

# Reach

ISSUE 9 | January 2015

THE PUBLICATION FOR EDUCATION RESEARCH

## A Pre-Election Conversation ...on *Access to College*

**William G. Tierney:** The first education issue in the upcoming presidential campaign is going to be about access to college. We need to increase the number of low-income students going to college, and that will require increased resources for college counseling and alternative uses of technology and social media from the federal government. President Obama's initiative to make community colleges free for everyone is sure to remain an agenda item.

**Morgan Polikoff:** I think your point is a really important one, and it makes me think of all the wasted opportunities where students could very well go on to succeed in college, but for one reason or another they fall out because they don't have guidance counselors, they don't understand the application process, they don't have access to the FAFSA. That to me is the lowest hanging fruit.



The Southern California College Advising Corps (SCCAC) pairs "near-peer" college advisers with low-income students to navigate the college application process. Overseen by Rossier's Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice (CERPP), it is part of the national nonprofit College Advising Corps. Above, Jessica Garcia (left) advises Kortney Pham at Santiago High School in Garden Grove.

We shouldn't overlook early childhood education, which I think is going to end up being an issue in the next campaign. I put college affordability and issues around college in that camp as well. They require investments that may not get this immediate payoff. If we really want to prepare kids and educate them for the 21st century, then we really do need to think about policies from early childhood on.

**Sandra Kaplan:** NPR recently aired a program regarding access to college. It appeared that some of the students who were interviewed wanted to go to college but did not understand the purpose of going. It reminded me of my visit to a preschool when I heard a teacher jokingly telling a four-year-old practicing writing his name, "If you don't learn this, you'll never get to college." And the student said, "What is that?" And I had that same feeling. We need to help students and parents more clearly understand the meaning and value of going to college and the relationship to what is learned at school today to learning in college tomorrow.

**Melora Sundt:** We can't lose sight of the so-called transformative developmental effect of college. Are we talking about developing job skills? Is college even the right path for that? But that being said, everybody ought to have access.

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MESSAGE

From the Dean

As we head into an intense national election season, we asked six members of our faculty to sit down for a discussion of the education issues that should guide a new administration.

Our participants included **Estela Mara Bensimon**, an expert in college equity and recently named Outstanding Latina Faculty by the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Ed; **Sandra Kaplan**, nationally known specialist in gifted education; **Julie Marsh**, whose research has influenced policy implementation, educational reform and accountability; **Morgan Polikoff**, cited by *EdWeek* as one of a dozen young researchers who will change the field; **Melora Sundt**, who led Rossier's team that built the groundbreaking online Master of Arts in Teaching; and **William G. Tierney**, internationally known expert in higher education policy and access.

Highlights of their conversation are featured in this issue.



Karen Symms Gallagher, PhD  
Emery Stoops and  
Joyce King Stoops Dean



*We need to think more broadly about standards-based accountability so it doesn't end up as a new form of the No Child Left Behind waivers.”*

—Julie Marsh



**Julie Marsh**  
Associate Professor of Education

## ...on *Accountability*

**Marsh:** I think that we need to work on accountability and reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which has been in limbo for some time. We need to think more broadly about standards-based accountability so it doesn't end up as a new form of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waivers. Right now we have states that are operating in a variety of ways under these waivers, and some states are actually still under NCLB, including California.

But we need to think about a system that is less punitive and one that's focused more on capacity building. That is, building the capacity of organizations—and individuals within—to be able to actually teach to the new Common Core standards. And so I think we need to think back to the model of systemic reform that was posed years ago, which included not just the idea that we were going to give incentives—what you might call a carrot-and-stick approach to accountability—but a model in which we could also have alignment of professional development and instruction and all the other systems that we need in order to support the teaching of these standards.

**Polikoff:** I agree that it's essential that we solve this accountability issue. More than 40 states have waivers, which have dramatically reshaped their accountability policies, and we don't know how long those waivers will be in place. I think they will last through the current administration just because President Obama is unlikely to sign anything that will replace his waivers. But we need to understand how these waivers are being implemented and what their effects are on students, teachers and schools.

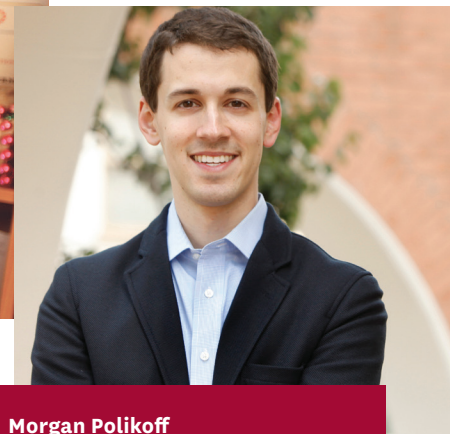
We've had standards and accountability as the centerpieces of federal education policy for well over a decade, but the amount of support to do research has been relatively limited in scope. So I think that we need to view these not as static policies but as policies that can and should change as we learn about their effectiveness.

**Marsh:** I should mention the dramatic changes in California's accountability system for K–12. We've moved to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and local accountability plans. The whole idea is “You tell us your goals in these eight areas, you decide how to get there.” There will be some sort of measures over time, but essentially, “Here's the money, with flexibility, and you decide locally how to spend it.”

**Polikoff:** I think that there are challenges there. First of all, to some people there's little A in “LCAP” (Local Control and Accountability Plan). It's not like you're going to be shut down if you're not serving kids. Which is what a lot of people think about when they think of accountability.



