



THE VITAL ROLE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES in the Education and Integration of Immigrants

BY CHRISTOPHER CONNELL



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AND REFUGEES

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Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR)

provides resources that foundations need to address the challenges facing newcomers and their host communities and to strengthen society as a whole. Its mission is to influence the philanthropic field to advance the contributions and address the needs of the country's growing and increasingly diverse immigrant and refugee populations. As a nationwide network, GCIR helps private and public funders connect immigrant issues to their funding priorities by serving as a forum to:

- Learn about current issues through in-depth analyses, research reports, and online data, tools, and resources tailored specifically for grantmakers.
- Connect with other funders through programs, briefings, and conferences that examine major immigration trends and how they impact diverse communities.
- Collaborate with grantmaking colleagues on strategies that strengthen immigrant-related funding locally and nationally.

In California, GCIR coordinates the **California Immigrant Integration Initiative (CIII)**, a joint effort of California-based GCIR members to develop a comprehensive immigrant integration agenda and strengthen the immigrant integration infrastructure throughout the state. *The Vital Role of Community Colleges in the Education and Integration of Immigrants* is part of CIII's effort to improve educational and workforce opportunities for California's immigrants.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How we incorporate immigrants into every facet of U.S. society—and prepare them for a job market that increasingly relies on skilled workers—will determine the economic future of our country. The foreign-born population rose to a record 38.1 million in 2007 or 12.6 percent of the population. Between 2005 and 2050, the U.S. population is projected to expand by 48 percent, with immigrants representing 82 percent of that growth.¹ Assuming immigration levels remain constant, by 2050, one in five residents (19 percent) will be foreign-born.² These immigrants—as workers, taxpayers, and consumers—are essential to helping the United States replace its aging boomer workforce and maintain a stable economy.

As affordable providers of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, workforce training, vocational certificate programs, and undergraduate education, this nation's nearly 1,200 community colleges can play a central role in facilitating the integration of immigrants and their children into the social, economic, and civic fabric of society. They provide immigrants with opportunities to move up the economic ladder and have a genuine shot at advancement in the knowledge economy.

The “Ellis Island” and “workhorses” of higher education, community colleges are greatly accessible. For those struggling to overcome the barriers of poverty, limited English, and inadequate preparation, community colleges offer an opportunity and a pathway to a brighter future. Tuition is a fraction of the cost of four-year colleges and universities, and classes are offered from morning to night and in places close to where students work and live. Community colleges provide extensive developmental courses that prepare students of all ages for college-level work, and they play a large and growing role in teaching ESL and adult basic education classes that give newcomers the skills needed for jobs, further schooling, community participation, and everyday life.



Community colleges prepare most of this country's nurses, including the women pictured here who recently graduated from *Carreras en Salud* (Careers in Health), a partnership among community groups, civic organizations, organizations and Wilbur Wright College in Chicago.

Community colleges enroll almost half of all U.S. undergraduates, or 6.5 million students. Twenty-four percent of these students come from an immigrant background: six percent are permanent legal residents; six percent are naturalized U.S. citizens; and 12 percent are children of immigrants.³ In addition to students enrolled in degree programs, five million others take non-credit classes, seeking basic skills, self-improvement, or personal enjoyment, but often as a stepping stone toward a better job, college degree, or vocational certificate. Most community college students attend part-time, juggling college with work; many are raising families as well. For all these reasons—and despite the challenges they face—community colleges provide educational opportunities that are vital to the economic well-being of immigrants, refugees, and the communities in which they live and work.

Community colleges play a large and growing role in providing adult basic education (ABE), which provides instruction

in the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics to adult learners. For immigrants and refugees, ESL is a central part of ABE instruction. Although public school systems are responsible for adult education in many states, a number of states have shifted that responsibility to community colleges. Researchers Forrest P. Chisman and JoAnn Crandall believe “community colleges are ideal providers of adult ESL services because they are adult-focused institutions that offer credit and non-credit ESL as well as opportunities for immigrants to pursue further education—all under a single educational umbrella.”⁴

Many of the one million students taking adult basic education classes at community colleges are limited in how well they speak, read, and write English. These students vary in prior education and English language proficiency and differ in native languages and cultural backgrounds.⁵ One classroom may contain engineers, doctors, and nurses as well as refugees escaping political strife, agricultural workers seeking better

economic opportunities, and those who grew up in bilingual homes but need to improve their academic English.⁶ In response to these diverse backgrounds, community colleges offer a range of models to help students improve their English skills, from non-credit courses that develop beginning language skills to advanced, for-credit courses that bolster readiness for academic degrees and professional training. Some combine language and vocational instruction, so students learn English vocabulary used in a particular job, while simultaneously acquiring technical skills. Some colleges allow students to study English on their schedule as other obligations permit, with no fixed term or start and end dates. Others offer high-intensity classes with managed enrollment, requiring students to enroll at the beginning of a term and keep up throughout the course. Successful programs create opportunities for ESL students to practice their English with native speakers outside the classroom, and give language learners a say in selecting projects that speak to their own lives and struggles. Some colleges allow intermediate ESL students to enroll in certain vocational or academic courses taught in English without requiring those students to reach the top ESL level.

A natural fit with ESL, civics education is another area where community colleges have carved out an important role. Civics education programs help immigrants prepare for the U.S. citizenship exam, teach newcomers how government works on the local, state, and national levels, show them how to access public services, and encourage them to engage in the life of the community.

With worker retraining funds and support from local and national foundations, some community colleges run programs that serve as a bridge from ESL to training and careers for low-skilled workers—often immigrants or the children of immigrants—who need to improve their English and their educational level to advance to better jobs.

In all these areas, from ESL to workforce development, many community colleges

work in partnership with community-based organizations (CBO), pairing their educational expertise with a CBO's practical know-how and local connections.

As providers of an estimated 40 percent of adult basic education classes, community colleges have become an important force for change in the field, and they are taking on an increasing share of the responsibility for meeting the educational and vocational needs of immigrants and refugees, especially those facing the dual challenge of earning a degree or certificate while learning English.

Funding Recommendations

Foundations that invest in higher education devote far more of their philanthropic dollars to baccalaureate, master's level, and doctoral institutions than to community colleges. And foundations that seek to make a difference in the lives of immigrants and refugees often direct their resources to community-based organizations and programs that serve these populations.

With a large enrollment of immigrant and refugee students, community colleges are an important partner in the integration of immigrants and offer myriad investment opportunities for foundations, from replicating small-scale projects to funding systems change. Following are GCIR's recommendations on what funders can do to help community colleges improve educational opportunities and economic outcomes for their immigrant and refugee students:

1 Fund a range of direct support programs and services to help students from immigrant and refugee backgrounds succeed in the community college setting:

- a Scholarships to enable students to attend college on a full-time or closer to full-time basis.
- b Support services that often are crucial to enabling low-income immigrants to enroll and stay to completion. Foundations can fund community colleges directly for services such as

bilingual academic and employment counseling, or they can fund partnerships with community-based organizations for services such as transportation and child care.

- c Innovative efforts such as Washington State's Integrated Basic Education Skills Training (I-BEST) Program (see page 16), that provide extra services for immigrants who are trying to learn English and job or academic skills simultaneously.
- d Other career training and bridge programs that give English language learners and other adult education students access to career and academic programs that increase their chance of success in a community college and after they graduate.

In making grants to support the above programs, foundations can fund the replication of effective models (see examples starting on page 8) as well as programmatic innovation within institutions and across community college systems.

2 Improve the alignment of assessment systems within adult ESL programs. Student progress is often impeded by the lack of alignment between the tests needed to pass one program level and the assessment that determines entry into the next level.

3 Educate immigrant families about available financial aid. Due to language barriers and lack of familiarity with the U.S. educational system, many immigrant parents are unaware of the different types of state and federal financial aid available to their graduating high school students. Undocumented parents may be reluctant or unable to complete financial aid forms that require social security numbers. Foundations can support awareness campaigns to inform immigrant families about their options and to provide assistance in navigating the financial aid process.

4 Revamp financial aid policy. Most community college students enroll on a part-time basis. While they are eligible for federal Pell Grants, grants are less than what they would receive if attending full time. Immigrant students can exhaust their Pell Grants early if they use them for adult ESL classes.⁷ (Pell Grants may be used for up to 30 hours of non-credit, remedial classes).

5 Support more equitable distribution of state aid. Community colleges receive markedly less state funding than their baccalaureate counterparts, and many states allocate far less financial aid for community college students than for those attending four-year universities. Foundations can support advocacy to increase funding for community college students, especially those enrolled part-time, as well as funding that allows low-income students to take non-credit courses including ESL, citizenship, and civics classes at no cost or greatly reduced cost. They also can encourage or even subsidize

community college programs that provide reduced tuition for those who enroll in credit courses upon successful completion of developmental or ESL classes.

6 Back efforts to gain and preserve access to in-state tuition for all U.S. high school graduates, regardless of their immigration status. Out-of-state tuition and fees put college out of reach for many low-income immigrant families. Funders can support organizing, advocacy, and education efforts to preserve or put in place in-state tuition policies for those who attended high school in the state—and to counter attempts to put in place laws and policies that bar undocumented students from enrolling in two-year and four-year colleges. (See page 7 for details.)

7 Increase the hiring of more full-time ESL faculty and reduce reliance on part-timers. As examples in this handbook illustrate, the use of full-time instructors contributes to better student outcomes.

8 Expand professional development opportunities for both full- and part-time faculty. Such opportunities are essential to improving and maintaining instructional quality.

9 Invest in partnerships that leverage existing resources and engage other sectors. Potential partners include:

- a Community-based organizations and other local service providers that can help community colleges reach deeper into immigrant communities to provide such services as citizenship, civics, and workforce preparation classes.
- b Intermediary organizations with the technical expertise to develop assessment tools, conduct evaluations, and improve instructional methods and program design.
- c State and local funding agencies to address the shortage of available spaces in ESL and other adult education programs.

