Danforth and MU to hire joint researchers

Nov 18, 2014, 7:31am CST

Ben Unglesbee
Reporter-St. Louis Business Journal

The Donald Danforth Plant Science Center and the University of Missouri plan to deepen their relationship with the addition of four new researchers who will hold joint appointments at both institutions.

The appointments, announced Tuesday, are years in the making and aim to give Danforth and MU more fluid access to each other's staff and research capabilities.

Danforth President Jim Carrington said officials from Danforth have been talking with deans and department chairs at MU for several years about opportunities for "doing something jointly." Those talks accelerated with the appointment of MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin and soon developed into a framework for hiring four faculty members with joint appointments.

"The reasons to do this as a formal partnership with Mizzou — very briefly, we can do much more together," Carrington said.

The two institutions will recruit mid-career and senior-level plant scientists with established reputations and research programs, Carrington said. Two will be housed at MU and two will be housed at Danforth, with the costs for salaries and benefits being split roughly between the two institutions. All will have joint appointments at both Danforth and MU and tenure at MU. Both institutions will agree to each of the hires.

Carrington would not say what the cost of the partnership would be, only that each institution has its own criteria and resources in setting salaries. The advantage of the dual appointments will be to "double the impact of the hires" for each institution, Carrington said. For example, the partnership will make it easier for MU graduate students to work at Danforth as well as make it easier for Danforth to access MU's research technology and facilities, and vice versa.

Carrington added that Danforth and MU will search for scientists who can complement the research activity and fill gaps at both institutions. While all hires will have the freedom to pursue their own research programs, Carrington expects they will work on collaborative projects between Danforth
and MU. "This will make us more intertwined and connected to Mizzou," he said. "This is a big deal for us because it lets us get a big jump on hiring for the expansion that we're undergoing and is a reaffirmation of our partnership (with MU) that is 16 years going."

Carrington doesn't anticipate making any hires at Danforth until early 2016, after the center's $45 million facility expansion is complete. Until then, the center won't have the space for new scientists, he said.

Earlier this year Danforth announced another formal partnership between the center and MU, as well as seven other research centers including other universities across the state. That project, dubbed "Missouri Transect: Climate, Plants and Community," is funded with a $20 million grant from the National Science Foundation to look at the agricultural, economic and environmental impacts of climate variability on the state.

MU inspecting library after mold is found

By Ashley Jost

Monday, November 17, 2014 at 3:58 pm

Testing is underway after mold was found on a heating and cooling vent at the University of Missouri's Ellis Library last week.

The fungus was found Thursday morning. Environmental Health and Safety personnel tested the area that afternoon and confirmed it was mold, according to a notice from library administrators. The vent was in the special collections area of the fourth floor.

“While we have confirmed there is mold in the area, that doesn’t mean anything,” Environmental Health and Safety Director Todd Houts said. “Mold is in the air everywhere. It becomes an issue when there’s a lot. We’re not sure how much there is yet.”

Houts said workers set up “traps” that will collect samples of the mold throughout the week. Later this week or early next week, environmental staff will examine the mold spores the trap collects.

“Mold has a bad name because when people talk about it they’re usually talking about extreme situations, but mold is present practically everywhere,” Houts said. There is no obvious,
imminent threat from the mold found in the library vent, he said, and there’s no history of mold problems inside of the library.

The notice from the library was sent to library staff, members of the Library Committee and the MU Faculty Council, library spokeswoman Shannon Cary said in an email.

“Environmental Health and Safety will be performing additional inspections and tests to make sure all affected areas are identified,” the notice reads. “Any affected areas will be cleaned immediately by Campus Facilities, and other air ducts in Ellis Library will be cleaned as needed. In addition, MU Libraries administration is working with the Office of Energy Management to make sure that proper temperature and humidity levels are maintained at Ellis Library and the specialized libraries at all times.”

