness that have significant implications for student success. While a portion of today's college students may struggle academically, for example, only about 25 percent of high-performing students with low incomes are likely to graduate from college, compared with 30 percent of low-performing students with high incomes. This challenges the notion that the smart, college-ready students will succeed, whereas the weaker, underprepared students will not.

The range of images of the ideal college student—with high-achieving, self-directed students on one end and students with high potential on the other—has far too many campus leaders lamenting the challenges of educating today's students and pining for an era long ago in American higher education when the students were different and more ideal students could be found. But this perspective defines students who do not fit

that narrow profile as deficient and excludes the broad range of students enrolling in higher education institutions today. Further, it absolves institutions from the responsibility to rectify systemic, structural, and other impediments to student success and again places the onus for college success solely on students.

Although admittedly there are differences between the students of today and previous cohorts, their similarities are fundamental. Like prior generations of students, today's students arrive at college with a desire to learn and grow both personally and professionally. Regardless of the decade in which they enter college, many students believe that a college degree is a prerequisite for a good life. Students have always believed that participating and succeeding in higher education will allow them to tap into greater levels of self-awareness and efficacy. They also share the expectation that college will prepare them to live and make a living. Hence, for generations, students have arrived at the doorsteps of our colleges and universities with high expectations and varying academic and personal needs. And historically, our colleges and universities have responded accordingly, seizing the opportunity to nurture and prepare these students to lead meaningful, productive lives.

Over the years, higher education has aimed to be responsive to the concerns of its students, but the present day finds too many in the higher education community either solemn in the quest to find the ideal college student or too constrained by external forces and demands to expand the box or to think outside it altogether. Given this scenario, we long for and reminisce about a golden age in American higher education when students all came to college well prepared and resources were readily

available to support them. But this never was the case. The idea that an ideal student or ideal college existed once upon a time is nothing more than a myth. America's colleges and universities have always appealed to students with diverse interests and levels of academic preparation, and resources have always had to be negotiated. The challenge for us today is that our system of higher education has grown exponentially over the past three centuries—and growth continues. As the system grows, so do the numbers of students who need additional support and preparation.

Clark Kerr wrote, "An appreciation of the evolution of higher education helps to develop perspective on contemporary issues, since historical context often reveals that our present problems are not all new ones" (as cited in Bullard, 2007, p. 12). In other words, the realities faced by today's college students simply provide a contemporary spin on issues previously encountered. A quick review of the history of higher education reveals that changing student needs have always stretched the system; and the system has, in turn, always adapted to accommodate the realities of the emergent student population. Even going back to the founding of the nation's first colleges in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—when going to college was a rarity except for those interested in the clergy—we find that Harvard College provided tutors in Greek and Latin for underprepared students (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998).

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, seminal legislative efforts—including the Morrill Land-Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890, the G.I. Bill of 1944, the Civil Rights Act of 1965, and the Higher Education Act of 1965—helped to make

higher education more accessible and affordable for millions more Americans (Thelin, 2011). As a result of these policies, thousands of deserving students enrolled in college, and while many had to adjust to the social dimensions of higher education, several faced academic challenges as well.

Over the past 20 years, as a result of an unparalleled number of natural disasters, prolonged international and domestic conflicts and terror attacks, extreme economic downturns, multiple global health crises, national protests calling for social justice, and seismic technological changes, the United States has witnessed an unprecedented level of environmental, economic, and social disruption. Over the past 2 years, we have witnessed the astonishing infection of nearly 80 million people in the United States with COVID-19—and the death of nearly a million people nationwide. During the same time, we have witnessed countless protests for social justice and mourned a series of brutal acts of violence and murders against countless numbers of Black, Latinx, and Asian American people.