In addition, foundations can support projects that involve multiple community partners—all of the above as well as businesses, the media, and church groups.

10 Support research, evaluation, and demonstration projects to determine what works. Some models featured in this handbook were developed as a result of research findings. Further research and demonstration projects can help instructors, administrators, policymakers, and funders understand factors and practices that contribute to the success—or failure—of students at individual institutions and in different state systems. Findings would expand knowledge and understanding of best practices in the field, lead to programmatic innovation, inform policy development, and guide future public and private investment in adult basic education and other programs serving immigrant students. Potential areas of research include: tracking student outcomes and



progress over time, particularly after they have matriculated into formal programs; evaluation of particular strategies or program designs; studies to determine what weakens and strengthens retention rates; and studies on how technology can best be used to enhance or deliver ESL instruction.

11 Fund campaigns to educate the general public, the media, businesses, and policymakers about the role and impact of community colleges, particularly how much they increase students' earning potential and repay the public investment, as well as drawing attention to the serious problems they face in retaining and graduating students and in moving students from non-credit ESL and basic skills classes into college-level work. Such education efforts can help increase understanding of and support for community colleges.

In addition to grantmaking, foundations can play a leadership role to call greater attention to the role community colleges play and can play to help immigrants achieve economic self-sufficiency and become active community members. Foundations can convene stakeholders from fellow grantmakers to educators to public officials. They can also mount their own public education and communications campaign.

This handbook calls attention to the vital importance of community colleges in creating a pathway to economic well-being and full community participation for immigrants and their families. It provides an overview of the community college system, explores the challenges and



ESL instructor Dianne Prosack and five of her students from Vietnam, Ethiopia, and South Korea at Northern Virginia Community College in Alexandria, Virginia.

opportunities they face, and explains why they are an important vehicle in helping newcomers gain a more secure economic foothold. It also describes best practices and profiles exemplary programs from campuses across the nation, focusing on ESL and other basic skills, vocational training, and civics instruction.

The success of the models featured in this handbook makes a strong case for

philanthropic investment. Foundations should look to community colleges as key partners in their efforts to address poverty, improve educational and job opportunities, and engage immigrants in civic life. In so doing, they will promote the social and economic integration of immigrants and, in turn, contribute to the betterment of the larger society.

A PRIMER ON COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND THE EDUCATION OF NEWCOMERS

About Community Colleges

Community colleges enroll 6.5 million students, including almost half of all undergraduates. Some five million others take non-credit classes, including English as a Second Language, at the nearly 1,200 accredited two-year colleges, most of them public institutions.

Community colleges train half of the country's nurses and almost 80 percent of law enforcement officers, firefighters, medics, and other first responders. From respiratory therapists to CAD designers to electronics technicians, community colleges graduate professionals who form the backbone of many industries. And they do so at a fraction of the cost of four-year colleges and universities. This century-old American invention—Joliet Junior College in Illinois was the first—remains the most affordable avenue for higher education. Tuition and fees range from a low of \$633 in California to \$5,692 in New Hampshire, though financial aid can bring those costs even lower. In California, tuition is waived for low-income students, and in many states students are not charged full tuition for non-credit courses. The College Board estimates that the total expenses for a full-time student living off campus but not with parents was \$13,126 for 2007-08, which is less than half what it costs to enroll at a four-year public college and only a fraction of what private universities charge.¹⁰

U.S. Secretary of Education Spellings, speaking at a community college summit, said, “Ninety percent of the fastest-growing jobs require postsecondary education or training yet we’re not equipping enough of our citizens, especially people of color, to seize these opportunities. What does it mean for our country that only nine percent of low-income students earn a college degree by age 24, compared with 75 percent of students from wealthier families? Or that only 10 percent of Hispanic students earn a bachelor’s degree by age 29? Or that 60 percent of Americans have no postsecondary credentials at all?”¹¹

Graduates of community colleges earn almost double what high school dropouts make (\$38,000 compared to \$19,900);

a bachelor’s degree pushes average earnings above \$54,000. Still, over four decades in the workforce, a community college graduate can expect to earn \$1.6 million, or \$400,000 more than a high school graduate. As the National Commission on Community Colleges said, “Community colleges can be a powerful tool helping American communities absorb the shocks that globalization administers. For individuals, particularly those from low-income or minority backgrounds, community colleges can open the door to opportunity through the surest route to personal security and income growth: an associate or a bachelor’s degree.” Community colleges, the panel said, “are obvious staging grounds for trying to close many of the gaps in American life.... They can close the gap between the immigrant promise and the immigrant experience by integrating new Americans into our national life.”¹²

Community Colleges and Immigrants

For immigrants and refugees, community colleges are a principal doorway to a better life. They are, in the memorable words of the National Commission on Community Colleges, “the Ellis Island of American higher education, the crossroads at which K-12 education meets higher education, and the institutions that give students the tools to navigate the modern world.”¹³ Secretary Spellings called them “the workhorses of higher education, educating millions at an affordable price and meeting local workforce needs.”¹⁴

Twenty-four percent of the nation’s 6.5 million community college students come from an immigrant background: six percent are permanent legal residents; six percent are naturalized U.S. citizens; and 12 percent are children of immigrants.¹⁵ Some immigrants arrive in the United States with strong education credentials, but many lack the English skills needed to enter their field



Community colleges serve a vital role in helping less-educated immigrants learn English, gain vocational skills, and acquire the credentials needed to succeed in the workforce.

of work. Other immigrants, such as those from Mexico and Latin America, often have limited formal education, compounding their lack of English skills. The Census Bureau estimates that in 2006, nearly a third of foreign-born adults 25 and older lacked a high school diploma and half were limited English proficient (LEP). Nearly 31 percent of these foreign-born with limited English were from Mexico; the Philippines, China, and India each had about four percent; no other country accounted for more than three percent.¹⁶ In addition, half of the 14 million foreign-born Latinos lacked a high school degree, and a third had less than a ninth-grade education.¹⁷

“For many immigrants, the United States is a place where, through hard work and perseverance, they hope to achieve better lives for themselves and their families. But in today’s America, realizing the American Dream is almost impossible without some postsecondary education.”

Jamie P. Merisotis, President and CEO, Lumina Foundation for Education

Community colleges offer immigrant students opportunities to learn English and fill skills and education gaps. They award certificates, credentials, and associate degrees that provide pathways to universities and rewarding careers. They engage students in the civic and cultural life of their communities, cater to working adults with classes in the evenings as well as daytime, and offer instruction close to homes and jobs.

“For many immigrants, the United States is a place where, through hard work and perseverance, they hope to achieve better lives for themselves and their families. But in today’s America, realizing the American Dream is almost impossible without some postsecondary education,”

Jamie P. Merisotis, then-president of the Institute for Higher Education Policy and now president and CEO of Lumina Foundation for Education, told a congressional panel in May 2007. Many immigrants “must struggle with inadequate finances, heavy work and family responsibilities, varied academic backgrounds, limited English proficiency, and a lack of knowledge about the American system of higher education—all of which can affect their ability to navigate the complex postsecondary admissions and financial aid processes and the equally challenging process of earning a postsecondary credential.”¹⁸

In a 2007 study, the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) laid out the challenges that immigrants face in gaining access to college, especially those who came to the United States as teenagers or young adults. “Latino immigrants are particularly underrepresented in higher education, comprising only 30 percent of immigrant undergraduate students, although Hispanics make up 47 percent of the overall immigrant population,” the IHEP study said.¹⁹ Almost two-thirds of non-citizen immigrants age 25 and older had no more than a high school education.

Challenges for Undocumented Students

In the divisive national debate over U.S. immigration policy, controversy has developed over the immigration status of students. At the national level, immigrant students and their supporters have mounted campaigns over the past few years to pass the DREAM Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act), which remained stalled in Congress as of October 2008. If signed into law, the DREAM Act would allow states to provide in-state tuition to undocumented students. It would also create a pathway to citizenship following graduation from high school and completion of two years of military service or college.

Ten states—California, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah and Washington—

From ESL to Biochemistry

Oghay Kherzai was 18 when she fled the Taliban in her native Afghanistan in 1992 and spent five years as a refugee in Pakistan. She immigrated to the United States in 1997 with her husband, an American citizen, and signed up right away for ESL classes at the College of Lake County in Illinois. “I literally started from ABC,” she said. Ten years later—with time off for the births of her three children—she graduated with a 3.94 GPA and a full scholarship to a four-year college. She is majoring in biochemistry and has set her sights on becoming a surgeon. In 2007, Oghay was honored by the National Commission on Adult Literacy as a national model for ESL students. Accepting that award at a ceremony in New York, she recalled that life as a refugee in Pakistan was “pure heartache.” But she quoted the British philosopher Bertrand Russell, “Extreme hopes are born from extreme misery,” and added thanks to the College of Lake County “and its fantastic program—ESL.”

passed laws between 2001 and 2007 allowing undocumented immigrants who graduated from high schools in that state to pay in-state tuition. Twenty-two other states have considered similar in-state tuition bills but failed to pass them.

In 2008, several states moved in the opposite direction to bar undocumented students from paying in-state tuition, regardless of how long they had lived in the state or attended its public schools. South Carolina passed a measure barring those unlawfully present in the United States from entering public colleges and universities and from receiving any type of state financial aid. And North Carolina’s community college board ruled that undocumented students are not entitled to in-state tuition pending a further study. Similarly, Alabama’s State Board of Education voted to ban undocumented immigrants from enrolling in its two-year colleges.



In the past several years, youth-led campaigns around the country have been educating the general public, the media, and policymakers about the importance of providing undocumented students access to in-state tuition and creating a path to citizenship for them.

