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Author(s): Regina Deil-Amen and James E. Rosenbaum

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The Unintended Consequences of Stigma-free Remediation

Regina Dell-Amen
James E. Rosenbaum
Northwestern University

Social stratification may emerge within efforts to reduce it. Although open admissions policies increase access to college, many students may not really be college students; they are taking noncredit remedial courses, which raises concerns about stigma and "cooled-out" aspirations. Studying two community colleges, this article describes a remedial approach that avoids stigma and cooling out but creates unintended consequences. Analyses of interviews with staff and students and of institutional procedures show how this approach arises. The analyses also indicate how this approach inhibits and delays students' awareness of their remedial status, causes them to misjudge their prospects, and prevents them from considering alternative options.

T rue to American ideology, individuals have a say in their attainments, but their goals and efforts usually depend on their perceptions. Systematic misperceptions lead to blocked opportunity just as surely as do concrete barriers, and they produce less social protest and more self-blame. Recent studies have examined how individuals perceive the stratification process. O'Connor (1999) described how low-income African American students' perceptions of the mobility process are influenced by societal factors, and Lareau and Horvat (1999) showed how African American parents' suspicion of schools reduces their compliance with school standards of teacher-parent interaction and compromises their ability to advocate for their children. In contrast, some studies have noted the tendency of individuals to have excessive expectations that are unlikely to be realized (Smith and Powell 1990). This tendency may not be limited to individuals; institutional prac-

tices may encourage these misperceptions through distorted or unclear information.

It is often difficult to see where social stratification is created in institutions, and the lack of clarity may be an important mechanism for increasing the stability of stratification systems. Stratifying processes may be obfuscated by processes between and within institutions, particularly the classes and symbols that signal distinct tracks and trajectories (Useem 1992). Lack of clarity can arise between institutions if prior "feeder" institutions do not provide key information that would help individuals anticipate the demands of later institutions and how they will be evaluated and stratified within them (Dougherty 1994). In addition, within a single institution, information can be controlled so that individuals may have difficulty seeing how and when they are being stratified. As a result, institutional stratification processes that are not clearly seen are not easily confronted.

The study reported here examined the

institutional management of individuals' perceptions inside community colleges. Prior institutional practices play a key role in determining the need for information management and the possibilities for how it can be done. Colleges must manage information if feeder institutions allow students to have unrealistic college plans and do not provide key information about the demands of college. Colleges develop institutional practices to manage students' plans through their methods of conveying information and the content of that information. These practices may provide the conditions for students' misperceptions about their position within the structure of higher education and their prospects for success. These institutional processes have been given little attention by researchers.

One manifestation of this phenomenon has been noted in community colleges. The term *cooling out* is used to describe the process by which community colleges urge students to recognize their academic deficiencies and lower their aspirations (Clark 1960; Karabel 1977). This study found the use of a "nonstigmatized" approach not noted by prior researchers that is kinder and gentler. Although the intent of this approach is to avoid communicating low expectations and limiting students' goals, it has some unintended consequences that are less benign, making it even *more* effective in managing students' perceptions and channeling students into lower-status positions.

BACKGROUND

Although our image of community colleges is still based on research from the 1960s and 1970s, community colleges are dramatically different institutions today. One artifact of open admissions policies has been the enormous growth of remedial programs. In fact, 64 percent of high school students who enroll in community college take some remedial courses (Adelman 1995). These changes have raised new issues and force us to reconsider our conceptions.

One concept that must be reexamined is cooling out. Derived from Goffman's (1952)

description of the way confidence men get their victims to come to terms with having been swindled, cooling out may also be used to describe the ways in which community colleges get students to lower their unrealistically high expectations for obtaining bachelor's degrees and to aim for one- or two-year degrees in vocational or applied programs (Clark 1960). Colleges accomplish this cooling out by a combination of preentrance testing, counseling, orientation classes, notices of unsatisfactory work, further referrals for counseling, and probation. These steps serve to convince students who aspire to transfer to four-year colleges to "accept their limitations and strive for success in other worthwhile objectives that are within their grasp" (Clark 1973:367). Just as the confidence man convinces victims to accept their loss as being in their own best interests,¹ colleges convince students that lowered plans are in their own best interests.

Cooling out may still occur today in community colleges. Indeed, it may be happening more, but in addition to the process described by Clark (1960, 1973), the phenomenon has taken on new and multiple forms. These new processes may have important implications. As we suggest, the primary concerns of the older literature may have been somewhat reduced in recent decades, but there has been a concomitant increased concern about another element.

The cooling-out process has been criticized primarily for demoralizing students and lowering their plans. It forces students to lower their expectations by indicating that they cannot meet their aspirations. It does so by subtly and not so subtly stigmatizing students and forcing them to realize their inferiority on the basis of their performance within a "legitimate" framework of "objective" academic standards. Karabel (1977) criticized cooling out for guiding students—primarily those of working-class or lower middle-class origins—into lower-status tracks. He was especially critical of the role that cooling out plays in actively pressuring students to sort themselves out of the competition for transfer on the basis of their substandard performance. If students do not seek guidance, Karabel (1977:239) stated, "the counselor with the

authority of the disciplinary apparatus behind him requests to see the student" to inform him that he "had his chance" and did not "measure up." Karabel (1977:240) further noted that "community colleges . . . developed cooling out as a means not only of allocating people to slots in the occupational structure, but also of legitimating the process [and causing] people to blame themselves rather than the system for their 'failure.'" By convincing students to see lower-track vocational courses as their best alternative, cooling out gets students to accept the college's assessment as serving their own self-interest (Erickson 1973).

In addition, Dougherty (1994) highlighted the prevalence of community college faculty's low expectations of students and the negative impact they have on students' performance. His analysis drew on research by London (1978) and Weis (1985), which suggested that community college instructors respond to students' low skill levels by concentrating on a few promising students and largely giving up on the rest. As Dougherty (1994:90-91) noted:

The sad irony is that these low expectations feed a self-fulfilling prophecy. In a process well described by labeling theorists within the sociology of education, . . . low expectations tend to lead teachers to withdraw attention and praise from poorer students, which in turn reinforces the very poverty of the student performance that is being decried.