These overwhelming events have created a heightened sense of uncertainty for us all and have illuminated the daily vulnerability, barriers, and challenges facing many of our students and communities. Moreover, for many college students, these events disrupted their studies, threatened their health, shuttered campus life, and slowed opportunities for jobs after graduation. A total of 56 percent of Black and Hispanic students reported that COVID-19 is very likely or likely to force them out of school, compared with 44 percent of Whites (Gallup Inc., 2020, p. 12). While college students have long been prone to stress, anxiety, and depression, nearly three of four Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 years report poor mental health

tied to the pandemic, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020, p. 1052). The economic, social, and academic upheaval have sapped motivation and confidence, contributing to already high rates of depression and anxiety (Wang et al., 2020).

As we grapple with daunting realities, stemming from the social, demographic, technological, and economic changes impacting higher education, it is imperative to acknowledge higher education's role in creating and perpetuating systemic barriers that impede student progress and success. For example, higher education leaders rarely acknowledge how higher education's policies, practices, and hidden expectations perpetuate systemic inequities and further stratify and marginalize students. To better support today's students, and future generations of students, higher education must transform to work well for every student and meet students' needs and current realities. In addition, it must embrace the paradigm shifts associated with the broader contextual conditions.

The goal of becoming a student-ready college is not difficult to embrace for most educators. In fact, the concept has been embraced since the first edition of this book in 2016. However, when faced with challenges, some institutional leaders—even those who are sensitive to student needs and diversity—may fall back on processes and routines that expect students to conform to outmoded expectations and norms. Although the concept of student readiness will resonate with many, we also recognize that, for some, enacting these recommendations may pose a challenge, effectively perpetuating the status quo—and in the twenty-first century, the status quo is no longer an option.

A Profile of Twenty-First-Century Students

To strengthen our democracy, colleges and universities must offer students a high-quality educational experience that teaches them how to work and how to live in this twenty-first-century knowledge economy (Wagner, 2010). For centuries, the U.S. system of higher education has been a leader in postsecondary education, boasting some of the strongest outcomes and institutions in the world. U.S. institutions are recognized in worldwide rankings of colleges and universities, holding more than half of the top 100 spots as well as 8 of the top 10. Many world leaders in the sciences and humanities are graduates of U.S. colleges and universities.

Even for those who do not achieve these levels of success, the benefits correlated with earning a college degree have been documented (Ma, Pender, and Welch, 2020). For example:

- Higher educational levels reduce the chances of being unemployed:

  "The 2018 unemployment rates for 25- to 34-year-olds were 4.7 percent for those with some college but no degree and 3.1 percent for those with associate degrees" (Ma et al., 2020, p. 30).

- Attaining a college degree increases the likelihood of moving up the socioeconomic ladder:

  "Of adults who grew up in the lowest family income quintile, 21 percent of those with a four-year college degree moved up to the top income quintile between 2002 and 2011, compared with just 17 percent of those with an associate degree, and 13 percent of those with only a high school diploma" (Ma, Pender, and Welch, 2016, p. 33).