Candy Packer to CNC Programmer

Azucena Lopez works the third shift (11 p.m. to 7 a.m.) in a candy manufacturing plant in Chicago, but now spends hours each week in community college classes training to be certified as a computer numerical control (CNC) machine programmer. It's one of the skills taught in the Instituto del Progreso Latino's Manufacturing Technology Bridge Program, with specialty training at the Humboldt Park Vocational Education Center of Wilbur Wright College. Lopez's mother packed candy in the same plant after emigrating from Zacatecas, Mexico. Lopez has already become one of the first women to break into the ranks of machine operators at her plant, and is hoping that getting credentialed as a CNC programmer will boost her pay from \$16 to \$23 an hour. "For me it's an education," said the 36-year-old mother of three. "I want to be more than a packer. I want to show them I can run these machines and help them manufacture parts."

Challenges for Community Colleges

Many students—immigrants and non-immigrants alike—are academically unprepared for college when they walk through the doors of a community college. Many of those who graduated from U.S. high schools—foreign-born and U.S.-born alike—require extensive remedial work before they are ready to tackle regular college classes. Some immigrants are handicapped by large gaps in their schooling as well as unfamiliarity with English. Many are quickly discouraged when they discover how long the journey to a community college certificate or degree will be. In California, home of the country's largest community college system with 2.5 million students, four out of 10 community college students stay in the system for a year or less, and fewer than one in 10 earns an associate's degree.²⁰ Most community college students are taking classes part-time while working full- or part-time, and many are raising families as well. It is not uncommon for students to take a break—for a semester or two. As a consequence, the path to a "two-year" degree may extend over six years or even longer.

Twice as many community college students take at least one remedial course as do those who enroll in public four-year colleges—42 percent versus 20 percent.²¹ Some studies suggest that an even greater number of community college students, as high as two-thirds, are inadequately prepared to do college-level work. Inadequate funding further exacerbates the issues. For example, whereas the University of California system accepts the top one-eighth of applicants and the California State University accepts the top one-third, California community colleges accept all applicants yet receive far less state funding to address their students' special needs.²²

Some states have moved to vest their community colleges with the primary responsibility for developmental education. Students not only pay tuition for these catch-up courses, but forgo wages to do so. Most entering community college students say their goal is to earn a four-year degree, but the odds against them are long. Among those who began at a public community college in the 1995-96 academic year, 29 percent transferred to a four-year institution within six years, and of that group, 35 percent had completed a bachelor's degree and 44 percent were still working toward that degree after six years.²³

Affordability, accountability, and results were the watchwords of a 2006 report by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education.²⁴ While prodding institutions to step up their performance, that panel also stressed that whatever their shortcomings, colleges remain "the major route for new generations of Americans to achieve social mobility." It is here that community colleges play the lead role in the sprawling and diverse U.S. system of higher education, especially for immigrants new to the language and the country.

BEST PRACTICES FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE STUDENTS

For immigrants struggling to put food on the table while juggling a job and college coursework, the road to improving English and job skills, much less earn a degree and transfer to a four-year university, can seem endless and impossibly steep. To address this challenge, community colleges are experimenting with innovative ways of helping to speed students along this journey. They are partnering with foundations, businesses, and other community organizations to help immigrants and other students succeed in higher education. This chapter highlights some of the most innovative programs aimed at helping immigrant and refugee students succeed in these main areas: learning English and civics, acquiring vocational skills, and preparing for a four-year college.

Innovative ESL Strategies

Community colleges are not the only places for adult immigrants to turn for ESL instruction, but they offer distinct advantages to those who hope to achieve not only literacy but a job credential or academic degree. Yet the transition from non-credit adult education ESL to for-credit classes is difficult. According to Forrest P. Chisman and JoAnn Crandall, two of the leading experts in the field, only 10 percent make the transition to further education of any kind. “Transition rates are so low primarily because educational pathways from the lowest levels of English proficiency to enrollment in academic or vocational programs are so long,” they said. “Usually, ESL students must devote years to improving their English by ESL programs and to improving their educational levels by ABE/ASE [Adult Basic Education/Adult Secondary Education] programs. Even then they must enroll in credit ESL programs, because the ‘life skills’ curricula of most adult education ESL programs do not provide them with the specialized English language skills required for academic studies. These pathways to further education require a longer commitment of time, and a larger commitment of money,

than most working adults with other responsibilities can make.”²⁷

The Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy’s *Passing the Torch* study and companion reports offer a look at some of the best practices in teaching the language and other skills that immigrants need to prepare for higher education and careers. *Passing the Torch*, drawn principally from an examination of innovative strategies adopted by five community colleges considered exemplary in the adult ESL field,²⁸ suggested three “highly effective strategies” for increasing the learning gains of ESL students at community colleges:

- **High-intensity instruction with managed enrollment.** Most adult ESL classes meet once or twice a week for at most three

to six hours of instruction and are “open entry/open exit,” meaning that students can start and stop as they see fit. The model colleges all offered some high-intensity classes that met 12 to 24 hours per week for a semester. In most cases, students could enter only at the beginning of the semester and were dropped if they missed too many classes. Despite concerns that it would be difficult for these adult learners—virtually all immigrants—to make this commitment, all the programs were filled and many had waiting lists. For example, Seminole Community College uses the high-intensity, managed-enrollment approach in 80 percent of its non-credit ESL classes, while City College of San Francisco found that students in its

Foundation Support of Community Colleges

Some community colleges are partnering with foundations on ways to hold on to more ESL and immigrant students and to convince them to raise their aspirations. They are providing support services—including one-on-one counseling and help with child care and transportation—to help students juggle the demands of school, work, and family, and offering intensive English instruction to speed immigrants’ journey up the literacy ladder. Several national foundations—Lumina Foundation for Education, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Ford Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and others—are assisting community colleges in these and other efforts to improve opportunities and outcomes for minority and disadvantaged students, into whose ranks many immigrants fall.

One of the largest is Lumina’s Achieving the Dream (www.achievingthedream.org), a \$100 million, eight-year initiative involving more than 20 organizations and 83 community colleges in 15 states that are trying to close achievement gaps, especially for low-income students and students of color. Achieving the Dream is helping colleges dig deeper into student data and helping them to improve student outcomes. Part of the Achieving the Dream approach has been to provide technical assistance, either directly to the colleges or through intermediary organizations, to bolster their capacity to do this work.

In California, the \$33-million Basic Skills Initiative (www.cccbsi.org) seeks to improve the instruction and learning of English, mathematics, reading, and ESL in the state’s 110 community colleges, which enrolls more than 2.6 million students each year. The initiative organizes professional development trainings and offers resources and best practices in areas such as curriculum, self-assessment, and evaluation. It engages many partner organizations, among them the Academic Senate for the California Community Colleges and the Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative, a public-private partnership of 14 philanthropic foundations and the State of California Employment Development Department. Although funded primarily by the state, the initiative also receives support from several foundations, including The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and The James Irvine Foundation.

high-intensity classes were achieving gains two to three times faster than counterparts in lower-intensity classes.

- Extended learning outside the classroom.** All the colleges in this study created opportunities for ESL students to practice English with native speakers outside the classroom. They made extensive use of instructional technology, assigned class projects that required students to interact with native speakers, encouraged informal conversation groups, and arranged one-on-one tutoring.
- Curricular adaptations for learners' needs.** The colleges took special measures to accommodate ESL students' needs, especially those who knew very little English and had little schooling in their home country. They found ways to make students active learners. Yakima Valley Community College, which serves many immigrants, structures beginning classes around study projects selected by the students themselves; its ESL students outpaced peers at other Washington state community colleges in learning gains and transition rates.

Skilled faculty and ample resources were also keys to the success of the community colleges profiled in the Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy study. Most required their own faculty to have a master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) or a special certification in TESOL, and some required it of part-time instructors as well. City College of San Francisco (CCSF) stood out for limiting use of part-time faculty to teach ESL and paying its faculty the same whether they teach non-credit or for-credit courses. Part-time instructors at CCSF receive better pay and benefits, including professional development opportunities, than is customary at most ESL programs. The College of Lake County in Illinois, in a suburb north of Chicago, relies primarily on part-timers to teach ESL classes, but the



Many foundations have joined together on an eight-year initiative called *Achieving the Dream* to help immigrant, minority, and disadvantaged students make it to graduation.

salary scale is among the highest in the state, and the part-time instructors are required to complete six hours of professional development each year.

The community colleges held out as exemplars all devoted far more resources to ESL than most colleges do. The national average expenditure is roughly \$600 per ESL student per year; these campuses spend \$1,500 to \$3,000 per student on instruction and support. However, with waiting lists for spots in many ESL classes nationwide, and with funding closely tied to enrollments, colleges face inexorable pressures to stretch their dollars to serve as many as possible in bare-bones ESL programs rather than providing more intense and costly services to smaller numbers of English learners.

In addition to these insights on effective strategies, the *Passing the Torch* study highlighted five steps that community colleges can use to speed learning gains and increase transition rates for ESL students:

- Curricular integration with college preparation.** Most of the model colleges teach not just life-skills English but some of the same academic preparation skills taught in credit ESL classes.

According to the study, “programs of this sort usually provide high-intensity instruction for these purposes to students beginning at the intermediate level of English language proficiency or above.”