A second aspect of cooling out that has been less emphasized is that it delays students' recognition of their situation. As Goffman (1952) observed, after a swindle is completed, delayed recognition is important for giving the victims time to get adjusted to their circumstances. Clark (1973) and Karabel (1977) noted a similar delaying process, but they de-emphasized it because of their focus on the lowering of expectations. Although community college staff are aware of students' poor prospects from the outset, they delay telling students. The process is somewhat deceptive, and purposely so, but it is seen as tactful kindness, a way of giving students time to recognize and adjust to their lower prospects. Students ultimately come to

the same negative decision, and it is the negative implication, not the timing, that is the primary concern of critics. After all, what difference does it make if students figure out their situation only a few months later? As Clark and Karabel described, by the end of the first term of college, when they get their first college grades, students have come to a full recognition of their situation.

However, several decades after Clark (1973) and Karabel (1977) wrote about the cooling-out process, we find important changes. First, more high-school students plan to attend college, and many enter who have little likelihood of completing their degrees. The proportion of high school seniors who are planning to get college degrees has increased by almost two thirds over the past two decades (National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, 2000:41). By 1992, 84 percent of high school seniors in the National Education Longitudinal Study planned to get a college degree (AA or higher), and 68 percent expected to get a BA degree (Schneider and Stevenson 1999), but less than half these students were likely to complete any degree (Rosenbaum 2001). These high expectations arise, in part, because many students with college plans think that their school achievement has little effect on their educational attainment (Rosenbaum 1998; Steinberg 1996). Students know that open admissions will allow them access to college, and they report that they can wait to exert effort until they get to college (Steinberg 1996). Unfortunately, for these students, high school grades strongly affect the completion of college degrees. In the *High School and Beyond* study, most seniors with poor high school grades (Cs or lower) planned to get college degrees, yet such students have only a 14 percent chance of doing so by age 28, and almost one-third get no college credits (Rosenbaum 2001).

Second, guidance counselors' practices have changed in ways that may further increase the burden of cooling out in colleges. High schools have reduced the ratio of high school counselors to students (McDonough 1997), and guidance counselors' practices now favor an approach that does not interfere with students' college

ambitions. Although high school counselors acted as gatekeepers several decades ago (Cicourel and Kitsuse 1964; Rosenbaum 1976), more recent research (Rosenbaum, Miller, and Krei 1996) found that high school counselors subscribe to a "college-for-all" philosophy and avoid giving students unpleasant news. They advise nearly all students to try out college, even if they expect them to fail. Some counselors confided that they had misgivings about not warning students who had little chance of success, but they reported that parents often complained when they conveyed such warnings, and principals supported the parents.

Third, community colleges have radically changed higher education—increasing access and offering extensive remediation. They have implemented open admissions policies that allow all students to enter, regardless of qualifications, yet they have constructed remedial programs to provide instruction to students who are not prepared for college-level courses. Beginning in the 1960s, colleges, particularly community colleges, devised remedial programs to help students who lacked high school-level skills. The best national estimate of the extent of remedial education came from a careful analysis of college transcripts of a national survey of students of the class of 1982. It found that when they enter college, about 46 percent of students are in remedial courses, and among those who enter community colleges, 64 percent are in remedial courses (Adelman 1995). Although these individuals seem to be "college students," since they are enrolled in a college, they are actually taking some high school-level (remedial) courses.

Fourth, students who take several remedial courses are not accumulating many college credits, and their chances of completing a degree are lower than are other students'. Yet students do not lower their educational plans. Two studies documented a pattern in which the percentage of students who completed degrees sharply decreased as the number of remedial courses increased (Adelman 1999; Grubb and Kalman 1994). Yet analyses of national data have found that students' educational plans do not decline with increasing remediation (Deil-Amen 2002). How do stu-

dents understand their situation, and what institutional practices influence their perceptions?

The present study examined the ways in which community colleges handle the information management dilemmas implicit in the current situation. These four conditions—high school students' college aspirations, college-for-all counseling, the large number of students in remedial courses, and the association between the number of remedial courses and college dropout—create the need for community colleges to deal with students whose circumstances contradict their high expectations.² In contrast to the cooling-out processes noted in prior research, we found a process not envisioned by the earlier researchers that has reduced some concerns but made others more important. We discovered a "stigma-free" approach that is used effectively. Although open admissions has allowed students to enter with lower qualifications than in previous decades, community college staff have found ways to avoid conveying stigma, so students feel more self-confident. We were amazed and favorably impressed by the techniques they used to avoid conveying stigma.

However, our analyses suggest a downside. Although school staff may keep students from feeling demoralized or inferior, they may be preventing students from considering a wider range of options. Just as Goffman's (1952) swindler cools out a victim ("mark") by delaying recognition and preventing timely constructive activity, nonstigmatized cooling out delays students' recognition, which prevents them from making timely career decisions to pursue other options that may be more constructive for their occupational attainment. While Clark (1973) and Karabel (1977) found relatively brief delays of recognition that they considered of minor harm, we found lengthy delays over several terms of college, which may be more detrimental. Students who do poorly at school feel self-confident, but like the complacency of a swindler's victim, this feeling is misleading, and it may prevent them from making other choices. In Clark's analysis, students who are cooled out are directed toward an alternative (albeit lower) degree goal. In our research, we

discovered that this new stigma-free form of cooling out not only delays recognition, but fails to encourage students to choose alternative educational and career paths. Easily produced information is not being given to students, and students are paying the price in confusion, delayed recognition, efforts that have a low probability of attaining their goal, and failure to take actions that may be more promising.

DATA AND METHODS

Data were collected from multiple sources in two community colleges, here called Northwest and Central College, in a large Midwestern city to examine how students' perceptions are managed.³ The first author conducted fieldwork at these colleges, and in the process, developed a strong in-depth knowledge of both institutions. Data were collected from five sources: interviews with students; interviews with faculty and administrators; observations of daily life (including classes, events, meetings, advising sessions, and registration); analyses of college catalogs, course schedules, and other archival data; and a survey of students. Over two years, the first author interviewed over 130 students and approximately 54 faculty and staff, observed classrooms and informal interactions, lead seven focus groups with students, and attended meetings and school events. She also analyzed the college catalogs and class schedules of these two colleges, with a particular focus on remedial offerings. Furthermore, she conducted primary research on the district's organizational structure and history.

In addition, we administered surveys to 804 students at the two colleges that included questions about students' goals, attitudes, experiences, course-taking patterns, and perceptions.⁴ Data were collected with a primary focus on students in precredit or college credit-level degree-granting programs. Therefore, our research did not encompass the other offerings of these colleges, such as continuing education, special-interest classes, adult basic education, vocational skills training, English as a Second Language, and preparation for general equivalency diplomas (GEDs).

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Our research revealed a combination of institutional characteristics that create the groundwork for the type of stigma-free approach mentioned earlier. In this section, we detail this institutional context, which underpins the stigma-free approach, and in the next section, we discuss the approach itself. The main elements of this institutional context are a strong emphasis on transferring to four-year colleges, a developmental approach to remediation, and a strong social mission.