MU software change lets students use preferred first name

By Ashley Jost

Monday, November 17, 2014 at 11:25 am Comments (2)

A University of Missouri software update now allows students to use the first name of their choice for class rosters, school email and other Web-based systems.

MU Registrar Brenda Selman said the change was implemented about a month ago.

“We did this at the request of the students,” Selman said.

It’s a request students from several campus groups — including transgender and international students — have brought to administrators several times during the past few years. Selman said the delay was caused by waiting for the best time for a software update.

Students can now change their first and middle names, and the change will show up on class and grade rosters, the online hub for all of the students’ information, the email system and Blackboard, the content management system for coursework. Blackboard already had allowed preferred names, Selman said.
Any name changes will not show up on student ID cards, financial aid documents, transcripts or any other official documents, Selman said. Those will retain students’ legal names.

Selman said students can technically change their name as often as they would like now.

MU student Shane Stinson pushed for the change. Earlier this year, Stinson started a gender transition with hormone shots. He started going by Shane — instead of his birth name, Sarah — last fall. His story was published by Mizzou magazine, among other outlets.

“I really think Michael Sam and my story” supported “the fact that these LGBTQ issues need to be dealt with,” Stinson said. “To me, it makes me feel as if the professors, the administration, staff and faculty truly care more about who I am, my identity and who I want to be rather than what a piece of paper says.”

Stinson said the software change prevents students such as him from having to “out” himself every time he is in a new class when he has to ask the professor to call him Shane, not Sarah.

How to turn an office park into raptor habitat

University of Missouri rightOriginal Study

Posted by Nathan Hurst-Missouri on November 17, 2014

Businesses can play a role in raptor conservation—and possibly boost employee morale—by adding more native grasslands and woodlots, as opposed to lawns.

Raptors, or birds of prey, some of which are endangered species, typically live in environments that provide natural land cover, such as forests and grasslands.

Protecting endangered birds of prey helps maintain food chain balance and prevents overpopulation of common raptor prey, such as snakes and rodents.
As more businesses are built on the edges of urban areas, land where raptors once lived becomes industrialized, which raises concerns about the consequences of habitat destruction on raptor populations.

“Greater amounts of cleared and developed space, such as lawn and pavement, around these businesses have negative effects on raptor presence,” says Charles Nilon, professor of fisheries and wildlife at the University of Missouri College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources.

“In areas with more natural land cover of tall grass, woodlands, and tree cover, we saw a higher number of raptors. Simply adding certain trees and leaving tall grass can attract this wildlife.”

5% more lawn means 12% fewer raptors

To determine raptor presence, graduate student Jonathan Hogg visually counted birds at several business parks—or clusters of businesses—in St. Louis and surrounding counties. He also broadcasted raptor calls and recorded responses from resident birds. Hogg and Nilon found that even minor landscape changes can make areas more welcoming to raptors.

“Raptors avoid business parks with large areas of pavement and lawns because they can’t find food, protection, and nesting areas in these open spaces,” Nilon says.

“We found that for each five percent increase in lawn cover, the number of raptors decreased by 12 percent. Urban businesses can contribute to raptor conservation efforts by planning and preserving grassland and woodlots, and by leaving lawn areas undeveloped.”

Hogg and Nilon found that a surprising number of raptors have adapted to some business parks. During the course of the study, he detected 224 birds and eleven different raptor species. In addition, at least two sites showed evidence of nesting.

“Smaller areas of non-lawn habitat throughout the property, or on the edges of a business park, are adequate to increase the presence of these birds,” Nilon says.

“Retaining natural habitat on the edges of the development, on slopes, or along streams contributes to biodiversity in the urban landscape with virtually no impact on the usefulness of the property.”

Nilon says that many national and international corporations have initiated habitat improvement programs on their properties, and that research shows employees also often prefer these more natural landscapes.

The Wildlife Habitat Council and the British Trust for Ornithology, for example, report that a diverse wildlife population improves employee morale and encourages better relations with local communities.

