

COMMENTARY

AVID at Community Colleges Offers New Opportunities to Reach High-Need Students

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American community colleges have become the largest sector of higher education, enrolling 46% of all U.S. undergraduates, including 47% percent of undergraduates who are African American and 55% who are Hispanic. These are the higher education institutions of choice for many members of groups that have been historically underrepresented in higher education. The cultural beliefs of a community college often resemble a hybrid of those found in secondary schools and of those found in four-year post-secondary institutions. On one hand, community colleges are an extension of high school; on the other hand, the expectations are similar to those found in 4-year colleges - students are there to learn and can opt out if they choose to do so.

In California, community colleges are playing an increasingly large role, as the budget situation squeezes access to the CSU and UC systems. Many are looking for ways to support students who may be ill-prepared for the rigors of college and a recent study suggests an intriguing model, built on a well-established program. [Advancement Via Individual Determination \(AVID\)](#) has been a proven model for college preparation in over 4,700 U.S. middle schools and high schools and in 16 foreign countries. Although extensive research is available on the positive impacts of AVID in secondary schools, AVID at the postsecondary level is relatively new.

In "[The Implementation of Advancement Via Individual Determination \(AVID\) in a Community College Setting: A Case Study](#)" authors [Karen M. Watt](#), [Jeffery Huerta](#), and [Ersan Alkan](#), examine the initial implementation process of AVID in a northern California community college ([WCCC](#)). WCCC students reported that the support they received through AVID helped them focus, become more organized, and become more motivated to continue their studies. In addition, challenges such as faculty buy-in and resistance to changing institutionalized practices were encountered by staff members responsible for implementing AVID. In this initial implementation, faculty and administration sought to change the culture of the college to better serve underrepresented students in their quest to transfer to four-year institutions. As noted by the president of WCCC: "The historical trend in most community colleges has been to passively accept students in the first year and to weather the attrition without much reflection or intervention. AVID is a more structured and guided approach to the first year experience for community college students."

AVID in community colleges provides a potentially important evolution of the program in California, since Governor Jerry Brown used the line-item veto last June to cut funding for high school AVID programs. The national executive director of AVID [has affirmed](#) the organization's commitment to continuing their work in California (there are 1,578 AVID schools in 412 districts) but the elimination of funding for high school programs will likely have implications for higher education. Of the hundreds of thousands of high school students served by AVID programs each year, most are first-generation college-goers and would not otherwise have the support they need to further their education.

AVID implementation in higher education offers the possibility of still reaching at least some of those students. Since the WCCC implementation, AVID has also established the AVID *for* Higher Education (AHE) project, which subscribes to 5 AVID essentials. These differ somewhat from the 11 secondary AVID essentials: there is less emphasis on an AVID elective class and more emphasis on developing a campus team that specifically addresses retention, transfer and time to graduation issues through the use of AVID. The Watt, et al, study provides a framework for community colleges and higher education institutions to use the AVID program to leverage the academic potential of underprepared and historically underrepresented students.

The full study can be found [here](#): "Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) in a Community College Setting: A Case Study," Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 36: 752–760, 2012

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