Strong Emphasis on Transfer

Both colleges are located in an urban multi-campus district in Illinois, where the junior college system was founded not long after the turn of the 20th century through the efforts of and pressure from five university presidents who championed the "definition of the junior college role and function . . . as a place of higher education distinguished from the four year college or university only by the brevity not the content or quality of the curricula" (Dobberstein 1987:16). In the 1950s and 1960s, as community colleges expanded rapidly across the nation (Brint and Karabel 1989, 1991; Dougherty 1994), this district

experienced an expansion of conventional liberal arts courses and expansion of faculty largely hired directly from graduate schools.

These faculty members brought a sense of higher education which reinforced the traditional mission and replicated [the traditional] view of the junior college. As this faculty acquired tenure and developed a strong union, these professors would form the bulk of the instructional staff which is still dominant in the system (Dobberstein 1987:20).

The prevalence of this transfer-oriented junior college model of the community college has persisted in this district, particularly in these two colleges.

Although the two community colleges offer more and larger occupational programs than they did in earlier decades, an emphasis on transferring students to four-year colleges remains central, especially among liberal arts

faculty. These colleges may emphasize transfer somewhat more than most community colleges in the nation, but the difference is small: 25.8 percent of the students at these two colleges planned to get BA degrees, compared to 22.9 percent of a national sample of community college students (Deil-Amen, 2002). Thus, the transfer of students to four-year colleges is still a major part of the missions of most community colleges.

Maintaining "Standards": A Developmental Approach

Today, this strong emphasis on transferring students orients the faculty at these colleges toward preparing students to meet the standards and requirements of the senior colleges to which they intend to transfer. This orientation is reflected in the highly complex hierarchy of course levels that are intended to preserve standards and move remedial students into the college-level courses that are accepted for transfer credit by senior institutions. An English professor commented:

I think almost everybody sees that there is a commitment and dedication to the same type of ideals of helping the students and holding certain standards so that the students are not just passed along. I know in English we talk about it all the time. We do the students no favor to pass them along to the next level when they're not really prepared for it. So there's a lot of that making sure the [students are] academically prepared for the next level even here at the college so that they will then be successful. Because you sort of program them for failure if you're going to let them go on and they don't have the skills necessary.

In our interviews, virtually all faculty members vigorously approved of this system because they saw it as giving students a clear and structured pathway into college and providing students with a *college* education, not a *less-than-college* education. As a department chair stated:

We spend a lot of time talking about how you keep standards up because the last thing this population needs is further fraud perpetrated upon them where they've been told "OK you've passed" when, in fact, they haven't mastered what they're going to need to sur-

vive out there. And pretty soon someone's gonna throw them out there, and they're gonna sink. And I won't be part of that fraud, and I don't think many of my colleagues will.

A philosophical approach to remediation that is grounded in developmental (rather than behaviorist) theories of learning fits well with this institutional culture. Rather than the less expensive behaviorist approach, which assumes that students can master subject matter using self-paced, computer-assisted instruction and an open entry–open exit format, remedial courses at Northwest and Central College reflect developmental theories. Such an approach views learning as

a process in which individuals move from one level of knowledge to another. . . . The instructor plays a vital role . . . by creating a supportive and encouraging environment that provides challenges at appropriate levels to stimulate learning. Obviously, such programs rely heavily on instructor involvement and ideally involve small classes, making them relatively expensive to offer (McMillan, Parke, and Lanning 1997: 26).

In short, faculty and counselors view their mission as helping remedial students slowly but surely achieve their educational aspirations by guiding them through a series of short-term improvements.

Social Mission

The overall culture at Northwest and Central Colleges stresses a mission of providing opportunities to disadvantaged students. The faculty we interviewed expressed strong commitments to this role, and many acknowledged that it was a central component of their professional identity. The awarding of "institutional credit" for remedial classes is part of that same social mission. Like 80 percent of community colleges nationwide, Central and Northwest Colleges offer institutional credit for remedial classes in reading, writing, and mathematics. Institutional credit counts toward financial aid, campus housing, and full-time student status, but it does not count toward the completion of degrees (NCES 1996). This status allows remedial students to receive Title IV financial aid, and it

was opposed by conservatives in Congress who sought to limit Title IV funds to “those students most able to benefit” (Day and McCabe 1997), which would have compelled remedial students to pay for their own remediation. Giving institutional credit for remedial courses represents a battle won by non-conservative forces in their attempt to maintain financial access for disadvantaged students. The faculty and administrators we interviewed expressed sentiments that agreed with the position of the American Association of Community Colleges that “promoting access to higher education, especially for economically and socially disadvantaged students, needs to continue to receive priority consideration, and the investment of public dollars to support this commitment is not only essential, but appropriate” (Day and McCabe 1997).⁵

The faculty and administrators at the community colleges we studied thought that blaming students for deficiencies in their skills or financially penalizing them in a way that may restrict their access to and hamper their success in college was not compatible with their social mission of opportunity. Similarly, judging, evaluating, or altering students’ long-term aspirations is not part of how college staff define their role, especially if students aspire to transfer to four-year colleges. Rather, the counselors and faculty think that they should not underestimate the potential for students to turn around and achieve their goals of attaining college degrees despite their histories of poor academic performance. As one department chair noted when asked whether he makes judgments about students who may not complete their degrees, “Some people are late bloomers. Some people just take a long time to click and get into it. . . . So I don’t make those kind of determinations.” A counselor at Northwest articulated a similar philosophy:

You could easily misjudge or judge too fast an academic history by the fact that they didn’t do too well the first couple of times. You’d be surprised. I try to stay away from that. Students can blow you away, and then you fall into the trap of making judgment calls and decisions that are not in your judgment call to begin with—to tell [students] whether or not

they can become a doctor simply because they had a bad semester. . . . Although there is the time that you gotta be real with them and tell them, get real . . . I hate those times; that’s when I hate my profession. But other than that, you know, some people have bad semesters, but then they come around and do a 4.0 and do so well. . . . It doesn’t happen all the time, but it happens.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE NON-STIGMATIC APPROACH

The faculty’s reluctance to make judgments about students’ ability to obtain their goals and the desire to encourage all students to transfer to four-year colleges has led to new practices. Schools have often been criticized for stigmatizing students by placing them in remedial programs. In our interviews with community college staff, we were surprised to discover that they had developed innovative ways to avoid conveying stigma. However, in interviewing students, we discovered a serious disadvantage to this approach: Many students did not recognize their remedial status or realize the crucial implications of that status.

