

# Give Students a COMPASS

regional partnerships of state universities and community colleges  
working to provide all California students with  
an engaging, relevant, and purposeful general education

## Keeping Students in College: High-Impact Practices for Teaching and Learning

General Education is the curriculum required of all students, regardless of major. It represents the learning we expect of every college graduate: good writing, the ability to approach open-ended and ambiguous problems from a variety of perspectives, a broad understanding of the world and its people. Most students enroll in general education as soon as they start college, and for the majority who drop out, these are the only courses they'll ever take. These courses need to answer the question, "why stay?"



Efforts to make the curriculum more engaging have raised graduation rates and closed achievement gaps in a variety of local settings, as faculty add high-impact practices like learning communities, civic engagement, and service learning that highlight the value and relevance of college. But their good work is frustrated by high rates of student transfer: our best educational practices are often lost on the students who most stand to benefit, those who piece together coursework at multiple colleges, drop in and out, or attend part time.

As part of a national project led by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the California State University has invited its campuses to partner with their local community colleges and test a more integrated, engaging, and goal-oriented GE transfer curriculum. The next pages describe the project and four pilot sites now under way around the state, and explain how other regions and institutions can join.

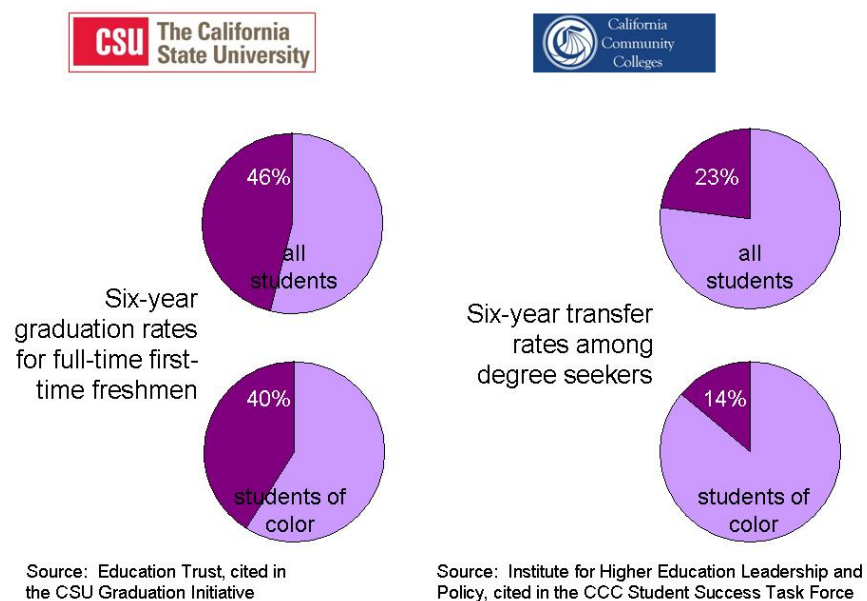
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## California’s community colleges and state universities

Over 400,000 students enroll at the 23 universities of the CSU, in campuses that range from urban to rural, small to enormous. Over 60% of the CSU’s graduates begin somewhere else, almost all of them at the state’s community college system, where they pursue the *general education transfer curriculum*, preparing to come to the CSU.

The community college system is also vast: 112 institutions, serving nearly three million students. Most say they intend to transfer, but few make it. Failure to transfer from a community college -- like failure to graduate from the CSU -- represents lost opportunity: to the state, to the students, and to their families and communities.



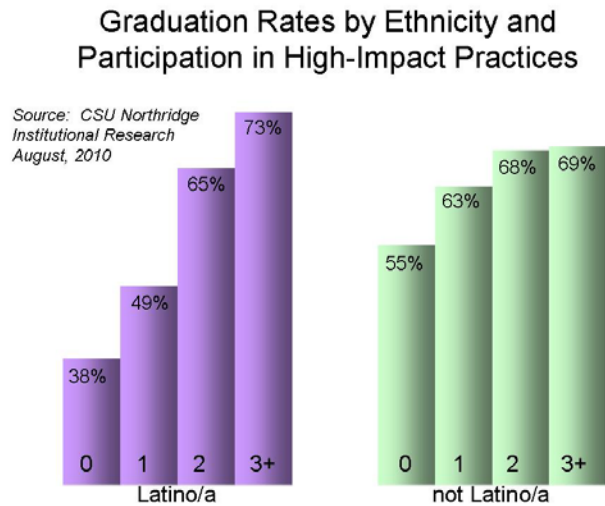
Low rates of student success are unacceptable, and both of these systems of higher education have recently launched high-profile efforts to improve their numbers. Some work can be done locally, for example with support for student services offices. But because so many of California’s students transfer, improvements to courses and curriculum -- the center of the educational enterprise -- requires concerted and coordinated faculty involvement, and a shared vision of how we might do better.

