

## Publications

## Document Links

- » Overview
- » Executive Summary 
- » Full Report 

## Project Resources

- » Project Description
- » Project Publications

## Overview

Updates

RSS

Share

E-mail

Print

August 2009

## More Guidance, Better Results? Three-Year Effects of an Enhanced Student Services Program at Two Community Colleges

Susan Scrivener and Michael J. Weiss  
with  
Jedediah J. Teres

Over the past four decades, community colleges have played an increasingly important role in higher education. Today, community colleges — which are accessible and affordable, relative to four-year institutions — enroll more than one in every three postsecondary education students. Unfortunately, among students who enroll in community colleges with the intent to earn a credential or transfer to a four-year institution, only 51 percent achieve their goal within six years. These students may face fewer difficulties and make better academic progress if they had better access to, or more adequate, student services, but, as it stands, student-to-counselor ratios at community colleges are often more than 1,000 to 1, limiting the assistance that students receive.

As part of MDRC's multisite Opening Doors demonstration, Lorain County Community College and Owens Community College in Ohio ran a program that provided enhanced student services and a modest stipend to low-income students. Students in the Opening Doors program were assigned to one of a team of counselors, with whom they were expected to meet at least two times per semester for two semesters to discuss academic progress and resolve any issues that might affect their schooling. Each counselor worked with far fewer students than did the regular college counselors, which allowed for more frequent, intensive contact. Participating students were also eligible for a \$150 stipend for two semesters, for a total of \$300.

To estimate the effects of the program, MDRC worked with the colleges to randomly assign students either to a program group, whose members were eligible for the Opening Doors services and stipend, or to a control group, whose members received standard college services and no Opening Doors stipend. Any subsequent substantial differences in academic and other outcomes can be attributed to the program. This study's findings include the following:

- **The program improved academic outcomes during the second semester that students were in the study.** Program group students registered for at least one course during the second semester at a higher rate than did control group students and earned an average of half a credit more during the semester. The registration impact is likely primarily the effect of Opening Doors services provided during the first semester. The program did not substantially affect outcomes during the first semester.
- **After students in the Opening Doors program received their two semesters of enhanced counseling services, the program continued to have a positive effect on registration rates in the semester that followed. The program did not, however, meaningfully affect academic outcomes in subsequent semesters.** The program did not significantly increase the average number of credits that students earned after the counseling program ended or over the study's three-year follow-up period.



## Related Publications

**Promoting Partnerships for Student Success:** Lessons from the SSPIRE Initiative »

**Getting Back on Track:** Effects of a Community College Program for Probationary Students »

**Support Success:** Services That May Help Low-Income Students Succeed in Community College »