- Co-enrollment.** Colleges allow intermediate ESL students to sign up for certain vocational or academic courses taught in English before they reach the top ESL level. “This practice not only allows students to gain valuable skills taught by those courses, but it also allows them to practice their English in authentic situations. It may also increase their motivation to persist in ESL, because it reinforces the idea that the purpose of ESL is not simply to learn more English,” the study said.
- Vocational ESL (VESL).** VESL courses are among “the most effective and fastest growing forms of non-credit ESL instruction” because they offer a shortcut to certification in fields from nursing to manufacturing to repair and maintenance. They often combine three elements: a high-intensity ESL course that teaches students both the English vocabulary and math skills required for particular jobs such as nursing or computer numerically controlled (CNC) machine operation, a regular vocational course taught in English, and a concurrent ESL support course providing further help with language and basic skills.
- Spanish GED.** Several colleges offer ESL students an opportunity to prepare for and take the high school equivalency exam in Spanish.
- Enhanced guidance and counseling.** Strong guidance programs can help adult ESL students make successful transitions. Some colleges mandate that students enroll in one-credit “college success” workshops and seminars. While counseling is important for all students starting at an academic disadvantage,



Vocational ESL combines the teaching of English with job skills to move students onto career paths.

it is crucial for ESL students because “the pathways from non-credit ESL to academic and vocational studies can be long and complex,” the study said.

The community college programs featured in this handbook employ these and other innovative strategies to help immigrants and refugees learn English.

Bunker Hill: Advancing Immigrant Success in Boston

Boston has been a beacon for immigrants throughout its history, from the Irish fleeing the Great Famine of the 1840s to more recent waves of newcomers from Latin America and Asia. It is home to the largest community college in Massachusetts, Bunker Hill Community College, which proudly proclaims that one of its principal goals is to “advance immigrant success” and “expand and develop new programs for immigrant students to enable them to achieve academic and career goals.”

Bunker Hill reflects the diversity of a city where nearly a quarter of the 600,000 residents speaks a language other than

English at home. With a second campus in nearby Chelsea and satellites in Cambridge, Revere, Somerville, East Boston, and Boston’s South End, Bunker Hill offers an expansive array of ESL and Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses as well as GED classes in English and Spanish. The philosophy and mission statement of the ESL Department is, “College content courses as soon as possible, with language support as long as necessary.”

Bunker Hill enrolls nearly 9,000 students in credit courses and thousands more in non-credit courses. In the 2004-05 academic year, some 2,600 students took ESL classes. Almost half of registered students took courses that prepare them for academic work (such as academic note-taking, speaking, reading, and writing) as well as classes that combine language instruction with psychology, computer technology, or other subjects for credit.²⁹ A third took Basic ESL classes offered by the college’s Community Education Department on a non-credit basis, with three hours of class each week (4.5 hours during the summer). The college’s ABE Department also enrolled 330 others in its free, non-credit Basic English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes designed for adults who lack English language and literacy skills and/or do not have a high school diploma.³⁰ These classes are offered at four levels and meet for three hours twice a week on the Chelsea campus and at sites out in the community. Separately, Bunker Hill’s Workforce Development Center offers workplace ESL courses on a contractual basis for businesses; this program served 228 students. Web-based ESL courses also are offered. In all, Bunker Hill offers 15 credit ESL classes, including three levels each of academic reading, academic writing, academic speaking, and academic note-taking.

Toni Borge, the special programs coordinator for the ABE Program, said community classes are designed to give students “a connection with the college right from the beginning and to start changing their aspirations. They are registered as Bunker Hill Community College students no matter

where their classes are.” That sends these primarily immigrant students the message that “college is something they can do,” she said. Some immigrants who resettle in Boston had only a few years of schooling in their native country. For them, the opportunity to begin learning English in a low-key, community setting “is very helpful because it’s a smaller, more nurturing environment,” said Borge.

Bunker Hill, like many colleges and other adult education providers, relies largely on part-time instructors to teach its many ESL offerings. But it requires both full-time and part-time faculty to have a master’s degree in ESL or a related field to teach the credit or basic ESL classes. According to a profile of Bunker Hill written for the *Passing the Torch* study, 62 percent of ESOL students had a measurable learning gain in 2004-05, and nearly 65 percent of Basic ESL students earned passing grades.

But even highly regarded programs such as Bunker Hill’s struggle to retain ESL students for more than a semester and help them make the transition to studying for an associate degree or certificate and, beyond that, a four-year degree. Forty-two percent of the ESOL students enrolled in fall 2004 attended classes in the following spring or summer, but only 14 percent of the Basic ESL students. The report’s authors theorized that “the ESOL program’s smaller size and larger infrastructure for student support likely contributes to its ability to retain more students. Second, because the [Basic ESL] program charges a fee, many students may be financially unable to continue taking courses for more than one semester in any one year.” A look at retention rates found that 43 percent of Basic ESL and 60 percent of ESOL students took more than one course at Bunker Hill over seven years (1999-2006).³¹ But the numbers who made the transition to credit ESL and college-level courses were much smaller: 18 percent of the Basic ESL students and just four percent of the ESOL students later took a credit ESL course; seven percent of the Basic ESL students and fewer than two percent of the ESOL students took other classes for academic credit.

Despite these challenges, Mary L. Fifield, president of Bunker Hill, said, “We at Bunker Hill Community College understand that learning is the key to a better life.” When the Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education held a hearing in Boston in March 2006, Fifield testified on behalf of the American Association of Community Colleges. Community college students, she said, include many who face the challenges of low income, limited expectations, and uneven preparation. “Yet this is the real majority. This is the future of our country. This is the workforce of America who will make the difference between a prosperous economy and one that falters,” Fifield told the commission.³²

At City College of San Francisco, ESL Is the Biggest Draw

The City College of San Francisco (CCSF) casts a large footprint across the Bay area, with a dozen campuses (including classes at San Francisco International Airport) and nearly 200 satellite locations. With an enrollment of more than 46,000 and a non-credit enrollment almost as large, it boasts that one of every 12 city residents is enrolled in its programs. A famous Diego Rivera mural, *Pan American Unity*, adorns the lobby of a campus theater. Courses are offered in more than 50 academic and 100 occupational areas. Fittingly in this diverse, multicultural city that is the birthplace of U.S. bilingual education (the landmark *Lau v. Nichols* civil rights case was brought in 1974 on behalf of Chinese American students in San Francisco public schools), the largest academic department at CCSF is ESL, with 130 courses and more than 340 faculty members. Some 19,000 students signed up for non-credit ESL classes in fall 2004 and 3,200 others took ESL for credit.³³ In a self-study written for its 2006 reaccreditation, a CCSF panel wrote: “Because of the very large cohort of second-language students in the credit programs at CCSF, the academic and vocational disciplines employ a variety of innovative and more traditional teaching strategies to reach

students from diverse educational and ethnic backgrounds.”³⁴

The MetLife Foundation, in collaboration with Jobs for the Future, gave CCSF a \$30,000 MetLife Community College Excellence Award in 2004 for “sophisticated and varied” ESL and community-based programs serving immigrants and others. Among the programs singled out in the award citation were the college’s intensive, 18-week Vocational ESL Immersion Program (VIP) to help English learners acquire both the language and job preparation skills to find good jobs, and a decade-old volunteer program called Project SHINE (Students Helping in the Naturalization of Elders).

Also supported by the United Parcel Service and the federal Corporation for National and Community Service, Project SHINE is a national service learning initiative that matches student “coaches” from CCSF and San Francisco State University with immigrants taking citizenship or literacy classes to prepare for the U.S. naturalization exam. In Spring 2005, 1,664 students in nearly 70 non-credit ESL classes at CCSF received tutoring through Project SHINE. More than 200 CCSF students—many of them former ESL students themselves—serve as tutors each year, according to Gail Weinstein, a San Francisco State University professor who launched Project SHINE in 1998. Originally aimed solely at immigrant elders, the coaches—some of them former ESL students themselves—now help immigrants with health literacy and other needs in addition to preparing for the citizenship test. There are sister Project SHINE sites on campuses in other cities, including Philadelphia, Miami, Milwaukee, El Paso, St. Paul, San Jose, and Long Beach. The national initiative is coordinated by Temple University in Philadelphia.

Three-quarters of CCSF’s large contingent of ESL instructors teach in the non-credit program. The college “does not distinguish between credit and non-credit ESL instructors in terms of qualifications, as many community colleges do,” Sharon Seymour noted in the *Torchlight* profile. All must

have a master’s in the field or an equivalent. “ESL instructors receive the same salary as all other instructors at CCSF and the salary rates are the same for non-credit and credit full-time faculty.”³⁵ The ESL Department budget for 2005-06 was \$14.7 million. The college received \$2,052 per full-time equivalent student for non-credit instruction. Fifty-nine percent of those students persist for more than one term. In the intensive VESL Immersion Program, the retention rate is even better: 80 percent. Those students receive 20 to 30 hours of instruction a week.

For the Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy project on community college programs, researchers examined the records of 44,700 ESL students who first enrolled at CCSF from 1998 to 2000. That 221-page study, *Pathways & Outcomes: Tracking ESL Student Performance*, paints a sobering picture of how steep the road to literacy is for many immigrant students. The researchers called it a “glass half full/glass half empty” story. They explained:

Non-credit students who take full advantage of the opportunities CCSF offers are outstandingly successful, both in ESL courses and in subsequent academic studies.... [But] ESL does not work as well as it should for most students who enroll in non-credit courses, because most of these students do not persist for enough terms or attend enough hours of instruction to make significant learning gains or to cross crucial thresholds.³⁶

The authors contend their findings “have implications for the adult education ESL field as a whole—both because CCSF’s ESL program has many features in common with a great many other programs and because the College’s program is regarded by many ESL professionals as ‘exemplary’ in the way it applies the principles of English language learning. In many respects, it is both a typical case and a best case of adult education ESL in the United States.” See sidebar on the following page for a summary of this study’s key findings.