The two community colleges offer a large number of remedial classes that do not count as credit toward a degree or transfer. Yet students’ own remedial placements and the place of remedial classes within the larger structure of the college are not always clearly stated to the students. The term *remedial* is rarely used in conversations between staff and students. Instead, the term *developmental* is usually used. This term accurately reflects the colleges’ modes of instruction, yet students do not understand what the word really means. In this institutional context, the term *developmental* is merely a euphemism for *remedial*.

This euphemistic approach seems highly desirable. It is a form of information management that downplays the negative and highlights the positive aspects of students’ placement. It avoids the tendency to blame students for their deficiencies. Realizing that students’ low skills may be due to difficult life circumstances or low high school standards,

college staff encourage students to try to achieve more in college than they have in the past. The term *developmental* is used to imply a temporary stage from which individuals will emerge with assistance.

Traditionally, colleges were candid about remedial courses, and they communicated clear stigma. This is still true at many four-year colleges. Some students at the two community colleges we studied first attended four-year colleges, where they reported that they had negative experiences regarding their low performance on placement tests. They were made to feel bad about themselves because they were in remedial classes. Steve, for example, recalled his experience with a remedial English instructor at a four-year college who "discouraged" him through her words and attitude:

I took the placement test, and they placed me in her class and she felt that . . . she had the right to say things, to say that we were below all the other students in [the college] because we were placed in her class. I felt that wasn't a good, positive thing to say about students that come to your class. You've got to teach them or help them go to the next class.

Steve dropped out of that college after one semester. His experience was stressful, and he found the college's atmosphere to be unsupportive.

In contrast, these community colleges de-emphasize failure and emphasize students' need to improve their skills. Their practices remove the stigma and negative labels of these courses. First, faculty and counselors try to communicate their high expectations of students to combat their students' tendency toward low academic self-confidence. An English professor at Northwest explained the logic:

As your student population becomes less elite, you can't assume a common background . . . and if there's not a common background and you have so-so students who are not completely confident of themselves as students, then you're going to have to support them . . . We assume we're not getting all the A students [and we're getting students] who aren't confident, and you have to kind of keep them afloat, particularly when it gets to be hard.

Second, most faculty and counselors truly believe that remedial placement is preferable to the placement of students in classes for which they are underprepared and in which they are likely to get frustrated and give up. Attempts to improve remedial English classes tend to focus on moving students steadily through a sequence of remedial courses, giving them the opportunity to develop their skills and transition to college-level English. The faculty member in charge of remedial English at Central described the logic:

We feel that they get much more out of their experience because it's so connected with what they did the prior semester. . . . What I'm hoping is that we'll . . . work on our curriculum, so that it goes all the way . . . up to English 102 with the same basic aims, the same basic abilities that are being developed at higher and higher levels as the student goes through the curriculum.

A counselor at Northwest commented on the importance of moving students too quickly into college-level courses that may be too difficult for them to handle:

There are a number of [reasons] why students drop out. There's the frustration level. They just give up and walk away. . . . If students are given the kind of course work or the opportunities to improve certain skills that they are lacking, then we have a better chance.

Faculty, who view the testing and placement system as legitimate and in the students' own best interest, try to inform students "gently" of their remedial placement by construing it as a positive and necessary step toward the fulfillment of the student's ultimate goals. A faculty member who teaches remedial English said this about the way she tries to communicate her remedial program during registration: "We try to build in that it's a positive experience."

Apparently, the efforts of faculty and counselors work as intended: Students do not feel stigmatized or demoralized on learning of their remedial placements. In interviews, students explained their remedial placements by repeating the positive language they heard from college staff. Steve, for example, later enrolled at Central College, where he believes he was treated much more positively when

the results of his placement test were explained to him:

They told me I would need help in English classes—not saying that I wasn't capable of doing the work, but ...I would need that help first before I could just jump into something like [English 101].

The following two comments are representative of the explanations echoed by many other students:

When I came back up here to pick up my test scores, they told me that my test scores were pretty high, but I didn't test in the high end, which is [English] 101 [the lowest college-credit English course]. (Tomisha)

Ms. Bartlett discussed my scores [on the placement test]. She said they weren't weak, but they weren't at the strongest point. (Latoya)

Community colleges convey a stigma-free message: This is a second chance to improve some minor weaknesses and enhance your skills. There is no need to feel bad.

This stigma-free technique seems to be an appropriate strategy, given the lack of confidence and fragile academic egos that many students have when they walk through the community college's open door. For instance, when Enrique started, he was concerned because he had been out of school for so long. He actually expected that he would do so poorly that he would get Ds and then have to take his classes over again. However, after getting his placement test scores, he was reassured by his instructor's comments that he was only one level below regular English. Enrique said, "I guess I'm not that bad." Because of his positive experience with his current English class, he feels more confident. As Enrique put it:

I feel more tenacious. . . . I'm trying to find a word for it. I don't feel that I don't belong here. I feel like this is what I want to do and I'm going to do it. I'm looking forward to succeeding.

Traci contrasted her experience at Central College with the negative treatment she received while she was completing her GED:

I hated it [the GED program]. It was like being inside a little jail or something. Even the teach-

ers treated you like you were a nobody because you didn't finish school. . . . They thought everybody was all ignorant and everything. Even when I tried to show them that I'm not that ignorant person, they still treated me like I was nothing, and I didn't like that.

Traci felt she was treated differently at Central College, right from the start. Other students who did not do well on the placement exam agreed As Sylvester put it:

When I got here, it was like the staff was more helpful. . . . It was no problem going through what I had to go through to start. So the staff was very welcoming, . . . hope you stay here and good luck, etc.

The softer approach has clear advantages over a stigmatizing approach that discourages students by labeling them deficient, disregards their ability to improve, and reinforces their doubts about their potential. It is likely to improve morale and the institutional culture and may interrupt the negative cycle of low expectations that exacerbate students' poor academic performance and failure (Dougherty 1994; London 1978; Weis 1985). Counselors, advisers, and instructors at Central and Northwest Colleges had clearly taken steps to communicate high expectations and minimize negative labeling.

On the other hand, a reluctance to use language that may have negative connotations can prevent students from receiving clear information. The vague language used by faculty to soften or avoid the stigma of the students' remedial placements led to confusion, particularly for students who were not familiar with the college environment. Annette, for instance, was not familiar with the system or with test-taking strategies and did not realize that the placement test would determine the type of courses she could take:

I wanted to get each [question] . . . right, so I took my time with them. So I ran out of time. . . . I really didn't care cause I didn't know that the . . . test was what was going to count for what courses I'd be able to take.