Hogg and Nilon’s study appears in *Urban Ecosystems*. 
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU to host national wheelchair basketball tournament

Monday, November 17, 2014 | 7:03 p.m. CST; updated 7:39 p.m. CST, Monday, November 17, 2014
BY ALLISON GRAVES

COLUMBIA – **MU is preparing to host the National Intercollegiate Wheelchair Basketball Tournament for the first time this March, and the university's wheelchair basketball program is asking the city to pitch in $10,000.**

Columbia’s Convention and Visitors Advisory Board voted unanimously on Monday to recommend the Columbia City Council approve the funding, which would include:

- $4,500 for officials and their room costs
- $2,500 for awards
- $500 for game basketballs
- $2,500 for printing advertisements and programs

The total cost of the tournament is estimated at $63,000.

The city's funding would come from the Tourism Development Program fund, according to a funding application filled out by Laura Salerno, associate director of the MizzouRec Services and Facilities Department.

The games are supposed to be held in the Brewer Fieldhouse, where the courts and goals are smaller than regulation, Salerno said. The tournament is also awaiting a possible $25,000 sponsorship from the Missouri Orthopedic Institute, which would pay for a portable, regulation-length floor and goals.

The National Wheelchair Basketball Association is contributing $7,500, and MizzouRec is covering facility fees, valued at $9,500. The tournament is still looking for more sponsors, Salerno said.
Eleven teams will compete in the tournament, which will be held March 5 to 7. It is the first time MU has hosted a tournament since joining the central intercollegiate division of the National Wheelchair Basketball Association in 2005.

MU has only a men’s wheelchair team, which is 6-0 this season.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Dr. Mitchell Rosenholtz left the world, and Columbia, 'better than he found it'
Monday, November 17, 2014 | 9:04 p.m. CST; updated 7:30 a.m. CST, Tuesday, November 18, 2014
BY WITT WELLS

COLUMBIA — When he was 77, Dr. Mitchell Rosenholtz finally decided to have his own Bar Mitzvah.

His faith had always been important to him, ever since his childhood in St. Paul, Minnesota. He was raised in the Reformed Jewish tradition, and he continued practicing when he moved to Columbia. He helped found Congregation Beth Shalom in 1974; he was one of three people who signed the incorporating documents. But it wasn't until a 2007 trip to Israel that Dr. Rosenholtz decided it was time to prepare for his right of passage.

"When Mitch was growing up, the Jewish tradition had gotten away from doing Bar Mitzvahs," said Maria Evans, Dr. Rosenholtz's friend and colleague. "By the time he was older, he thought it would be too hard."

The odds were stacked against him. He was showing signs of dementia, and his medical career hadn't given him much time to build a foundational knowledge of Hebrew.

But he did it.

"The day of the ceremony was miraculous," Evans said. "For two hours, the Mitch that we all knew and loved was back."
Dr. Mitchell Jay Rosenholtz of Columbia died Saturday morning, Nov. 15, 2014, after a 10-year battle with vascular dementia. He was 83.

He was born Dec. 18, 1930, to Rae and Alfred Rosenholtz in St. Paul. For the rest of his life, he would maintain a love of all things Minnesota. As a native of a state that had, in Dr. Rosenholtz’s words, a "real winter," he was an avid hockey player, continuing to play well into his sixties.

He graduated from Harvard College in 1952 and from the University of Minnesota medical school in 1956.

He was interning at Cincinnati General Hospital when he met Sandra Rathbun. They married in 1963, after Dr. Rosenholtz completed a brief stint as a researcher in the Army Medical Corps.

Dr. Rosenholtz moved to Columbia in 1969 to join the MU School of Medicine, where he would work as a professor for more than 30 years. In the early 1970s, he also served as the assistant dean for students and assistant dean for admissions.