**“Pathways & Outcomes:
Tracking ESL Student Performance”
Summary of Key Findings**

- *Only eight percent of students at the City College of San Francisco who started in non-credit ESL made the transition to academic studies.*
- *Students who progressed to regular classes “were among the College’s best academic students,” with 25 percent obtaining associate degrees or certificates—three times the rate of other adults who took basic skills classes.*
- *Former ESL students earned nearly half the degrees and a third of the certificates awarded to those cohorts that started in 1998-2000.*
- *Most successful students started at low levels of English proficiency and worked their way up. “They were students determined to achieve, and they did,” the study said.*
- *Still, fewer than one in five students who began at or near the lowest level of English reached the intermediate level.*
- *Only a small percentage of those who began ESL at high levels made successful transitions.*
- *Only 44 percent of all students advanced even to one of the 10 ESL levels. Most “did not persist or attend for long enough to advance very far.”*
- *Typically it took students 100 hours of class time to advance one level. Half those who made no gain took 50 hours or less of instruction.*

Kingsborough Creates Learning Communities for Brooklyn’s Immigrants

Brooklyn would be the fourth largest U.S. city if it were still independent, as it was until the close of the nineteenth century. More than a third of its 2.5 million residents were born outside the United States.³⁷ As it did in the days when trolleys still ran down Flatbush Avenue and the Dodgers played in Ebbets Field, Brooklyn still draws immigrants from the Caribbean to the Crimea, and it “is home to more students than Cambridge, Massachusetts,” according to Borough President Marty Markowitz. Some 15,000 of those students attend Kingsborough Community College, on 70 sunny acres overlooking Sheepshead Bay and the Atlantic where a Coast Guard station and U.S. Maritime facility once sat. Right next door is “Little Odessa,” the Brighton Beach neighborhood where émigrés from Russia and Eastern Europe have relocated by the tens of thousands. Brooklyn once drew large numbers from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic; now it draws immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, China, Vietnam, and dozens of other lands. “Over a hundred nations are represented and 80 languages spoken on our campus,” said Stuart Suss, Kingsborough’s provost and vice president for Academic Affairs. “Brooklyn was always a borough of immigrants and still is today.”

Kingsborough, founded in 1963, is one of six community colleges in the City University of New York (CUNY), the nation’s largest urban higher education system, with 230,000 students. Two-fifths of CUNY freshmen were born outside the United States, and nearly half grew up speaking a language other than English. Hispanic enrollment in the CUNY system grew dramatically in the 1990s, especially among immigrants. A study by D. Timothy Leinbach and Thomas R. Bailey of the Community College Research Center at Columbia University’s Teachers College found that Hispanic immigrants were “concentrated disproportionately in two-year schools” and they were not as successful as CUNY’s

traditionally high-achieving immigrant students from other parts of the world.³⁸

Kingsborough has drawn national attention for its Learning Communities approach to both ESL and developmental classes. Cohorts of no more than 25 first-year students take the same block of three courses, and receive two extra hours of classroom instruction and four hours of tutorials each week. The size of these classes is much smaller than the 42 students typical in general education classes at Kingsborough. The intensive ESL program enrolls 10 cohorts of 25 students each year taking ESL, speech, one-credit classes that introduce students to college and careers, and a full-credit introductory course in psychology, sociology, history, or health education. These immigrant students spend 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. each weekday in classes or meeting with tutors, with an hour break for lunch. To qualify for the Learning Communities, students have to place into intermediate ESL.

“The wonderful thing about the Learning Communities is that students get eight real credits that count toward graduation in their very first semester,” said Marcia Babbitt, chair of the English Department. The approach began on an experimental basis in 1995, but quickly became the standard at Kingsborough as students from those first Learning Communities passed the college’s English entrance requirements at rates as high as 98 percent. Daria “Dasha” Gorenshteyn, an immigrant from Ukraine and original participant, is now back at Kingsborough teaching ESL and serving as a mental health counselor after earning a master’s degree in social work from Columbia University. Recalling her start, she told *The Scepter*, the college newspaper, “Everything was coordinated and the support from the professors was incredible. It was like a family. We shared and studied together. I started making connections with other people.”

As the Learning Communities expanded, the pass rates fell back to 70 to 75 percent, but that is still up to 10 points higher than for other ESL students, Babbitt said.³⁹ She and colleagues regularly give workshops for

other colleges about the Learning Communities model, which Kingsborough now uses in its developmental classes as well. Suss said the high success rate is an important inducement for the immigrants that Kingsborough attracts. These “are very highly motivated adults. They don’t want to waste any time. They are looking for an education that can provide a quick return on their investment,” the provost said.

The research firm MDRC took a close look at Kingsborough’s Learning Communities in a 2005 study as part of a wider project called Opening Doors. It found that the students in the cohorts had higher pass rates, particularly in English, after their first semester and were more likely to complete remedial English requirements within a year. However, they were no more likely to still be enrolled at Kingsborough or elsewhere in CUNY one year later.⁴⁰

Kingsborough also is part of CUNY’s Language Immersion Program (CLIP), which offers lower-level, non-credit classes to immigrants from Brooklyn’s multilingual neighborhoods. CLIP is an intensive, one-year academic preparation program for English language learners (ELLs) who want to matriculate into the CUNY system. It uses thematic curricula that faculty develop, based on the interests of students and the resources of the city, such as the museums of New York. Frank Milano, who directs that program, said some students who work six days a week as home health attendants attend CLIP classes at night. The atmosphere is “a bit more like public school,” with students going to different classrooms for instruction on speaking and listening, reading, and writing.

Providing Civics Education

Pima Infuses Civics into the ESL Curriculum

In the midst of a budget crisis in 2003, the Arizona Legislature considered slashing the budget for adult education, including programs that help immigrants learn English. At Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona, Ismet Osmani, a refugee from Kosovo taking adult education classes,



At Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona, ESL students attend city council meetings, meet with legislators, and become civically engaged as part of their studies.

joined other student leaders in raising their voices against the proposal. The students’ journey to the state capital in Phoenix, 120 miles away, attracted media attention, and sympathetic lawmakers heard the student activists out and eventually scuttled the draconian cuts. Osmani’s picture appeared in newspapers, and the college made a video (posted at www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYMUQkfDfc) in which he spoke about his introduction to this side of American civic life. “I was a little bit nervous to go to that building.... [but] we thought it was the best way to send to the legislators our message and our concern about our school and the people who are attending classes here,” said Osmani, whose family was resettled in Tucson in 2002. “I just thought: Who am I? I just came in this country and to have a chance to talk to a legislator and people with high positions in the capital over there—I was very, very surprised and very satisfied. After the visits we got the money for our school, so we were very, very, very happy about that.” He was proud to have done “a little bit for our school.”

Pima, with 74,000 students is one of the largest, multi-campus community colleges

A Federal Push for English Literacy and Civics Education

ESL Civics programs got a boost when the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998 authorized the U.S. Department of Education to create a new English Literacy and Civics Education program. Grants are awarded to states by a funding formula that distributes the funds based on state needs. The initial \$30 million allotment in 2000 included grants for 32 states and almost \$7 million for a dozen demonstration projects. Two-thirds of the funds go to states with the “absolute” largest need based on their number of new immigrants, and a third is distributed to states experiencing the most rapid growth in those numbers.

Helping immigrants—especially elders who may have lived for years in the United States, speaking their native language—prepare for the citizenship exam had long been part of what adult education programs did.⁴¹ But rather than just memorizing facts and dates about U.S. history and the Constitution, this federal initiative “encouraged applicants to think about new ways to help learners be active participants in their communities and develop the kinds of knowledge, skills, and strategies they need to navigate the world around them and make their voice heard,” according to ESL and literacy expert Heidi Spruck Wrigley. She stresses the importance of linking ESL civics education closely to the issues that matter most to the students themselves in their daily lives. Convincing immigrants and refugees to approach elected officials can be a hard sell for those who came from countries with oppressive regimes, as well as for those struggling to put food on the table, Wrigley has written. To them, civic participation may seem “a worthwhile notion, admirable in others, but not necessarily something that gets them out of bed in the morning.”⁴² There are extensive civics education resources on the Web, including a Center for Adult English Language Acquisition brief on “English Literacy and Civics Education.”⁴³

in the United States. It had in place a civics-infused ESL curriculum well before the budget crisis. Former dean Cynthia Meier said the college involves hundreds of ESL students “in activities that focus on understanding the governmental systems and the nature of power in our society. They go to city council meetings, meet with legislators, travel to the state legislature, and engage in civic activity as a regular part of their studies.” There was an extensive student council structure—eight student councils with 280 student representatives at the time—and ambitious programs to give these students leadership training, public speaking skills, and the know-how to organize and tap into community resources, from the city council to the state capital.⁴⁴

Opening Doorways with VESL and Workforce Development

Carreras en Salud: A Community College Bridge to Nursing

When Juana Rodriguez moved to Chicago from Mexico, she thought that ten years’ experience as a nurse in her hometown of San Luis Potosí would give her a leg up in the U.S. job market. Instead she quickly discovered that she lacked the credentials to work as a nurse, and her inability to speak English left her toiling as a low-wage nurse’s assistant in a nursing home.

But that same nursing home quickly promoted her and nearly doubled her salary after she passed the Illinois Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) exam. The 48-year-old Rodriguez credits an innovative career and academic training program called *Carreras en Salud* (Careers in Health) with her new job. *Carreras en Salud* is a partnership among the Instituto del Progreso Latino, a powerhouse community-based organization on Chicago’s South Side, the Humboldt Park Vocational Education Center of Wilbur Wright College, the Association House of Chicago, and the National Council of La Raza. Ten months of instruction at Instituto and then pre-LPN classes at Association House helped Rodriguez gain entry to Wright’s Licensed Practical Nurse program.



Career pathway programs at community colleges can help immigrant students acquire skills for a range of careers, including machinist, nurse assistant, pharmacy technician, or phlebotomist.