She said that the "adviser" who helped her pick her courses did not say much about the placement test except "you scored fair on

your reading and your English test." This did not sound bad to Annette, and she went along when they told her what classes to take. "And they just gave those classes. They just said, 'This is what you have to take.'" Annette agreed with their selection, not even realizing that she was in remedial courses for which she would receive no college credits. It was only after her classes started meeting that her instructor informed her of her remedial status:

She [my teacher] told me that I scored low on the placement test; that's why I had to get in this... program for some remedial classes, to better my reading and my math skills, my English skills, so I could move on and start taking college classes. I wouldn't be able to take any college classes until I passed, finished out of the . . . program. I was like, "Why didn't anyone tell me that?" I would have gone to another school and took the test. They had me registering and everything, and now I have to take these remedial classes. This is going to hold me back because none of this counts. So I still have two years to go 'cause none of these classes here even count. So I was a little upset about that because it was really misleading. Especially with me signing up for financial aid and . . . [finding out that my] aid has to pay for all of this.

Annette's misperceptions were cleared up soon after she began taking her classes. However, many students experience much longer delays of recognition, and their lack of awareness is fostered by the lack of clarity in verbal exchanges, as well as in the written documents available to students.

ANALYSIS OF CATALOGS AND COURSE LISTINGS

The softer approach has even been built into the structure through which these courses are offered and the labels attached to them. The college catalog and course schedule guide students' decisions and strategies, but Central and Northwest's catalogs and course schedules are unclear and potentially misleading about which courses count and for what purposes. As one may readily assume, remedial classes fall at the bottom of a hierarchical sys-

tem of community college courses. Furthermore, remedial instruction itself is arranged hierarchically, and students are allocated to a place within this hierarchy through their performance on a placement test.

However, the hierarchy is difficult to see, and students often fail to recognize their own position within this system. Indeed, the system is not clearly defined. Just as the word *remedial* is not used in verbal interactions, it also does not appear in catalogs, course descriptions, or class schedules. After extensive effort to analyze the course offerings and interviews with staff about the meaning of certain terms and descriptions, we discerned the main elements of the course hierarchy. For simplicity, we grouped the community colleges' course offerings into four general categories: (1) "precredit" remedial, (2) "college" remedial, (3) "ambiguous" college credit, and (4) "definite" college credit.⁶ We can describe these categories succinctly, but such distinctions are not readily apparent to students. Ambiguity is a major attribute of some of these categories.

At the lowest end, there is no ambiguity. Precredit remedial courses are tuition-free and are described in Central's catalog as "noncredit." At Northwest, they are housed in a separate non-college credit division of the college. Students who score below a 10th-grade threshold on the reading, writing, or math placement test are placed in a precredit curriculum at either the 8th- or 9th-grade level. According to Northwest's assistant to the dean of instruction, these students' scores are "below the required level for college level." Northwest's catalog states that precredit students must pass a "progress test" to advance to the college's "collegiate programs" or "credit division."

On the other hand, at the next two levels, the distinction between remedial and nonremedial classes is much more blurred. At the second level, college remedial classes, though offered with credit classes and labeled similarly to them, offer credits that do not count toward a degree or transfer. Students who score above the 10th-grade level on the placement test but below a "college" skill threshold are placed in courses that are labeled "college credit," yet do not count

toward *any* degree or transfer requirements. These courses appear in the class schedule along with all other college credit classes, with no indication that they differ in any way from other classes (except that lower-level courses are prerequisites for higher-level classes). The terms *remedial* and *noncredit* never appear. On the contrary, next to the name of each course, is a notation in parentheses ("3 cr hrs," "4 cr hrs," or "6 cr hrs"), which seems to imply that credit is given—even for courses that do not supply college credit toward a degree. These courses count for "credit hours" just like the rest, yet these credits cannot be used toward a degree or transfer.

Giving remedial classes the status of "institutional credit" was intended to prevent barriers to access for underprepared students and prevent remedial students from being segregated from other students. Institutional credit allows students to acquire the skills they lack without requiring the additional financial hardship that would come from denying them federal aid to help pay for these courses. It also allows remedial classes to be included along with the other college credit courses, rather than be segregated into a separate and often stigmatized remedial program. Ironically, these well-intended policies have led to unforeseen consequences. The discrete incorporation of remedial classes into the colleges' "credit" offerings leaves students confused, and many students cannot distinguish between remedial and nonremedial courses. For example, Raymond did not know how some remedial courses differ from other courses in terms of credit. During registration, when he found that a course he needed was closed, he chose to sign up for a reading class instead, not realizing that it was remedial and that he would be paying for a course that would not count toward a degree or transfer credit:

I wanted a math class, but they said the math classes were too full. . . . I didn't really need the reading, though, because they said I scored high and I didn't need the reading. I just took it anyway because they didn't have math. So I took it.

Included in this "credit, but not really credit,"

college remedial category are Reading 099, 125, and 126 and English 098 and 100, which actually account for about 60 percent of all "English" sections offered at Central College. The math courses include Math 100 and 110.

Third, the ambiguous college-credit classes count as credit toward some degrees and majors, but not others, and they may or may not count toward transfer to some programs of study and some four-year colleges. Math 112, for instance, counts as credit only toward the associate in general studies degree but not toward an associate in applied science degree (AAS), AA, associate in science (AS) or associate in engineering science. Including Math 112, these "remedial" and ambiguous classes make up 55 percent of all "mathematics" sections at Central. Fourth, definite college credit courses count for both degree credit and transfer. Confusion is less likely to occur for classes at this level.

A perceptive observer looking over the course numbers may infer that numbers below 100 were below college level, and the others were not. This is a reasonable inference, but it is wrong. Indeed, numbers vary among departments, so that Math 112 is the first college-level course, yet Reading 126 is not a college-level course. To complicate matters further, all math courses below Math 204 do not count toward an AS degree, yet Math 118, 125, and 135 count toward an AA degree.

Actually, if students were to ask about credit, they would have to be pretty sophisticated to get adequate information. They would have to ask if a course gives credit for a particular certificate or degree and which degree. In addition, just because a particular course counts as credit toward a degree does not necessarily guarantee that it will be transferable to a four-year college or university. The transferability of particular courses varies by each four-year college and each type of program. At the time of the study, neither community college indicated in its catalog course descriptions which courses were transferable.⁷ Furthermore, the catalogs' course descriptions do not specify whether a course is remedial or whether it does or does not count as credit toward any degree.