## What are High-Impact Practices?

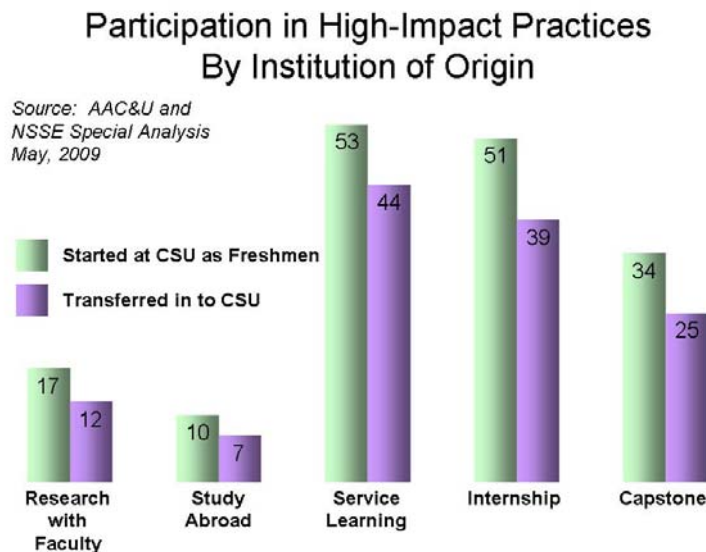
High-Impact Educational Practices are those that engage students intellectually. They are characterized by high effort, quality interactions between faculty and students, and contextualized, real-world settings that illustrate the relevance of college learning. Examples:

- \* internships
- \* learning communities
- \* undergraduate research
- \* civic engagement
- \* study abroad
- \* service learning
- \* peer mentoring
- \* community-based research

Participation in high-impact practices has been shown to improve both learning and persistence for all students, but especially for the historically underserved. Benefits appear to increase as students take part in more than one:



But not all students have equal access to high-impact practices. A 2009 analysis of CSU results from the National Survey of Student Engagement showed equitable participation among first-time freshmen by ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and parents' educational attainment -- but not for transfer students:



Together these data suggest an opportunity: by building high-impact practices into the general education curriculum required of all students -- regardless of whether they start at the CSU or transfer in -- the state may be able to significantly improve student success and reduce achievement gaps, while providing a more engaging, meaningful education.

## The Key to Transfer Curriculum: Articulation

Articulation is the matching of similar courses across community colleges and universities, establishing how students may apply work from multiple institutions toward a single degree.

As more students transfer, and as they transfer among a greater number of schools, the demands of articulation can force curriculum into a least-common-denominator mode. Faculty innovation is frustrated by the need for consistency. Classes and colleges look alike. Courses often fall into familiar patterns of lecture, memorization, repetition. General education courses that should prepare students for life after school instead have to mirror each other, increasingly disconnected from the worlds of work, citizenship, and lifelong learning.

And students, feeling the disconnect, drop out.

## A Promising Model: San José State University and Evergreen Valley College

Evergreen Valley College serves a mostly Latino population in the San José area. Its students are disproportionately eligible for Pell grants, and few of their parents have attended college. Most who come to Evergreen say they intend to transfer to a university and earn a bachelor's degree, but few do.

English 1B is a composition course required for transfer to the nearby four-year, San José State University. Typically only half to two-thirds of the students who enroll finish. In an innovative program begun in 2009, San José State invited Evergreen faculty to jointly develop a pilot project embedding two high impact practices -- service learning and peer mentoring -- into the English curriculum at both institutions.



University students who themselves had transferred to San José from Evergreen participated, not only providing a personal perspective on university life, but deepening their own educational investment at the same time. Anchoring the course was a service learning writing project that involved local middle school students as pen pals.









The result: all but one of the Evergreen Valley students persisted to the end of the course.

## Policy Grounded in Practice: Bringing the Model to Scale

At the system level, faculty leadership in the California State University are inviting institutions throughout the state to test similar partnerships, this time to straddle more than a single course, integrating high

impact practices and liberal learning with overarching themes like sustainability, public health policy, and global leadership, connecting college learning to the real world.

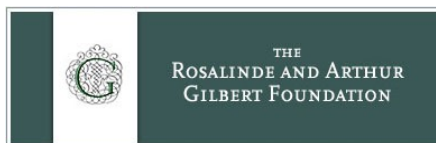
Four projects are under way now, each partnering a state university with its local community college:

  <p><b>Study Local</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- modeled in part on Butte College study abroad program</li> <li>- embeds service learning and community-based research across GE disciplines</li> <li>- transfer students earn credit toward minors via themed intersegmental "pathways," developed at Chico under Compass phase one</li> </ul>	  <p><b>Carpool Lane on the 99</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- entry seminars (freshman and transfer) at both institutions focus on advising, mentorship, and the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes</li> <li>- support from Sacramento State School of Education, to evaluate and document impact on student success</li> </ul>
<p><b>GE STEM Integration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lower-division GE students at both institutions take integrative coursework in science, English, and quantitative reasoning</li> <li>- each side of transfer accepts the combined package to meet key GE Breadth requirements</li> </ul>  	<p><b>Seamless Sophomore Seminars</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Oxnard College students work with CSU students prior to transfer</li> <li>- institutions share peer mentors, service learning placements, and faculty-developed common assignments</li> <li>- web-based instruction, ePortfolios, and involvement of articulation and institutional research to track impact and scalability</li> </ul>  

### Next Steps: Growing the Learning Community

As faculty at the pilot sites learn how make high-impact practices work across transfer, they benefit from the support and guidance of colleagues around the state. *Give Students a Compass* wants to expand the learning community to involve more community colleges and state universities as active participants in the changes taking place.

The result will be a smarter pathway to change, one that takes into account not only the needs of students and the dedication of faculty, but also the administrative demands of key functions like transfer guidance and articulation, so that promising practices can take hold for the long term.



*This document and supporting materials are available at [calstate.edu/app/compass](https://calstate.edu/app/compass).*