“With all those classes, I also was learning more and more English. It was like starting over, but there really was no other way for me to see my dreams become true.”

Juana Rodriguez, Graduate, Carreras en Salud

Like virtually all of that program’s graduates, she passed the licensing exam on her first try.

Rodriguez went to Instituto after hearing on television about a program it had to help immigrant nurses gain U.S. licenses. Rodriguez took a 10-month refresher course but found she was still ineligible to take the nursing boards.

Then she got a letter from Instituto about the new *Carreras en Salud* pathway. “I went and I found out that it was like starting all over again. But I decided to go for it,” she said. “They gave us intensive classes in English and math to a college level.” In three months she was ready to move from

Instituto’s classes to Wright College’s Humboldt Park Center, where she did more work in math and English and then took the science courses—psychology, biology, anatomy, and physiology—that were prerequisites for the nursing program. “With all those classes, I also was learning more and more English,” said Rodriguez. “It was like starting over, but there really was no other way for me to see my dreams become true.”

Julie White, dean of Wright’s Allied Health Programs, said that with the addition of *Carreras en Salud*, her program now is graduating two classes of 60 licensed practical nurses each year instead of one class of 40. The *Carreras* students usually come in with lower GPAs but hold their own with those admitted through regular channels (the program has five applicants for each available space). White was apprehensive at first about how the *Carreras* nurses would fare on the licensing exam. But only two students have failed even part of the exam in the program’s first two and a half years, and in the last

graduating class, the valedictorian and salutatorian were both from *Carreras*. The National Council for Continuing Education and Training recognized *Carreras en Salud* in 2007 with its National Exemplary Program in Workforce Development Award, and it was recently honored by the U.S. Department of Labor with its Recognition of Excellence Award for tapping the talents of special populations in the workforce.

Madeline Roman-Vargas, dean of Humboldt Park Vocational Education Center, said *Carreras en Salud* is a career pathway that works extremely well. “Learning a second language and assimilating yourself to the culture takes a long time. What programs like *Carreras* demonstrate is that students can be helped to do this even in the most difficult fields, like allied health,” she said. Humboldt Park also prepares students for medical careers such as certified nursing assistant, pharmacy technician, phlebotomist, and more. The lesson that Roman-Vargas draws from the success of the *Carreras en Salud* partnership is that college administrators need to be open and receptive to new ideas.

“In higher education there has always been an expectation of higher standards, and if a student is not at a given academic level the institution will have nothing to do with him or her. However, we have to be humble in the community college system. Some of the students who come through our doors do not meet that high standard,” Roman-Vargas said. Colleges need to find innovative ways to help them catch up and move rapidly into careers. “Our students don’t have the time to spend long, long years here. They need to survive,” she said. “When you look at Latinos, the fastest growing population in this country, they are trying to get educated; trying to move up that career ladder. There’s nothing wrong with helping them work through the process faster.”

“My goal is for people to be able to get into a field where they only have to work one job at a time, and not three or four. That’s my goal. That’s what I’m trying to achieve.”

Mary Charuhas, Dean of Adult Basic Education, GED, and ESL, College of Lake County

Learning Auto Repair and Horticulture alongside ESL Students at Lake County

Lake County sits on the shores of Lake Michigan in the northeast corner of Illinois above Chicago. With 650,000 residents, it is the state’s third largest county and the second wealthiest. With growth has come increased diversity, including an influx of immigrants from Latin America and Asia. Lake County’s overall population grew 25 percent between the 1990 and 2000 censuses, but its Hispanic population

surged 140 percent (to 92,000) and the Asian population doubled (to 25,000).⁴⁵

Helping those newcomers learn English is a job that the College of Lake County has taken on with determination and passion. A comprehensive community college, it enrolls almost 16,000 students, 80 percent of them in academic transfer or career preparation programs. But it also has a robust adult education program. Almost one student in five was enrolled in non-credit or credit ESL programs in spring 2006, according to a profile written for the *Torchlight* project by ESL instructor Suzanne Leibman. The college’s ESL program began in 1974 with two classes offered in a Waukegan church social hall, and it was not until 1980 that the first full-time ESL faculty position was created.⁴⁶ Now the college employs six full-time ESL faculty and 80 part-time faculty teaching a broad array of non-credit and credit classes.

Mary Charuhas, dean of Adult Basic Education, GED, and ESL, counts 3,500 students in her classes each semester.



At the College of Lake County, ESL instructors visit career classes, such as this one in automotive technology, and learn the vocabulary that their students will need to do well in their chosen field.

Most of the students are Latino, but the diverse student body also includes many Russians, Polish, and a mix of Asian students. “I have classes that go from ‘My name is...’ all the way up to transition to college or transitioning to get a job,” said Charuhas. “I try to make sure we serve a wide range of people.” While many courses are offered on the main campus in Grayslake or at a satellite campus in downtown Waukegan, these adult learners do not have to go far to find College of Lake County ESL classes closer to where they live and work. There are five levels of instruction, allowing students to focus on speaking, writing skills, reading comprehension, or grammar depending on their particular need. The adult education department offers non-credit classes on two tracks: ESL for Academic Purposes for those who want to move on to college and earn an academic degree or career certificate, and ESL for Life Skills for those “interested in getting a job and understanding how to do things like working with their children’s school and dealing with hospitals,” the dean said.

Even in the academic track, students are taught not only language skills but the basics of how to navigate the U.S. education system “and what it means to go to college, what a college course entails, which moves them into essay writing, giving speeches, doing some research, and understanding something as simple as the credit hour,” said Charuhas. “It’s quite a mix. We find they come in waves. They’ll come in, study for a while, leave for a while, come back and study some more. Especially in an economic turndown, many are working two or three jobs just to make a living.”

“We have everybody here. People come here for technology and everything from nursing to ... horticulture to becoming a secretary,” she said. “My goal is for people to be able to get into a field where they only have to work one job at a time, and not three or four. That’s my goal. That’s what I’m trying to achieve.”

The College of Lake County provides extensive support for immigrants trying to learn English and acquire job skills at the

same time. It offers ESL support classes that operate in tandem with entry-level classes in its career programs for certified nursing assistants, air conditioning technicians, automotive service specialists, and landscape workers. Dean Charuhas encourages ESL instructors to visit career classes and learn the vocabulary their ESL students will need. They may make suggestions to the vocational instructor on ways to modify presentations so that language poses less of a barrier. Then they organize ESL support classes that are held in the same location an hour before or after each career class session. “They learn the lingo, how the [career] teacher works and how they test, and they help that teacher understand that if you’re talking to ESL students, you’ve got to turn around and face them, not talk to the blackboard. There’s all sorts of dynamics that go on in this kind of shared teaching experience,” said Charuhas.

Leibman, who customarily teaches intensive intermediate ESL classes, has provided support for automotive technology and horticulture as well as a business technology class. “I can’t tell you how to repair an engine, but I can tell you a lot of words for auto repairs,” she said. “Basically what I did was first sit in and observe the class to learn the vocabulary and basic concepts, and also to see how the instructor worked and what I could supplement so that my students could go in there and succeed.” A colleague helped ESL students through the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning course, and another supported those interested in nursing.

The ESL support helped boost Lake County’s automotive and horticultural enrollments. “Students who would have never thought they had a chance realized they could take those courses. So we built it slowly over time and now we just keep looking for new opportunities,” said Charuhas.



Airport University, a partnership between the Port of Seattle and South Seattle Community College, offers classes in management, computer technology, and ESL as it prepares Seattle-Tacoma International Airport workers for better jobs.

“The ability of employers to remain competitive in a global economy is increasingly dependent upon the educational system’s ability to produce skilled workers. An important component of this future workforce is the immigrant population.”

Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges report

Washington’s I-BEST: College and Career Skills Intertwined

Over the past decade, government agencies and foundations have invested in numerous efforts to use community colleges as a bridge to training and careers for low-income workers with large gaps in their educational background. Immigrants comprise almost one-sixth of the U.S. workforce, and 20 percent of low-wage workers.⁴⁷ One of the most widely watched efforts has been Washington State’s Integrated Basic Education Skills Training (I-BEST) program, which pairs an ESL/basic skill instructor with a professional/technical skill instructor in the same classroom, simultaneously helping students acquire language and the job skills needed for higher paying jobs in such marketable fields as nursing, early childhood education, and automotive trades. Recognizing the higher costs of having two instructors per class, the state reimburses colleges for I-BEST at a rate 75 percent higher than for other students. Israel Mendoza, director of the Office of Adult Literacy for the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, said that translates to almost \$9,000 per year in state funding for I-BEST students versus \$5,000 for students in regular classes.

The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, which oversees adult education, launched I-BEST in spring 2004 as a demonstration project at five community colleges (later expanded



To help low-wage workers train for higher-paying trades, Washington State’s I-BEST program pairs an ESL/basic skill instructor with a professional/technical skill instructor in the same classroom.

to 10) to test “traditional notions that students must first complete all levels of basic education before they can begin workforce training,” the board said.⁴⁸ The demonstration benefited from funding the State Board had received from the Ford Foundation as part of its Bridges to Opportunity initiative; that helped pay for staffing, technical assistance, professional development, and research that was key to the implementation of the demonstration projects and, eventually, to adoption of the I-BEST model statewide. The state legislature decided to fund I-BEST system-wide based on promising results from the demonstration, which compared 268 I-BEST students with 1,425 other ESL students at 10 technical or community colleges⁴⁹ who aspired to become nurses, commercial drivers, teachers’ aides, automotive technicians, and enter other occupations.