If one had seen this kind of misleading information in a for-profit school, one might have inferred a swindle, since it encourages students to enroll in courses without clearly informing them whether they will receive “real” credits and whether these credits will count toward their goals. The situation is like a con man selling a stranger a watch, the value of which will be subsequently discovered to be less than expected. In community colleges, the reason for this action may be face-saving or oversight, but it is likely to mislead students into believing they will get more for their course efforts (and tuition) than they ultimately receive.

PITFALLS OF GUIDANCE AND DELAYED RECOGNITION

The lack of clarity just described leaves students with ambiguous and confused ideas about their remedial status, and they lack the structured guidance they need to make timely and informed decisions about their path through college. Although the ambiguity we have noted in the catalogs and in students’ minds could be overcome by effective guidance, these colleges lack the structured guidance necessary to help students navigate the organizations’ structure and procedures.

College staff usually assume that students will take it upon themselves to discover the degree, certification, and transfer requirements for their program of interest. Many students eventually do, but many wait too long, wasting time and money in the process. This problem is especially acute among students in college remedial classes, the second category. In our interviews, faculty and staff reported a hesitancy to highlight the negative implications of remedial courses, including the lack of “real” degree or transfer credits earned in such courses. They feared that such an approach would unduly discourage students.

However, students experience some difficulty from this delayed information. Ivette, who was in her second full-time semester and aiming for an AA degree, responded to the question about how long she thought it

would take to complete her degree by saying, “I still haven’t seen what credits I need for the classes.” Darius was also starting his second semester, and although he had definite plans to transfer to a specific university, he had not found out anything about the requirements for transfer. He thought that he would transfer to a four-year college with junior status the following year. Unfortunately, he was not aware that his full year of “full-time” course work—which he thought gave him 24 credits—actually gave him only 9 transferable credits. Five of his eight courses were either remedial or too low to count toward transfer.

Students often go for several months, a full semester, or even a full year without knowing that their remedial courses are not counting toward a degree or their transfer goals. Donald, a former remedial student, was in his *fourth* semester at Northwest College, and he had not yet talked to a counselor to find out which classes would be accepted at the university to which he wanted to transfer. Students with low achievement in English or math might have needed to take three terms of remedial courses before they could begin to get actual college credits, but few of these students realized this timetable. In a focus group, a couple of students who were enrolled in a special program that combined several different classes along with their remedial English and reading courses complained that they were not informed about the credit status of their courses:

John: We had five classes. For each class, we’re supposed to get three credit hours. We came up with just four credit hours [instead of the 15 he was expecting].

Vanessa: We didn’t even know that they were college prep classes.

John: We didn’t know. Like, they told us that we were in [this program]. They didn’t explain exactly like, “You’re going to take this, but you’re not going to be credited for this.” So like at the end when [the counselor said we] . . . only get four [credits], everybody is like, “Wait. [We weren’t aware of this].”

Marta said that she also did not find out this information until *after* she enrolled in English 101:

When I first came here, I was so happy to be in college. . . . Now I know I really wasn't [in college]. It kind of disappointed me to know that those classes, I'm not going to get no credit for. But although they helped me, it would help me a lot if I could get credit for them, too. So I know I'm in college now. I didn't know [I wasn't in college] then.

Some of this confusion stems from the diffuse, unorganized way that students tend to get information about what courses to take and how best to go about their plans. Visits with counselors are voluntary. Students' limited use of the counselors is built into the structure of the colleges. Central and Northwest College each have eight counselors for over 7,000 students in a given semester, or one counselor for 875 students. This ratio obviously limits the amount of access that students have to counselors. As one counselor at Central College stated:

Unlike high school, students will come to us voluntarily. We don't have a command performance. Obviously we couldn't have with just eight of us for over 6,000 students. So students do come to us when there's a problem, either personal, academic, or vocational.⁸

Although counselors are officially the main staff responsible for providing information, in practice, they are not the central resource through which students gain their information. During registration at the beginning of each semester, full-time faculty, counselors, and administrators sit at the registration tables to help students select their courses. All students must meet with one of these staff members to pick and approve their courses. Staff have information about prerequisites and basic degree requirements. However, this is often a rushed and chaotic period, and the particular staff person who advises a student is arbitrary. As a result, the provision of information and advice is a random process, with many faculty knowing little about remedial courses and their implications. In addition, students can get a faculty member to approve their courses before the chaotic registration period. This strategy may be more fruitful, particularly if the faculty member is familiar with the students and their programs. On the other hand, there is still the great risk that students will obtain advice in bits and

pieces from faculty members who often have incomplete information about remedial courses. Like Ivette and Darius, many students float around with little knowledge about whether or not they are accurately following their degree requirements because they choose not to visit counselors until they are well on their way toward graduating or transferring.

The students expressed regret about their lack of awareness of their remedial status and its implications. David said that he might have decided to forgo college altogether if he had known that his credits were not going to count toward anything:

I think that a student should know in the beginning . . . that these classes, even though we think they're necessary and you would benefit from them, will not count toward graduation. The students should know what they're getting into in the very beginning. Like I said, I don't have a lot of time to spend in school. . . . The program has helped me. . . . But if I had known from the very beginning that I wasn't going to be getting full credit for these classes, I may have thought twice about them. . . . I would have just gone on and tried to find a job. . . . I would have probably said, "Hey I don't have time for this. I've got to go."

For this student with limited funds and little time to spend in school, the "protecting" of students' self-esteem is preventing realistic career decisions. Goffman (1952) described such delaying of information as an essential element of a scam. Although we do not believe that this is the community colleges' intention, this nonstigmatized approach necessarily prevents students from making informed decisions and anticipating negative outcomes.

DO STUDENTS REALIZE THE IMPLICATIONS?

We administered surveys in many sections of six different remedial math, English, and reading courses and among students who had formerly been enrolled in remedial courses. Of the 804 students who were surveyed, 610 had taken or were currently taking remedial courses.⁹ Of these 610 students, 38.7

percent believed that these classes would count toward their degree requirements, and an additional 34.6 percent were not sure whether the credits would count. In sum, over 73 percent of the students who had taken remedial courses were either unclear or wrong about the actual status of their remedial credits.

The results indicate that students' awareness increases over time, but only modestly. Comparing students in the first year with those in the second year and above, we found improved accuracy over time, with 23.2 percent of first-year students and 29.7 percent beyond their first year correctly reporting that their credits would not count (see Table 1). The greater awareness that remedial courses do not count was accompanied by a decline in the proportion of students who were "not sure," while the proportion who held the mistaken belief that these courses count remained constant (almost 39 percent). Despite students' improved accuracy after their first year, over 70 percent of the students beyond their first year were still not aware that their remedial courses did not count toward a degree or transfer.