Dr. Rosenholtz had a special relationship with his students. He typically memorized all of their names by the end of the first class, and he had a reputation for giving lively and humorous lectures. He was the most parodied professor in the medical school’s annual skit shows, but students also had a great respect for him. When the Vietnam War took students out of his class, he protested when they couldn't. Many of his pupils asked him to perform their hooding during their graduation from the school of medicine.

In his spare time, Dr. Rosenholtz enjoyed photography, bluegrass music, Missouri football games and fishing in Minnesota, but golf was his primary hobby. He played in the inaugural U.S. Junior Amateur in 1948, on the Harvard Golf Team and in the faculty golf league at MU.

Dr. Rosenholtz’s commitment to fairness and to the motto "leave it better than you found it" was expressed particularly in his active involvement with liberal political causes. He worked with Common Cause in an effort to get money out of politics, and he also happily supported his wife, Sandy, when she ran for the Columbia City Council in 1973 and 1976.
Dr. Rosenholtz’s medical knowledge never really left him, Evans said.

"We've lost a lot of the old guard at the medical school," she said. "Professors like him don't just grow on trees. He was a big connecting thread for a lot of people associated with the med school."

Dr. Rosenholtz is survived by his daughter, the Rev. Cathy Ellen Rosenholtz and her husband, Fred Schmidt, of Columbia; and several cousins, nephews and nieces. He is remembered dearly by Evans, the staff of The Bluffs and generations of MU medical students and residents.

His sisters Ruthe Druck and Bobby Cohen, wife, Sandy, and daughter Debbie died earlier.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Congregation Beth Shalom building fund, the Mitchell J. Rosenholtz Scholarship at the MU School of Medicine or to Common Cause.

Services will be at 2 p.m. Tuesday at Congregation Beth Shalom, 500 W. Green Meadows Road. Burial will follow at Columbia Cemetery. Visitation will be at 6 p.m. Tuesday at 111 Edgewood Ave.

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MU music director marches to her own beat

By Bill Clark

Monday, November 17, 2014 at 1:00 pm

When the University of Missouri Friends of Music Board of Directors met recently, they were greeted by the new director of the School of Music — a raven-haired, 45-year-old mother of two named Julia Gaines, who has spent her performance career as a percussionist, mastering drums, marimba, vibraphone and dozens of other instruments — a far cry from her predecessor, classical violinist Rob Shay, who moved on in June to become Dean of the University of Colorado College of Music.
The 45-member board is charged with raising scholarship funds beyond the school’s budget.

Shay spent six years as the School of Music director, using his exceptional administrative skills to build upon the foundation left him by former director Melvin Platt’s retirement. When Shay moved on, Mike O’Brien, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, eventually announced his successor would come from the department.

No one rushed forth until Julia agreed to an interim try, only to find that the position would not be interim. So here she is today without interim in her title.

“Rob Shay taught me many lessons in administration and I listened closely,” Julia said. “And as a percussionist, you must learn lots of instruments and to be totally organized and in control.”

Now, meet Julia Gaines, born in 1969 in Belleview, Wash., one of three daughters of Jim and Jessie Hillbrick. Her dad was a minister, basketball player at Seattle Pacific College, a singer, pianist and clarinet player who today lives in our town, a distance runner who completed two half-marathons in October — and a cheerleader for the School of Music’s new director.

Her mom “had not a note of music in her,” Julia said, “but she loved the theater and was a great storyteller.”

When the family moved to Moscow, Idaho, Julia was in the second grade, and it was here she started her musical journey as a pianist. By the seventh grade, she had shifted to the drums, graduated from Moscow High School in 1987 and moved on to Lawrence University Conservatory of Music, earning a degree in percussion performance in 1991.

Next came a master’s degree from Eastman School of Music, then finally a switch to the University of Oklahoma to work on a doctorate. In 1996, Julia took a part-time position at MU, hired by Mel Platt, and finished her OU doctorate in Columbia. She became a full-time faculty member and, in 2000, married Rob Gaines, a Rock Bridge graduate and son of Bob Gaines, a longtime orthopedic surgeon still practicing at Columbia Orthopedic Group.