The State of Washington, like much of the nation, has become increasingly diverse. Its non-English speaking adult population more than doubled in the 1990s, from 117,000 to 261,000. “The ability of employers to remain competitive in a global economy is increasingly dependent upon

the educational system’s ability to produce skilled workers. An important component of this future workforce is the immigrant population,” a board research report said. Eleven percent of the state’s community college students were taking basic skills classes in fall 2007, and a quarter of those students were recent immigrants. Although ESL and literacy enrollments have been climbing, the board said, “the unmet need in Washington is huge. There are an estimated one-half million working-age adults without a high school diploma and one-quarter million working age adults lacking English language proficiency.”⁵⁰

The reality in Washington state and nationally is that relatively few ESL students make the transition to workforce training and if they do, it is typically training for jobs on the lowest rung of the ladder. According to the board report, the training they receive is often not aligned in pathways, but based upon a patchwork of credit and non-credit courses. “The longer it takes to master basic skills, the less likely adults are to advance from one stage to the next.” In Washington, only one in 10 ESL students made the transition to workforce

training within three years, and just one in 50 earned a certificate or degree within five years.

In the original demonstration, I-BEST students earned five times more college credits and were 15 times more likely to complete workforce training. Forty-four percent of I-BEST students completed workforce training, versus three percent of students in regular ESL courses. “I-BEST provided ESL students the opportunity to see that workforce training is attainable. They saw the opportunity and they took it,” the board report said.

A separate study of 35,000 adult students at Washington community colleges by David Prince, the board’s senior research manager, and Davis Jenkins of the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, concluded that earning one year of college credits and a credential was “the tipping point for students needing to find career pathways.” The ESL students who achieved those two milestones boosted earnings by \$7,000 a year. The gains were even greater for adult basic education students who already spoke English. They saw earnings go up \$8,500 a year once they completed a year of college and earned a credential. Their “tipping point” research has garnered wide attention.⁵¹

The colleges in the I-BEST demonstration focused their efforts on higher-level ESL students. On the state’s six-level competency system, these students were starting on level four. The campuses “uniformly reported that I-BEST was not suitable for low-level ESL students,” the report said, and even the best students still required additional ESL after I-BEST. But the initial results were strong enough for the board to urge all 34 technical and community colleges in the state to adopt the I-BEST approach of using two instructors. More recently, a follow-up study of I-BEST at 24 campuses in 2006-07 found a 55 percent increase in the number of ESL and adult basic skills students who were able to move up to college-level work in the same year they signed up for basic skills classes.⁵²

Tacoma Community College is using I-BEST to prepare 45 students for jobs in early childhood education and other careers, but nearly 800 others are in traditional basic skills classes. Beyond the cost of the extra instructor, I-BEST requires additional support, said Kim Ward, director of Adult Basic Skills. “You’re taking students that are very unfamiliar with the college environment, so the advising has to be much more intense. It’s an extremely labor intensive model, but the payoff makes it worth it,” said Ward.

Classes Take off for Immigrant Workers at Sea-Tac Airport

What started as an effort to help the largely immigrant screeners at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport regain jobs after the post-9/11 tightening of security has graduated into what sponsors proudly call Airport University, offering college credits and career advancement to scores of entry-level airport workers.

The program is a partnership between Port Jobs, a nonprofit arm of the Port of Seattle, and South Seattle Community College, an institution known for its wide-ranging apprenticeship and training programs. Airport University offers a host of classes in management, computer technology, and ESL.

The first to benefit were those screeners, hundreds of whom faced the ax after the Transportation Security Administration took over airport screening and required job-seekers to pass a new test to get an airport security badge. With help from an ESL instructor, “we had a pass rate of 50 percent compared to 10 to 15 percent at other airports,” said Susan Wilder Crane, executive director of Port Jobs, a nonprofit whose mission is to help connect Seattle’s poor to the pool of living-wage jobs in and around the busy airport where nearly 20,000 people work. The work of Port Jobs is funded by the Port of Seattle, the City of Seattle, King County, and many local and national foundations.

Now three or four practical courses are offered every quarter, with classes held in

the airport auditorium at no cost to the workers. Between 50 and 60 students take classes each quarter, with most learning English along with skills to move up from entry-level to higher-paying positions. The classes attract “a huge population of East Africans as well as Spanish speakers and immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe,” said Keith Marler, director of workforce education for South Seattle Community College.

Some are baggage handlers, ramp or tarmac workers; others work in the airport’s hotels, shops, and concession stands. Port Jobs awards modest scholarships to those who want to pursue additional credits and a degree at South Seattle or nearby Highline Community College.

Airport University was inspired in part by the courses that City College of San Francisco offers at San Francisco International Airport. Crane thinks other big airports would do well to follow these examples and forge their own partnerships between the workplace and the college world. “We have people who never saw themselves as college material starting to amass credit because it’s free,” she said.

Making the Transition to Four-Year Colleges

Many students enter community colleges with no intention of transferring to a four-year institution and earning a bachelor’s degree. According to the National Center on Education Statistics, two-thirds of 2004 seniors who enrolled immediately in a community college seem to have done so with the intention of pursuing a bachelor’s degree or higher, either viewing the two-year college as a stepping stone toward a BA or revising their initial plan to start at a four-year institution.⁵³ For adults starting in ESL or basic skills classes, there are two gulfs to be crossed: first to regular college classes leading to a two-year degree or certificate and from there to a four-year college for a bachelor’s degree. These are not insurmountable chasms, but most students are not successful in making both jumps. Those who do often rely on bridge

“Students’ lives have been positively influenced by teachers who take time to get to know them, challenge them with new ideas and concepts.”

University of Illinois College of Education’s evaluation of the Transitional Bilingual Program at Truman College

programs and other community college supports that try to make this difficult journey more manageable for immigrants and other English learners. Many of the barriers faced by ESL students are the same as barriers faced by most community college students—only the obstacles are higher for the language learners. Chisman, summarizing the Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy’s research on community college ESL programs, said eight percent of those who start at the lowest level of English proficiency “ever make the transition to postsecondary education of any kind.”⁵⁴

A background paper on “Helping Adult Learners Make the Transition to Postsecondary Education” commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Vocational and Adult Education suggests the dimensions of this challenge. “Adults moving from ABE [Adult Basic Education] programs into higher education often face considerable challenges,” Judy Alamprese of Abt Associates wrote. “Many need help strengthening their academic skills, as well as developing their study and time management skills. Many need assistance navigating enrollment and financial aid systems and other aspects of college life. In response to these challenges, ABE programs within and outside community colleges have begun more actively to assist adult learners in their transition to postsecondary education.” The learners “not only have to bolster their academic skills, but they also must learn to manage the amount of work and the pace of a college curriculum, including enrolling in multiple courses and completing homework in these courses. To prepare adult learners for these require-



Truman College’s Transitional Bilingual Learning Community (TBLC) helps recent immigrants in Chicago progress toward an associate degree and, beyond that, to a four-year bachelor’s degree.

ments, for example, the ESL program at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon, offers a structured curriculum for high-level ESL learners that simulates this experience by having learners maintain an academic workload similar to that required in credit classes,” Alamprese said. Other colleges are bolstering services that facilitate transition, “from providing additional instruction to enhance learners’ academic skills, to offering counseling for financial aid, stress and time management, and study skills, to providing mentors who offer encouragement and support. These types of assistance need to be much more widespread if we are to see a substantial increase in the number of ABE learners who participate in postsecondary education,” Alamprese concluded.⁵⁵

Julie Mathews-Aydinla of the Center for Applied Linguistics’s Center for Adult English Language Acquisition has summarized what research points to as the most effective strategies to support the transition of adult English language learners to postsecondary education.⁵⁶ The keys to preparing ESL students for success in academic programs include:

- Focusing on language accuracy and emphasizing form (including grammar, syntax, and spelling) as well as meaning.

- Extensive reading, including the types of texts they will face in college and such different genres as academic essays, editorials, and personal narratives.
- Learning strategies to expand their vocabulary, both by making frequent use of dictionaries and by learning how to infer the meaning of unknown words from the context. Such strategies are more effective in building vocabulary than rote memorization.
- Developing conceptual and critical thinking skills.

Administrators also need to address “nonacademic” factors that make the transition to postsecondary education difficult, including transportation, child care, and time management.

Truman College: Bilingual Classes and Scholarships

The Transitional Bilingual Learning Community (TBLC) at Truman College on Chicago’s North Side is helping recent immigrants get started on the right track and progress toward an associate degree and, beyond that, to a four-year bachelor’s degree. Launched in 2002, the one-year program recruits promising Latino immigrant students out of GED classes or

Chicago high schools, gives them scholarships to attend classes full-time that initially are taught in Spanish, but switch gradually to all-English. The students take classes together as a cohort with strong advising and counseling support. Because most are ineligible for federal financial aid due to their undocumented status, Truman awards Harold Washington Scholarships—named for the late Chicago mayor—that cover full tuition as long as the students are enrolled full-time (12 credit hours) and maintain a 3.0 GPA.

In an evaluation, researchers from the University of Illinois College of Education found that the investment in the Transitional Bilingual Learning Community appeared to be paying off. Among the first 124 students, 87 percent completed the one-year program and kept taking classes at Truman—double the usual retention rate for full-time students. The evaluators reported that almost a third of the first cohort and half of the second were on a path to earn associate degrees and/or transfer to a four-year college. “Students’ lives have been positively influenced by teachers who take time to get to know them, challenge them with new ideas and concepts, have an understanding of their life circumstances, demonstrate respect and dedication, and have an appreciation for their cultural heritage,” the Illinois professors wrote.⁵⁷ Many of the students, after the first year, cut back their class schedules to accommodate their need to work to support themselves, so it takes longer than two years to obtain an associate’s degree. But these students are persisting at high rates. “The pipeline definitely has been strengthened,” observed Helen Valdez, chair of the Math Department and a director of the Transitional Program. The Lumina Foundation for Education, which funded the evaluation of TBLC, recently spotlighted Truman’s learning community in one of its publications.⁵⁸

“Community colleges are increasingly pivotal in America’s role in globalization, and the integration of immigrants into the American society and economy. We must be measured by who our students are as they come in to study, what happens to them, and their subsequent success in local communities. Until those measures are also included in common assessments, we will always mismeasure the true impact of the community college.”