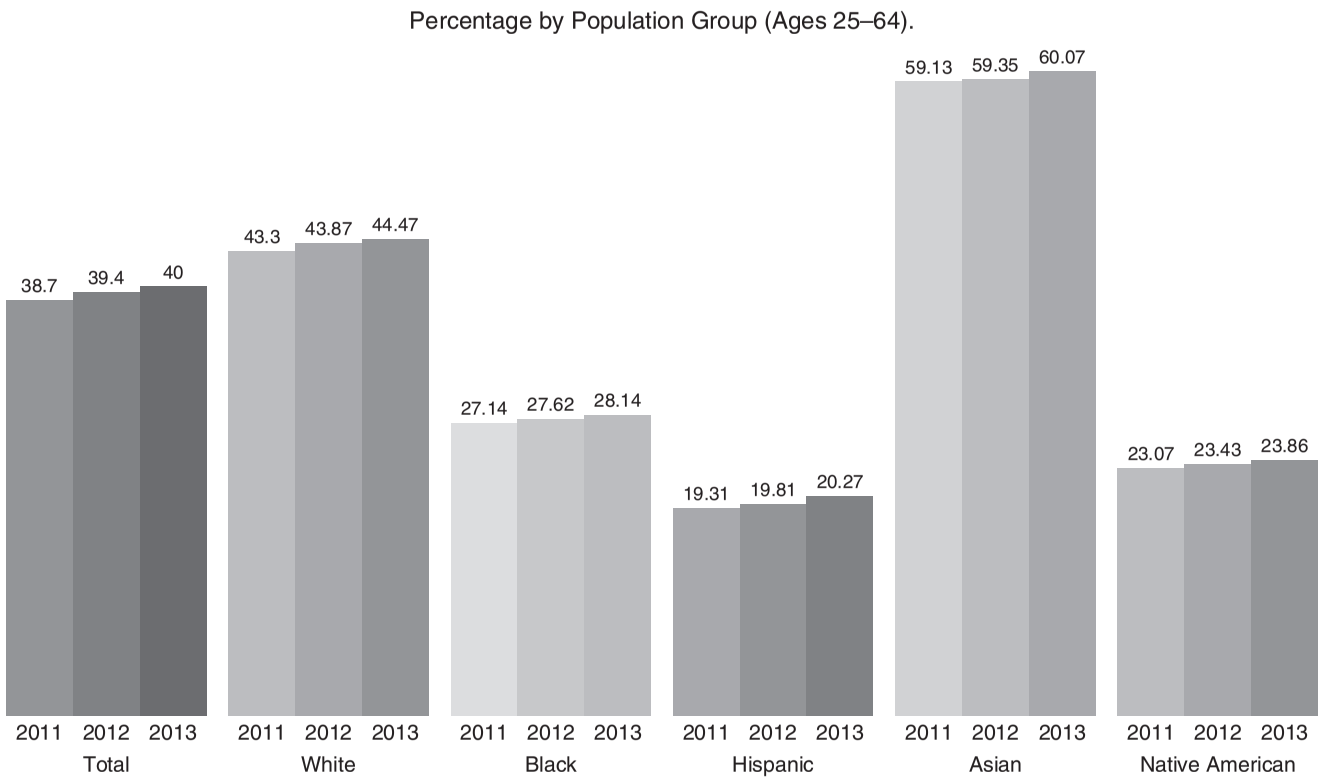
- Adults with a college education exhibit higher levels of civic engagement:

  "In 2017, 42 percent of four-year college graduates, 34 percent of adults with an associate degree, 31 percent of adults with some college, and 19 percent of high school graduates volunteered" (Ma et al., 2020, p. 40).

Even as the importance of higher education continues to be high, student success outcomes and graduation rates are uneven and below average. More than 15 million students currently are enrolled in over 6,000 postsecondary institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.), but only 4 of 10 Americans hold a college degree or credential (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Another 25 percent attempted college but left without a degree (Lumina Foundation, 2015c). We also know that these subpar outcomes disproportionately impact students from traditionally underserved racial and ethnic groups, who represent growing sectors of higher education—fewer than 30 percent of Blacks (28), Hispanics (20), and Native Americans (24) between the ages of 25 and 64 years have earned a college degree (Figure 1.1). And a recent examination of millennials shows that the career readiness among recent graduates is unsatisfactory, with deficits in skills associated with literacy, math, and problem-solving (Goodman, Sands, and Coley, 2015).

With the face of American higher education changing, it is vital that we embrace new models of education and support services that can accommodate today's college students. To serve these students, we must first have a precise understanding of the profile for twenty-first-century college students. Presently, students of color compose more than 40 percent of the student body, and that proportion is expected to increase, with the