Rob, the owner of a local computer company, is totally non-musical, but their two kids have followed Mom. Zachary, 11, a sixth-grader at Gentry Middle School, said drums were for girls only but made the switch this year. Hanna, age 8, is a pianist and third grader at Lee School.

The Gaines family is active in the Christian Fellowship Church where Julia serves as the Children’s Christmas music director.

Wednesday’s column will outline Julia’s role as the new director of the MU School of Music. We will close today with five memorable music moments of hers:

- Playing her first marimba solo as a high school freshman. She became addicted to audiences.
• In 1989, her Santa Clara Vanguard Drum Corps won the national title in front of 40,000 at Arrowhead Stadium. All 128 of the members were crying as they marched to victory, Julia said.

• In 1991, as an undergraduate at Lawrence she played the Lord’s Prayer on the marimba, as it had been presented by xylophone player Val Eddy. “It was an emotional experience I’ve repeated many times since,” she said.

• In the opera, “La Boheme,” there is only one cymbal note. At OU, she played that one cymbal note and cried as she did. The scene depends on it.

• Playing a Tom McKenney piece on the marimba in 2007 — her solo debut in Carnegie Hall.

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**Michael Sam named one of GQ's Men of the Year**

Monday, November 17, 2014 | 9:19 p.m. CST

**BY MISSOURIAN STAFF**

COLUMBIA — **Former Missouri defensive end Michael Sam was named one of GQ's 2014 Men of the Year, the magazine announced Monday.**

Sam appears on one of GQ's six collectible covers for the annual award. The other people GQ selected for its 2014 Men of the Year covers are Dave Chappelle, Steve Carell, Ansel Elgort, Chris Pratt and Shailene Woodley.

The announcement comes after Sam made national headlines by being the first openly gay player selected in the NFL Draft.

On Twitter, Sam thanked GQ for his inclusion in Men of the Year, saying, "I'm beyond honored to share their company!!"

The St. Louis Rams selected Sam as the 249th pick in the 2014 NFL Draft, but the team cut him at the end of training camp. He temporarily joined the Dallas Cowboys' practice squad but is currently a free agent.
On Sunday, the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported that the city’s Arena Football League franchise, the Las Vegas Outlaws, plans to offer a contract to Sam. Sam graduated from Missouri in December 2013. In his senior season, he was the Southeastern Conference Defensive Player of the Year and led the Tigers to a division championship and a Cotton Bowl win.

The Chronicle of Higher Education

November 18, 2014

AAU’s Planned Sexual-Assault Survey Draws Backlash From Some Researchers

By Tom Bartlett

NO MENTION

Last Friday the Association of American Universities sent a letter to 75 university presidents and chancellors urging their campuses to participate in a sexual-assault climate survey. On Monday, in response, 16 sexual-assault researchers sent a letter to those same university presidents and chancellors urging them not to participate in the survey.

So why would researchers who study sexual assault speak out against a proposed survey that would gather more information about that long-ignored national problem?

One reason, the researchers say, is a lack of transparency. Universities are being asked to commit to a survey that, they write in the letter, is "proprietary and therefore not available for scientific examination."

According to the letter from the AAU, while aggregated results will be shared widely, the results for a specific university will be provided only to that university. The researchers have also raised doubts about who will design the survey and worry that, rather than bring more attention to the issue, the AAU’s survey "may well relieve institutions of the incentive to perform valid surveys conducted by those with expertise in researching campus sexual assault."
One signer of the letter was Jennifer J. Freyd, a professor of psychology at the University of Oregon. Ms. Freyd, a longtime sexual-assault researcher, conducted a survey on her campus, released this fall, that found that more than a third of women had experienced at least one nonconsensual sexual encounter.