In our interviews, students who were taking multiple remedial courses seemed more confused about their situation. They were making sacrifices, improving themselves, and aiming toward a degree, and no one was telling them any discouraging information, even though they were taking several "developmental" courses. The survey data clarify students' response to this situation—students who were taking remedial courses in more subjects were less likely to realize that their courses would not count (see Table 2). Even among advanced students, students who

were taking three or four remedial course areas were less likely to be aware that remedial courses did not count than were students who were taking one remedial course area (21 percent versus 37 percent). While some correct perceivers may have dropped out (especially by the second year), these findings also support the observations in our interviews: Students who take remedial courses in multiple areas are more likely to misperceive the value of their remedial courses.

Our survey also asked the students to assess their chances of achieving their degree goals (on a 5-point scale, from very likely to very unlikely). We found that students' perceived likelihood of attaining their degree goals did not decline as they took more remedial subjects (see Table 3). Moreover, the remedial students did not have lower degree goals. They were actually slightly more likely to indicate that they were aiming toward a bachelor's degree (versus an associate degree or a certificate) than were the nonremedial students—46.3 percent and 44.2 percent, respectively. Although national data indicate that the dropout rate for students with three or more remedial courses is much higher than for students with only one remedial course (Adelman 1996, 1999; Deil-Amen 2002), we found that students do not lower their perceived chances of completing their degrees as the number of their remedial courses increases.

CONCLUSION

When students enter college, they may not really be college students; they may be taking high school-level courses that provide no "real" college credit. This study found that students

Table 1. Remedial Students' Perceptions of Remedial Credits

Students' Status	Do Remedial Classes Count Toward a Degree?			<i>n</i>
	% No	% Yes	% Not Sure	
First year	23.2	38.9	37.9	330
Second year +	29.7	38.5	31.8	280
All remedial students	26.7	38.7	34.6	610

Table 2. Remedial Students' Perception of Degree Credits, by Number of Remedial Subject Areas

Number of Remedial Subjects	Do Remedial Classes Count Toward a Degree?				n
	No	Yes	Not Sure	Total	
<i>First Year</i>					
One remedial	36.5	35.4	28.1	100	96
Two remedial	17.2	45.2	37.6	100	93
Three remedial	15.4	36.3	48.4	100	91
<i>Second Year +</i>					
One remedial	37.0	39.5	23.5	100	81
Two remedial	32.4	40.3	27.3	100	139
Three remedial	20.9	35.5	43.6	100	110
<i>All Remedial Students</i>	23.2	38.9	37.9		610

may not realize their situation and its implications. We described the several ways that community colleges create this circumstance, inadvertently and with good intentions.

Community colleges are faced with serving students who arrive at their doors underprepared for “college-level” courses, yet who fully anticipate that they will complete their college degrees. The colleges must deal with these students and their high expectations. As one community college English professor aptly noted, “You have to serve your community if you’re a community college.”

Unlike Clark’s (1973) description of the cooling-out process, we found that community college staff have found ingenious ways to preserve students’ aspirations and avoid conveying stigma to students who are placed in remedial courses. Indeed, we were impressed with how these community colleges were able to avoid damaging students’

self-confidence while encouraging them to improve their skills to qualify for college-level courses and pursue their goals of transferring to four-year colleges.

However, we discovered that this stigma-free approach has some critical unintended consequences. The avoidance of “remedial” labels; a hesitancy to highlight students’ remedial placements; and the lack of an adequate, structured counseling/advising system led to confusion and misperceptions among the students. Even after two, three, or four semesters, some students were still unclear about whether the courses were giving them college credit and how long it would take them to get a degree. Some students had lost time taking courses they did not need and for which they did not get credit. For students with limited funds and a narrow window of time for college study, such missteps can be costly to their careers.

Table 3. Perceived Chances of Achieving Degree Goals, by Number of Remedial Course Areas

Number of Remedial Subject Areas	% “Very Likely” or “Likely” to Earn a Degree	n
None	90.7	194
One	94.4	177
Two	96.6	232
Three	91.0	201
All students	93.3	804

Just as the hallmark of a scam is the selling of objects of little value, some students reported investing time and tuition in remedial courses that failed to deliver the "value" in degree credits they had been expecting. This process looks a lot like the swindles that Goffman (1952) described. Students are being gently led into a long-term process without having any idea of how little progress they are making or how long it will take to attain their goal. They are expending money and efforts, and there is a real risk that many of them will not get a degree and that some will get few or no college credits. The staff have good intentions when they create these misperceptions, but they are deceptive nonetheless.

Could this deception be in the students' best interest? Is keeping students in college "for their own good" similar to the way parents trick their children into eating vegetables that are good for them? There are several reasons to think that deception is inappropriate here. First, these students are not children; they are adults with adult responsibilities—rent payments, car payments, jobs, spouses, and children—and a strategy of deception is patronizing. Second, these remedial courses are not as costless as eating vegetables. We were astounded at the enormous sacrifices that the students were making to be in college. We interviewed students who had to work 40 hours a week, who had taken out loans, and who were supporting parents and siblings. Some were working parents, for whom their college courses and homework were added on to 60 hours of work and family obligations. Tricking these students into losing sleep, reducing their time with their children, and avoiding overtime assignments at work is certainly more costly than eating vegetables. Third, deception has other costs: It creates credibility problems. Students have implicit timetables. Many students have promised their families that they will get an associate's degree in two years, and when the time comes and goes, parents and spouses are understandably disappointed and angry at the time college has taken away from home and job.

Fourth, these students have other options, which they could choose if they were not

deceived. Some college programs require fewer remedial courses. The AAS degree often has fewer academic prerequisites than the AA and AS degrees, so that some students would need fewer noncredit remedial courses. In the colleges we studied, if a student scores poorly on the remedial exam, say at the 10th-grade level, she or he must take three noncredit (remedial) math courses before being able to take one that gives credit for an AA degree. But that same student would only need to take one noncredit math course if she or he were pursuing an AAS degree. Since three remedial courses delays the completion of a degree and may increase the likelihood of dropout (compared to one course), students may choose the AAS to avoid these outcomes. This easier choice is unlikely to affect employment outcomes, since it is unlikely that employers understand the difference between the two degrees. Furthermore, research has shown that taking more applied occupational courses has clear economic benefits (Bishop 1992; Grubb 1996; Rosenbaum 1996). In many cases, the bulk of these AAS credits can also be transferred to a four-year college if students choose to continue their education. Deception prevents students from even considering these alternative options.