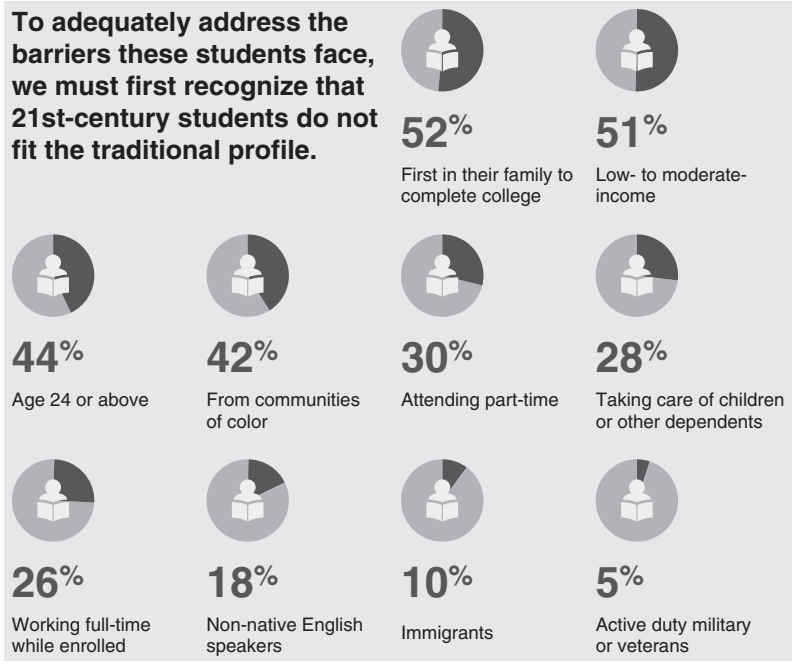
Figure 1.1 Trends in Degree Attainment Rates for U.S. Residents



Source: Lumina Foundation, 2021

growth being fueled by Latino/a and Asian students. And over 70 percent of today's college students possess nontraditional or post-traditional student characteristics (Miller et al., 2014), with 37 percent being over the age of 25 years, having dependents (24 percent), or working full-time (40 percent). In addition, growing proportions of these students are first-generation college-goers (46 percent), at or below the federal poverty level (31 percent), or minorities (42 percent) (Figure 1.2). At the same time, as the civil rights of those of diverse sexual orientations are advanced nationally, we expect to serve even more students who reflect the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Figure 1.2 Profile of Today's Student



Source: Lumina Foundation, 2021

Historical trends show that there has been steady enrollment growth among diverse student groups—with these post-traditional characteristics—for decades. But the trends in accessibility have not translated into better student outcomes. In fact, college completion rates for many underserved student groups continue to lag far behind national averages.

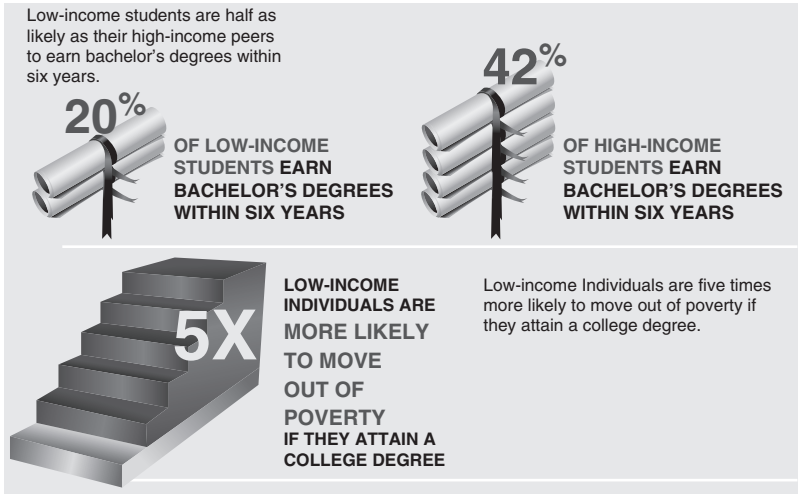
About one in five part-time students finish a degree after 6 years (NPR, 2019). Even when observing 6-year outcomes, 71 percent of students that were exclusively part-time did not make it to graduation compared with the 14 percent of exclusively full-time students. (Shapiro et al., 2018).

Minority students still struggle to graduate. Less than 35 percent of African Americans (32 percent), Native Americans (25 percent), and Latinos/as (25.5 percent) complete college (Lumina Foundation, 2019).