In an interview on Monday, Ms. Freyd said more information can be good as long as "the process is open and everyone is following good scientific practice"—but she doesn’t think that’s the case here. She argued that the AAU’s survey was intended to allow universities to say they’re taking the issue seriously and pre-empt further criticism. "Universities are going to say, ‘We’ve done our duty,’" Ms. Freyd said. "There can be a survey done that does more harm than good."

Mary P. Koss agrees. Ms. Koss, a professor of public health at the University of Arizona who is considered a pioneer in the study of sexual violence, is worried that the real purpose of the survey is to counter efforts by the federal government to examine and deal with sexual violence on campuses. "I’m concerned because the AAU’s stated purpose is to get ahead of the federal initiative, which I interpret to mean getting around the federal initiative," she said.

Ms. Koss and Ms. Freyd also object to what they say is a lack of experts in the field of sexual assault involved in developing the survey. Among those on the survey’s design team are administrators and some professors who don’t study sexual assault. It’s as if, according to Ms. Freyd, you were interested in "finding the genetics of Ebola, and you put together your research team to study Ebola, and you have researchers from other fields, general counsels, and administrators."

Those criticisms aren’t fair, said Mollie B. Flounlacker, associate vice president for federal relations at the AAU and the project manager for the association’s campus sexual-assault survey. A number of experts in the field of sexual assault are involved with the survey, she said, along with administrators and others who can ensure a successful campus response.

As for the assertion that the association’s survey is mainly about universities’ attempting to head off bad press rather than deal with the problem, Ms. Flounlacker said that’s not true. "Presidents are serious about making progress on this issue," she said. "The reason we’re doing this is not a political one."

Ms. Flounlacker said it was a shame that the researchers were denigrating the AAU’s survey, calling the association’s effort an important step forward. "There’s never going to be a perfect product, but we tried to be incredibly careful with involving the
right people who are going to be a part of this effort," she said. "It’s unfortunate that members of our community are not going to be supportive."

Sarah L. Cook shares the concerns of those who signed the letter. Ms. Cook, a professor of psychology at Georgia State University who studies violence against women, didn’t sign the letter because she was a consultant on a competing research proposal submitted to the AAU. She worries that university presidents are being asked to involve their campuses in a survey that hasn’t yet been developed.

"If I were a university president, I’d think twice before signing on the dotted line," she said. "I’d like to know what I was getting."

November 18, 2014

Colleges Saw a Flood of Students at Recession’s Peak—and Discouraging Results

By Katherine Mangan

NO MU MENTION

Six years after a flood of students entered college, many seeking shelter from a sinking economy and a leg up in an uncertain job market, their progress report is in, and it isn’t encouraging.

Only 55 percent of the students who entered college in the fall of 2008, at the peak of the Great Recession, had earned college degrees or certificates by May 2014, according to a report released on Tuesday by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. That’s down from 56.1 percent for the cohort that started in 2007. That doesn’t seem like a lot, but it comes at a time when colleges, foundations, and policy makers have been pulling out the stops to prod more students along to the finish line.

And it follows a year when completion rates failed to budge.
The biggest drops were among older and part-time students struggling with rising costs and the competing demands of their jobs, colleges, and families. The sector with the sharpest declines was four-year for-profit colleges. Those are the very students and sectors that accounted for the largest increases in enrollment during the recession, so it is perhaps not surprising that overall graduation rates slipped.

It is nonetheless disappointing to colleges that have been beefing up their academic-support programs and streamlining transfer requirements as the pressure to graduate more students intensifies. President Obama’s proposed college-rating system is just the latest of such high-profile efforts.

Those two external trends—a national completion push and an influx of at-risk students—"were kind of at odds here," Doug Shapiro, executive research director at the center, said in an interview on Monday.

"We were a little surprised that the student demographics won out over the improved institution efforts," he added. "A lot of colleges are doing all they can to keep students on track to graduate."

‘A Buffer Against Hard Times’
College was a popular destination in 2008, as widespread layoffs helped push enrollments up 12 percent over 2007.