*Gail Mellow, President,
Fiorello H. LaGuardia Community College*

LaGuardia: ‘The World’s Community College’

Fiorello H. LaGuardia Community College President Gail Mellow likes to call her institution “the world’s community college,” and the numbers back her up. Fifty-eight percent of the 15,000 students enrolled in fall 2007 were foreign-born. They came from 156 countries and spoke 118 different languages natively. The two-year college in the New York borough of Queens attracts international students in large numbers as well as immigrants, drawn by its success in graduating even those who need basic skills or ESL instruction at the start of college. Mellow, delivering the Robert Atwell Lecture at the 2008 annual meeting of the American Council on Education, said, “We graduate almost twice the national average of students, even though our immigrant and New York City-educated students come to college with severe academic deficits.” LaGuardia’s Office of Institutional Research & Assessment combed through the records of 45,000 students who first enrolled between 1991 and 2001 and found that more than a quarter graduated within six years. Almost two-thirds of the 2006-2007 graduating class started in basic skills or ESL classes.

LaGuardia is an unusual community college in many regards. Located ten minutes from Times Square on the subway, the college reflects New York’s ethnic diversity, with a mix that includes 38 percent Latino, 21 percent Asian, 20 percent African-American, and 14 percent Caucasian. A majority of students attend classes full-time and half are traditional college age (17-22); the median age is 22, several years younger than at the typical community college. Half of the faculty hold doctorate degrees, and full-time faculty, not part-timers, teach almost half the courses. Eighty percent of new students say their goal is to earn a bachelor’s, master’s, or higher degree.

Still, LaGuardia’s heavily immigrant population shares some of the same challenges that confront community college students everywhere. Three students in four needed preparatory courses in at least one of the basic skills areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. LaGuardia’s graduates typically took nearly four years to amass enough credits for an associate’s degree. But LaGuardia says its five-year transfer rate of 54 percent was more than double the 23 percent national rate for community college students, and 23 percent of the class that entered in 1997 graduated by 2002, compared to 17 percent nationally.⁵⁹

Twice LaGuardia has received national awards for its extensive programs to help new students start college on the right foot. In 2002, LaGuardia was one of just two community colleges among 13 colleges and universities named as Institutions of Excellence by the Policy Center on the First Year of College, a project funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Atlantic Philanthropies, and other foundations. Mellow said LaGuardia’s programs for freshmen were “designed to foster academic success as well as create a sense of community and connectedness to the college among a highly diverse group of students, many with developmental or English-as-a-Second-Language needs.” Like Kingsborough Community College, LaGuardia makes extensive use of learning

communities that link ESL and other developmental courses with credit-bearing introductory courses in business, computers, and sociology. Dean of Academic Affairs Paul Arcario said, “What the success of such learning communities shows is that the most effective basic skills instruction occurs when ... offered in the context of a student’s chosen discipline or major.” College assessments show that students in its learning communities outperform those taking developmental, ESL, or college-level courses in stand-alone versions. Recently, LaGuardia has expanded the notion of “contextualizing” skills instruction to create First Year Academies, a school-within-a-school approach that offers an orientation course, co-curricular activities, a career development course, and development of student electronic portfolios (ePortfolios) all within the context of students’ majors. In 2007, LaGuardia received the Bellwether Award for its First Year Academy and ePortfolio program.

Mellow, in her lecture to the American Council on Education and in a book she co-authored, *Minding the Dream: The Process and Practice of the American Community College*, argues that both government funders and philanthropic organizations invest far too little in community colleges. “We must stop giving community colleges straw and expecting spun gold,” she said.

“Public community colleges spending averages \$9,183 per student, while spending for 4-year public college students



With the goal of promoting academic success and fostering a sense of community among its diverse study body, LaGuardia Community College uses learning communities to link ESL and other developmental courses with credit-bearing introductory classes in business, computers, and sociology.

averages \$27,973 a year,” the LaGuardia leader told her fellow college presidents. “As higher education leaders, we have allowed the baccalaureate and community college systems to develop separately and unequally.” Until the funding formula reflects today’s demographic realities, she said, “the relevance and status of American higher education in a competitive, global education market will erode.”

Community colleges, Mellow said, should be measured by more than graduation and

transfer rates. “Community colleges are increasingly pivotal in America’s role in globalization, and the integration of immigrants into the American society and economy. We must be measured by who our students are as they come in to study, what happens to them, and their subsequent success in local communities. Until those measures are also included in common assessments, we will always mismeasure the true impact of the community college.”

CONCLUSION

Immigrants from around the world bring to the United States a mixture of cultural practices and educational backgrounds, yet they all have the same goals: to pursue the American Dream. For some that may mean escaping political strife and persecution; to others, it is about escaping poverty and building a secure financial future.

Community colleges can and do play an important role in helping immigrants and refugees build new lives and contribute to their new communities. As accessible, versatile, and flexible institutions, they fill many critical functions from teaching remedial courses and providing English language instruction to credentialing new

health professionals and first responders to preparing students for the transition to a four-year university.

GCIR encourages foundations to explore the many ways that they can support the community colleges in their backyards and across the nation, from scholarships to research and evaluation to expansion of effective instructional programs and support services. As an educational system that serves the most unprivileged members of our society, including many immigrants and refugees, community colleges are natural partners for foundations seeking to ameliorate poverty, provide educational opportunities, and promote economic security. Many immigrants in community

colleges are highly motivated: By enrolling, they have already taken the initiative to improve their education and skills—by and large, while juggling college with full-time jobs and family obligations. Their part-time enrollment means progress toward degrees and certificates is slow, and many students give up far short of their original goals. With timely philanthropic investment, community colleges can do their part to help immigrant students succeed. Keeping immigrants on the path to degrees and jobs can pay large dividends, not just for these individuals but for the society to which they are and will be contributing.

GLOSSARY

Many of the terms in this glossary have more than one meaning, and their usage often varies by state or region, e.g., what is commonly known as ESL classes in one area may be called ESOL or even ELL classes in others. This glossary explains generally how various terms are used in this handbook.

Adult Basic Education. Instruction in the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics to adult learners to prepare them for the labor market or higher academic or vocational training.

Adult Education. Instruction for adults 16 and older who are not regularly enrolled full-time in school. Adult education encompasses a range of classes, from basic skills and English literacy to high-school equivalency and continuing education. Almost half of the 2.5 million adults in federally funded adult education programs are learning English. Adult education is offered by many providers, including schools and colleges, unions and employers, churches, nonprofits, and community organizations. At community colleges, adult education courses usually are offered outside the college's regular academic and career tracks.

Basic (or Beginning) ESL. Classes that teach adults basic English skills needed to function in an English-speaking society, including basic vocabulary for buying food and clothing and getting shelter and medical attention. This is sometimes called survival English.

Bridge Programs. Programs that help adults make the transition from basic skills and ESL into certificate and academic classes that prepare them for careers and further academic advancement.

Credit Courses. Courses that carry college-level credit and lead to a degree or certificate.

Developmental Education. Also called remedial education, developmental courses give students a second chance to learn reading, writing, and mathematics skills that normally are mastered in high school. Many students entering college are placed first in one or more developmental courses, which usually do not count toward college degrees or certificates.

English Language Learners (ELL). Originally used only with K-12 students, the term is also used to describe adults who need help with written and spoken English. They are sometimes called limited English proficient (LEP).

English as a Second Language (ESL). English language instruction for adults who are non-native speakers of English. According to the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, adult ESL targets English language and literacy proficiency needs rather than broader educational needs. ESL students range from highly educated, credentialed learners to those who are not educated or literate even in their native language.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). See "English as a Second Language" above.

GED. A high school equivalency diploma awarded through the General Educational Development (GED) testing program. The GED tests measure high school level skills and knowledge. Some students obtain a GED diploma immediately after dropping out of high school. Others seek to earn a GED as adults. Tests are offered in Spanish as well as English. A high school diploma or GED may be a prerequisite for entry into college or vocational programs.

Immigrant. A person who leaves his or her country to settle permanently in another country. In U.S. immigration law, immigrant refers to all aliens in the United States who have not been admitted under one of the law's non-immigrant categories, e.g., tourists and foreign students. In this report, "immigrant" describes all those born abroad who have come to settle in the United States, regardless of immigration status or whether they have become U.S. citizens.

Limited English Proficient (LEP). A term used to describe people who are not fluent in English. The Census and many experts define LEP individuals as anyone over the age of five who speaks English less than "very well." The federal government and many states and local school districts also use the term to identify K-12 students with insufficient English to succeed in English-only classrooms. Increasingly in the schools, the term English language learner (ELL) or English learner (EL) is being used in place of LEP.

Literacy. As defined by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, the ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family, and in society.

Local Education Agency. The local public school district. In many places, adult education falls under the jurisdiction of the K-12 system.

Non-credit Courses. Classes that do not count toward a college degree or certificate. May include basic skills and some ESL classes, as well as vocational and personal enrichment classes.

Refugee. A person admitted to the United States because she/he is unable or unwilling to return to the country of nationality due to persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, membership in a social group, political opinion, or national origin. Refugees apply for admission at a facility overseas and may apply for permanent resident status one year after being granted admission. In this report, the more general term "immigrant" includes refugees.

Remedial Courses. See "developmental education."

TESOL Teachers. Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. They often hold certification in this field.

Vocational English as a second Language (VESL). Instruction that seeks to improve adults' ability to understand, speak, read, and write the English language and increase their opportunities for employment through improved job-related English communication skills.

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