Only 26 percent of low-income students earned bachelor's degrees compared with 69 percent of higher-income peers, even though attaining this degree substantially increases their chances of moving out of poverty (Mortenson, 2019). If low-income young adults earned bachelor's degrees at the same rate as their higher-income counterparts, the United States would rank even higher among the top developed countries in the world.

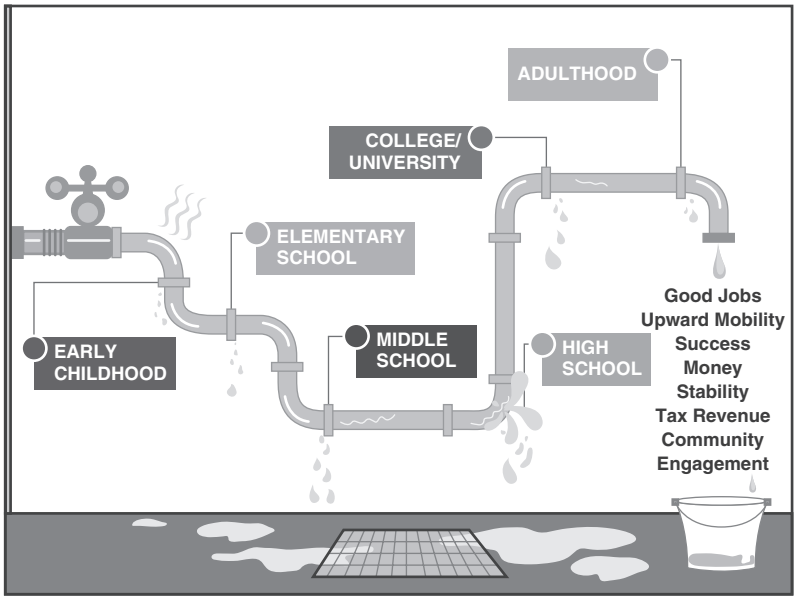
These facts show that the American system of higher education simply does not work well for everyone, and all along the pipeline far too many students encounter challenges that lead to the end of their formal education (Figures 1.3 and 1.4). These trends are unacceptable, especially at a time when a more educated workforce and citizenry are so desperately needed. Educating all of America's students, especially underrepresented

Figure 1.3 Attainment Rate for Low-Income Students



Source: Mortenson (2019)

Figure 1.4 The Reality of the Education Pipeline



Source: Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2013 (Reprinted from Literacy Connects)

students, is a national imperative, as it can lead to positive impacts for individuals and entire communities.

The Science of Student Readiness

There is no silver bullet approach to student readiness. Although many colleges experience common challenges, the vast number of institutions—and the diversity of contexts based on size, location, student body, resources, mission, environment, and myriad other factors—precludes a one-size-fits-all approach. Accordingly, campus leaders who aspire to student readiness must commit to prioritize, implement, and sustain policies and practices that will effectively, flexibly, and sustainably support student success within their particular campus context. Like scientists who focus on the physical and natural world, student-ready campus leaders must design interventions based on their systematic study of the structure and behavior of the *higher education ecosystem* through observation, inquiry, data analysis, intentionality, and reflection.

Student readiness is a means and an end. It is a discipline that is prioritized and practiced across the institution. And while there is no magic recipe for success, our years of work in and with colleges have revealed some common characteristics of student-ready colleges and programs:

1. *They know who their students are, how they are doing, and what they need to succeed*. Student-ready college leaders use data, feedback, and mechanisms for regular personal contact to understand who their students are, where they're from, and their aspirations, challenges, and

needs. While it may be logistically impossible for most campus administrators to have close personal connections with every student, many student-ready leaders have successfully inculcated the value of this connectivity to staff at all levels of the institution. This approach helps to neutralize the feelings of isolation and disconnection that often precede poor student performance and outcomes. This knowledge is critical to the success of every aspiring student-ready campus leader.