"When the cohort for this study entered college, the prospect of a degree as a buffer against hard times was top of mind for many who found themselves newly unemployed," the report notes. "Yet, while the labor market lowered the opportunity cost of enrolling, rising college tuition continued to drive postsecondary degrees out of reach for many Americans."

The clearinghouse’s report, supported by a grant from the Lumina Foundation, focuses on first-time, degree-seeking students who enrolled in two- and four-year colleges. It also includes the growing number of students who took classes for college credit while they were still in high school.

It examines graduation patterns for students by age, part-time or full-time status, and sector, and follows them as they transfer to other colleges.

Graduation rates held steady for traditional-age students who enrolled full time, but those students make up a shrinking minority of today’s college students.
Also in the good news, bad news department: Students who started in four-year, private nonprofit colleges saw a 0.7-percentage-point increase in their completion rates, but their share of the total cohort in 2008 was down 1.2 percentage points, compared with the 2007 cohort.

Among the other key findings, comparing the 2008 and 2007 cohorts, the report says:

- The completion rate fell 2.6 percentage points, from 40.9 to 38.3 percent, for students age 21 to 24, and 1.4 percentage points, from 43.5 to 42.1 percent, for those older than 24.
- Completion rates for students starting out in two-year public colleges dropped 0.7 percentage points, from 39.8 percent in 2007 to 39.1 percent in 2008.
- Students had a tougher time transferring from two-year to four-year colleges, with 16.2 percent of those who started at community colleges going on to earn degrees from four-year colleges, compared with 17.2 percent the year before.

So what does all this mean for higher-education policy?

For one thing, the report’s authors note, it highlights the importance of considering the widespread variations in completion rates based on student demographics and the types of colleges they entered. Colleges have long complained that federal completion calculations leave out many of their students, including those who transfer or attend part time. The clearinghouse’s figures capture many more of those increasingly mobile students.

Policies that make college more affordable will allow more students to attend full time and will increase their odds of success, the report notes.

**Caveats About For-Profits**

The findings on low completion rates among for-profit colleges are likely to intensify the controversy over the federal government’s gainful-employment rule, which will judge career-oriented programs on the basis of their graduates’ ability to repay student-loan debts.

Four-year for-profit colleges saw the biggest surge in enrollment and corresponding drop in completion rates. Their rosters were up 35 percent in 2008, but their six-year completion rates dropped four percentage points, from 42.3 to 38.4, from the class that entered in 2007.

The for-profit sector has been criticized for its aggressive recruiting and high costs, but the authors also point out several caveats when interpreting their students’ high attrition rates.
Even though the research center tried to include only students who were seeking college credentials, it isn’t easy to identify them, particularly at for-profit institutions. Some students stick around long enough to get industry credentials but leave without college certificates or degrees, Mr. Shapiro said.

In addition, many students who enrolled in 2008 had recently lost jobs and "may have been seeking shelter from the economy," he said. "If they got a degree, great, but if a job opened up earlier, they were more than happy to take it and leave college." Those students, most would agree, shouldn’t be counted as dropouts or failures.

The report’s focus on first-time college students also leaves out many students who previously attended college and enrolled in for-profit institutions to retool for different careers.

David S. Baime, senior vice president for government relations and research at the American Association of Community Colleges, said he was disappointed in the findings.

"Students who went to college in 2008 were being clobbered with horrible economic conditions," he said on Monday.

"A lot of people enrolled hoping it would help them get another job or because they were unemployed and didn’t have other options, but the financial and other realities were too much for them," he said. "It probably would be unrealistic to expect the completion efforts that were just getting going when this cohort was enrolling to make a difference in the outcome."

Strengthening ties between community colleges and four-year colleges will continue to be crucial, the report says.