Community colleges and their promise of open access do give disadvantaged students a second chance to overcome obstacles, just as they were intended to do. Unfortunately, this second chance leads to a degree only for a small proportion of students in this situation. Our study highlighted the possibility that the stigma-free approach may represent a more subtle form of blocked opportunity. Rather than a cooling-out approach that limits opportunity by steering students toward the structural alternative of a lower degree, the delayed recognition caused by a stigma-free approach may be contributing to students dropping out of college altogether and hence accumulating *no* credentials rather than a lesser degree.

The institutional context we described fosters the type of misperceptions that inhibits students' ability to plan their long-term educational and occupational future effectively. At the least, it seems that students are being shortchanged in their chances to consider

realistic backup options, like taking advantage of on-the-job training, short-term certificates, AAS degrees, or skill training at another kind of school in addition to their college studies.

It is appropriate to be concerned that informing students of their lower probabilities of success will be discouraging. However, withholding this information prevents students from taking steps to address the situation. College staff must find ways to convey full information while they encourage students' efforts. In addition, practitioners must find ways to support programs that reduce failure for at-risk remedial students. This is not an easy balance, but it is necessary to find ways to provide both information and encouragement.

We conclude that nonstigmatized counseling may solve the old complaints about cooling out but may raise additional concerns about candor and deception. Reduced stigma and improved self-confidence may have come at the cost of deception and delay, prolonging the time it takes for students to realize their situation. Students are not getting easily produced information, and they are paying the price in delayed recognition, efforts that have a low probability of attaining their goal, and failure to take actions that may be more promising.

NOTES

1. The movie, *The Sting*, provides a clear example of Goffman's model. In the movie, the character played by Robert Redford gets revenge on a powerful enemy by a confidence scheme but then creates a situation in which the enemy must decide that it is futile and risky to try to recover his lost money.

2. Although other postsecondary institutions were not included in this study, the impact of remedial programs can and should be explored at four-year colleges as well. All community colleges offer remedial courses, and they are the only institutions that have experienced an increase in remedial enrollments. However, 81 percent of four-year public and 63 percent of four-year private colleges offer remedial courses, and the conse-

quences of these programs on their students is an important area of study (NCES 1996). Nearly two-thirds of students who attended only a community college or a community college and a four-year college took at least one remedial course, whereas 40 percent of those who attended only a four-year college took at least one remedial course. (NCES 2000:52).

3. Northwest College enrolled about 11,000 students during 1995 in its credit and precredit courses. Of the students in these courses, 61 percent were female and 39 percent were male; 50 percent were white, 27 percent were Latino, 12 percent were Asian, and 9 percent were African American; their average age was 26; 70 percent were enrolled part time; and 38 percent were employed full time. Central college enrolled about 13,000 students in its precredit and credit courses in 1995. Of the students in these courses, 63 percent were female and 37 percent were male; 47 percent were African American, 23 percent were white, 14 percent were Latino, and 11 percent were Asian; their average age was 30; 77 percent were enrolled part time; and 45 percent were employed full time. In-district tuition was \$47.50 per credit hour.

4. Surveys were administered to students in class, so the response rate approached 100 percent. Classes were selected to target strategically a cross section of students in remedial courses and particular programs.

5. Since local funding is partially based on head-count enrollments, the awarding of institutional credit also conveniently allows community colleges to maintain enrollments by giving credit status to students who may otherwise not pay tuition if they were enrolled in noncredit remedial classes. This is a chicken-and-egg situation, however. Often, the more remedial classes a college offers, the fewer sophomore-level courses it offers. However, in Illinois, as in most states, community colleges did not actively seek to increase their remedial enrollments. They were forced to accommodate to the will of political decision makers, who, in the Board of Higher Education Act, designated community colleges as the place where remediation efforts should be undertaken (Ignash 1997:7). In fact, many faculty and adminis-

trators oppose the increase in remedial classes and would prefer to offer (and teach) more higher-level courses. In any case, the financial incentives do not seem a prominent concern. In the district we studied, remedial credits are actually allocated funds at a rate that is 13 percent lower than baccalaureate transfer credits, 36 percent lower than technical credits, and 63 percent lower than health credits. Moreover, if financial concerns were primary, we would expect all remedial courses to be staffed with less-costly part-time faculty, which was not the case. Indeed, we were impressed to find that about half the credit-level remedial reading and writing courses at Northwest and 80 percent of them at Central were staffed with full-time faculty, who expressed an idealistic desire to provide opportunities to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The relationship between structures of funding and remedial approaches in community colleges is a topic that is worthy of extensive research, but is beyond the scope of this article.

6. We created these classifications. Such concrete distinctions are not specified by the colleges themselves, nor are they presented to students.

7. A few years ago, students usually had to consult with a four-year college directly or get a "transfer guide" from the counseling office for their college and program of interest. These guides were constantly being revised and updated and therefore were often outdated. Many four-year colleges have recently participated in a broad-based articulation agreement that helps to create a consensus between two- and four-year colleges regarding the "approved" curricula. As a result, these two community colleges now have a list of transferable courses for schools that participate in the Illinois Articulation Agreement in their catalogs. However, confusion still abounds, since some "ambiguous" credit courses count for transfer to some schools but not to others and not for some AS degrees.

8. The counselor's estimates regarding student enrollments differ from the figure in the preceding paragraph, which was obtained from the district's Office of Planning and Research. The number of students enrolled changes from semester to semester as well as

over the course of one semester, due to student withdrawals from the college.

9. The number of remedial course areas is based on students' reports of the titles of the courses they had taken, which is probably a better indicator than their own count of the number of remedial course areas because students do not always realize that a course is remedial.

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Regina Deil-Amen, Ph.D., is Research Project Director, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. Her main fields of interest are higher education, inequality, institutions, and culture. Dr. Deil-Amen completed her Ph.D. in sociology at Northwestern University and will begin her appointment as an assistant professor in the Department of Education Policy Studies at Pennsylvania State University in August. She is currently working on a project that explores institutional differences between public and private colleges in how they prepare students for jobs in the subbaccalaureate labor market.

James E. Rosenbaum, Ph.D., is Professor of Sociology, Education, and Social Policy, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. His main fields of interest are education, work, careers and the life course, and stratification. After completing a book in the Rose Monograph Series on the high school-to-work transition, he is now conducting studies on the transition between community colleges and work.

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