2. *They are intentional*. Student-ready colleges embrace their institution's role in supporting the success of all students and acknowledge the active support of every student's success as a core institutional function. Campus leaders seek opportunities to align this vision with the institution's overall mission and prioritize it in the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies, practices, and programs. Moreover, these leaders expressly and sustainably devote time and financial resources to the ongoing effort.
3. *They foster a culture of inclusive leadership and shared ownership*. Student-ready college leaders understand that faculty, staff, and students all play integral roles in the campus's success. Accordingly, their student readiness efforts are anchored in a culture of transparent, inclusive collaboration that actively invites and involves every office and person on campus.
4. *They are self-aware and opportunistic*. Student-ready college leaders seek qualitative and quantitative feedback on all aspects of students' experiences and performance. Systems for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of

campus practices, programs, and culture inform a culture of continuous improvement and professional development. Leaders humbly recognize the institution's place within the larger ecosystem of higher education stakeholders, and the institution proactively seeks opportunities to strengthen its service capacity.

5. *They understand the big picture and think long-term*. Student-ready leaders recognize that the overall picture of student success on their campus is an aggregation of the results driven by several systematized practices and processes. These leaders regularly use qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the function and impact of these systems and strive to identify and rectify any inflection points or unintentional hindrances they discover. Furthermore, student-ready leaders understand that sustainable system change (and maintenance) requires thoughtful design, diligent implementation, proactivity, and patience. They understand that data-informed decision-making, aligned with institutional mission, helps to justify the room (and time) their student-ready initiatives will need to bear fruit. When established, a culture of continuous self-improvement enables the work to be viewed as an investment in the campus's mission rather than an expense of doing campus business.
6. *They focus on behavior*. Student-ready college leaders recognize that student outcomes are the end result of trajectories often dictated by student choices and behaviors in specific, high-leverage points in time. These leaders seek to understand these moments in time to identify the

institution's preparedness, role, and response so that appropriate resources can be deployed, strengthened, or reallocated.

7. *They observe, act, innovate, and prioritize accountability*. Motivated by the opportunity for continuous improvement, student-ready campus leaders use regular data collection to determine baselines, set goals, evaluate impact, and establish campus-wide accountability measures. Their data-informed, continuous improvement cultures empower the testing of new approaches to student support and welcome campus-wide feedback.

We endeavor to use the recommendations and examples we cite throughout the remainder of this book to illustrate these traits.

The Value of Student-Ready Colleges and the Emerging School-to-Work Economy

The American system of higher education has long been regarded as one of the best in the world. However, in the face of systemic demographic changes, increasing tuition, and pervasive economic changes and instability, one of the most significant challenges facing higher education is the question: Is college worth it? Is it worth the time? Is it worth the cost? Is it worth the uncertain opportunities and outcomes for employment and economic mobility?

Over the past 30 years, college tuition and fees at universities have increased more than twice the rate of inflation, and at

community colleges tuition has increased more than one-third of the rate of inflation. A bachelor's degree that cost approximately $5,500 in 1985 cost more than $27,000 in 2017; during the same time, an associate degree that cost approximately $3,300 rose to more than $10,000 (Sherman, 2020). Moreover, more than 40 million Americans owe more than of $1.6 trillion in student debt, and over 30 percent of borrowers are late, are in default, or have stopped making payments altogether within 6 years after graduation (Hu and Ton-Quinlivan, 2021).

Further, just over half the students who enroll in college complete a degree 6 years later. Of those students who graduate, approximately one-third are underemployed; that is, they are working in jobs that do not require a college degree (Stoute, 2021). And another nearly 40 percent of recent college graduates are unemployed (Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2021). At the same time, employers are experiencing a significant gap in the skills they need and rely on from employees compared with the abilities that job seekers actually possess. The bottom line: One of the primary reasons students pursue higher education is to get on a pathway to better employment and economic stability and success. And, for too many students, higher education is not fulfilling its promise.