"For many disadvantaged students, enrolling in community college is the only entry point to postsecondary education," it notes. As a result, "improving community college/four-year institution partnerships is even more important."
More first-time students enrolled in college in 2008, as the recession was beginning, than in previous years. But a smaller percentage of this group made it to graduation, according to new data the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center released today.

The study draws from a database that tracks 96 percent of the nation’s total enrollment. It is the third annual installment of completion data from the nonprofit center, and the first look at six-year graduation rates for students who entered higher education as the economy soured.

Graduation Rates on "This Week"
Doug Shapiro, executive research director of the National Student Clearinghouse, will discuss these new findings Friday on "This Week," Inside Higher Ed’s free weekly news podcast. Sign up here for notification of new "This Week" podcasts.

The number of incoming, credential-seeking students in 2008 grew to 2.7 million from 2.4 million, an increase of 12 percent. And the number of first-time students who were at least 21 years old increased by 20 percent.

That influx isn’t surprising, as economic downturns typically drive enrollment booms. “The prospect of a degree as a buffer against hard times was top of mind for many who found themselves newly unemployed,” according to the report.

Yet at the same time, higher education was buffeted by budget problems that led to tuition increases. And the researchers note that the national college completion push, which President Obama and foundations have led, has also been part of the backdrop in recent years.
Until now researchers have lacked broad, long-term data on the recession’s effects on college completion rate. And the new numbers from the Clearinghouse feature several advantages, including the ability to follow students as they transfer and move across state lines.

The news is not encouraging, and follows an earlier report showing a decline in student persistence. The latest study found that 55 percent of students who first enrolled in 2008 earned a degree or certificate by this fall, down from 56.1 percent for students who arrived in 2007. The percentage of students who were still enrolled and working toward a credential (14.7 percent) was also down one percentage point compared to the previous group.

Students who were at least three years out of high school contributed disproportionately to the drop-off in college completion. The rate was down 2.6 percentage points for students who were between 21 and 24 years old when they enrolled and 1.4 percentage points for those who were over 24.

Likewise, rates slid 0.7 percentage points for students who first enrolled at community colleges (to 39.1 percent). They were down more sharply at for-profits, with a 3.9-percentage-point decline at four-year for-profits (to 38.4 percent). Fully half of first-time students who enrolled at four-year for-profits in 2008 have dropped out without earning a credential, according to the study.

In comparison, completion rates were essentially flat for those who first enrolled at four-year publics (62.8 percent) and up slightly for students who started at four-year
nonprofit colleges (73.6 percent).

The study also found, however, that community colleges and for-profits had the biggest recession-driven enrollment increases. For example, the number of incoming, first-time students at four-year for-profits jumped by 35 percent in a single year, to 107,368. “This suggests that many opted to enroll in four-year for-profit institutions only as a response to the deepening recession,” the report said. “Thus, the dramatic decline in completion rates could also be attributable to improving economic conditions later in these students’ education, which may have led some to leave school in order to re-enter the labor market.”

The smaller decline in community college completion rates likely is due to similar reasons, said Afet Dundar, an associate director at the center, who co-authored the report.

Overall, traditional-age students who enrolled full-time were just as likely to earn a credential in the 2008 incoming “class” as were students from the previous year. Yet because fewer students were able to attend college full-time, the study said, the overall completion rate for traditional-age students was down (0.5 percentage points).

Dundar said one of the report’s more alarming findings was a decline in completion rates at four-year institutions for students who first enrolled at community colleges. That number dropped a percentage point compared to the previous year (to 16.2 percent from 17.2 percent) despite efforts around the country to create smoother transfer pathways.
On the positive side, the study confirmed that more students eventually get to the finish line after eight years of working on a credential.

As a supplemental feature, the report tracked students who first enrolled in 2006. Within eight years, 44.4 percent of this group completed at their original institution, while 15.7 percent completed at another college. The combined rate of 60.1 percent is 6 percentage points better than the six-year rate, and 2 percentage points better than the seven-year one.

“The two additional years make a noticeable difference,” the report said.