In part, these challenges are the result of an ineffective school-to-work transition process to help students navigate successfully between their learning and work experiences. The United States is the only industrialized nation in the world that has no systematic, institutionalized school-to-work transition infrastructure. Although many institutions have a career center for students, students need more than resume assistance to confirm that they are on the right path and have the knowledge and skills needed to

differentiate themselves from other entry-level job candidates. The lack of a comprehensive and effective school-to-work transition system has a serious impact on many students as well as the capacity to meet the needs of the U.S. economy and employment gaps in high-need, high-demand industries overall. Postsecondary education must do more to foster access to critical post-college outcomes, including sufficient earnings, high-quality jobs, and economic mobility and security.

Here again, the notion that the smartest, most talented students will naturally rise to the top can obscure the truth as gaps in access, completion, and post-college outcomes vary widely within and across institutions while existing systems distribute opportunity based on socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity rather than talent and effort. Further, this notion undermines the implementation of strategies and interventions that promote educational and career outcomes for students, and for the most vulnerable students in particular. Creating and ensuring equitable access to twenty-first century knowledge and skills for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and underrepresented Asian American and Pacific Islander students, and students from low-income backgrounds is critical to their success in the workforce (Postsecondary Value Commission, 2021). As a result of the dynamic changes in the U.S. economy over the past 30 years, despite questions regarding the value of higher education, higher education attainment plays an increasingly important role in nurturing students' development of skills and abilities. And economic opportunity and mobility are extremely difficult to attain today without a higher education.

Since the 1980s, the U.S. economy has been rapidly shifting from an industrial economy to a skilled-services economy.

In the industrial economy, jobs in industries including construction, manufacturing, natural resources, transportation, utilities, and wholesale and retail trade flourished—and roughly two out of three entry-level jobs required a high school diploma. Since the shift to the skilled-services economy, jobs in the United States have rapidly and significantly increased in healthcare services, information technology, financial services, government services, education services, consulting and business services, leisure and hospitality services, and personal services. Within the skilled-services economy, two of every three entry-level jobs require some postsecondary education or training, and nearly one-quarter of those jobs require at least a bachelor's degree (Carnevale et al., 2018).

The report *Three Educational Pathways to Good Jobs* finds three primary pathways in the school-to-work economy: high school, middle-skills credentials, and bachelor's degrees (Carnevale et al., 2018). This is important because the role of higher education in producing the talent needed in the school-to-work economy is not an ancillary one. The quality of the educational experience, the knowledge and skills gained, and the success of every student on the path are critical. As the high school pathway continues to shrink, it will continue to offer fewer job opportunities for workers than middle-skills credentials and bachelor's degree pathways.

Postsecondary institutions must confront the question, Is college worth it?, and deliver on the idea of value by intentionally constructing meaningful, integrative learning experiences and pathways that lead to careers and ensure every student develops the necessary knowledge, skills, and networks to be successful in work and life.

The Path Forward: Taking Steps to Transformation

Policymakers and the general public habitually criticize American higher education. One could make the point that as long as higher education has existed in the United States, people have always been critical. Criticism extends from educators and their policies and practices to the impact of education, or lack thereof, on students. Certainly, there are elements of truth in some of the criticism, but there are ways to address these critiques and improve the higher education system. In this book, we are turning away from criticism and thinking about improvement as growth and progression. We intend to offer a useful corrective, but we do so from a positive vantage point that offers new questions and opens new perspectives on what it means to create a student-ready campus.

This book is written for all campus educators, but it is intended to spur action primarily among campus leadership and decision-makers. We hope that readers will take from this book a set of principled recommendations that will offer a framework for aligning attitudes and behavior with the steps needed for success. Acknowledging that we are making the case for cultural and organizational change, we speak with humility. We know this work is hard, and it takes bravery and passion to even consider what we recommend. But through our work, we have encountered many courageous people who are ready to tackle the challenges but are unaware of where or how to start. We believe that the best time to start is now, and the best place to start is where you are as you turn the pages of this book.