**William G. Tierney**  
Wilbur-Kieffer Professor of Higher Education,  
Associate Dean for Research and Faculty Affairs and  
Co-Director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education



**Morgan Polikoff**  
Assistant Professor of Education

## ...on *Outcomes*

**Polikoff:** It seems like every time anyone puts up an outcome, it's shot down. Graduation rates could be an outcome, but that's easy to game. If you're talking about teacher ed programs, one outcome could be how teachers do in the classroom, but teacher ed programs don't like that as an outcome. So yes, it sounds lovely to say we're going to focus on outcomes, but it's hard for me to think of examples where people come together and settle on good outcomes and actually hold themselves accountable.

**Bensimon:** I think that's very pessimistic. I think that we have to have some trust in professionals. People are in this business of education, whether it's K-12 or higher education, because at some level they do care about assisting others, and I realize that's not universal. Let's say if gaming was really going on in community colleges or in four-year colleges, you would be seeing a lot better results, right? We wouldn't be seeing the low graduation rates that we're seeing.

**Polikoff:** I'm just speaking from the No Child Left Behind experience. To me, what you're proposing sounds like NCLB for higher education. Unlike other people, I think NCLB was not a wholly terrible thing. It accomplished a lot. But I just worry about the kinds of gaming behaviors we might see. In fact, I would guess that they would disproportionately harm the very kinds of students that we would want to help, which are low-income and first-generation students.

**Bensimon:** In my mind, schools should be rewarded for graduating first-generation, low-income or minority students.

**Sundt:** It could be that the outcome shifts to the next step—either they get into a college or they are employed. Or there's a different group determining the success.

**Kaplan:** In California, the Education Code is going to face some serious revisions. And those of us who are very much involved with categorical programs, and the potential demise of categorical regulations, so to speak, are really concerned. It goes back to what you were saying, Julie. It's a lack of developing decision-making ability as to what to do under LCFE.

**Tierney:** People will always game the system. There's always a way to do what is required but not have anything change. But there are some certain, clear, identifiable changes that could be made. We could switch, for example, from a focus on high school graduation rates to college-going rates. If the Secretary of Education pushed for that, there would be significant ramifications. It would force schools and postsecondary institutions to work more closely together, and that's essential if we want real reform.

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“*I do like the idea of outcomes that are not protected by the institution itself, the way graduation rates are.*”

— *Melora Sundt*



**Melora Sundt**  
Professor of Clinical Education and  
Executive Vice Dean



**Sandra Kaplan**  
Professor of Clinical Education



**Estela Mara Bensimon**  
Professor of Education and Co-Director of  
the Center for Urban Education

...ON *Outcomes* | *Continued from previous page*

**Polikoff:** And I think that gets to an important point, which is we really need to think very hard about what the outcomes are that we want to be held accountable for. And we've used very crude and reductionist outcomes, and if we have the right kinds of outcomes, they can, I think, drive the kinds of linkages that Julie was talking about really desperately needing. I think having a smart group of people coming together and saying, "Look, here's a list of outcomes, and here's how you can think about constructing such a system."

**Marsh:** Then would you agree on the K-12 side? Let's look at the CORE (California Office to Reform Education) districts, and their approach to trying to balance out not just outcomes in English or Math achievement but also the socio-emotional outcomes.

**Sundt:** I do like the idea of outcomes that are not protected by the institution itself, the way graduation rates are. But pushing into something that they don't control, like employability. And I'd like to see greater accountability tied around them.

**Polikoff:** Of course we have to acknowledge that all of this is happening in the context of larger societal issues, particularly around inequality. While I think education certainly can play a role in addressing that, I think that we also have to acknowledge that other social policies are really needed if we are going to see real progress.

## Major Grants Awarded

Between August and December 2014

The **Center for Urban Education**, co-directed by **Estela Mara Bensimon** and **Alicia Dowd**, received **\$300,000** from the Ford Foundation to support "Pathway for Academic, Career and Transfer Success (PACTS): An Emerging Academic Innovation at Los Angeles Trade-Technical College."

The Mattel Children's Foundation has awarded a second grant, for **\$784,000**, in its collaboration with USC Rossier on Speedometry™, a free-to-use curriculum that utilizes Hot Wheels® toys to teach STEM to 4th graders.

**Gale Sinatra**, **Morgan Polikoff**, **Julie Marsh**, **Fred Freking** and **Angela "Laila" Hasan** head the research team, assisted by Assistant Dean for Research **Cathryn Dhanatya**.

The **Southern California College Advising Corps**, overseen by **CERPP's Jerome Lucido**, has received two awards: the CTBC Bank Community Reinvestment Excellence Award (**\$50,000**) and the LA Scholars Investment Fund (**\$100,000**), a collaboration of the California Community Foundation and College Access Foundation of California.

As part of the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education grant program, the U.S. Department of Education has awarded **\$1.7 million** to Project CHANGE, led by **Sandra Kaplan**.

A **\$3.2 million** "First in the World" grant from the U.S. Department of Education will allow the **Pullias Center** to expand the college access game "Mission: Admission." **Zoë Corwin**, **Gale Sinatra** and **William G. Tierney** head the project.

**Morgan Polikoff** received a **\$159,000** grant from an anonymous donor to conduct a two-year project on the effects of curriculum adoptions on student achievement in California.

The Walton Family Foundation awarded a **\$250,000** High Quality Charter school grant to benefit charter management organization Endovate, funding the new **Hybrid High School East** in the East Los Angeles/Boyle Heights area. **Dean Karen Symms Gallagher** is the PI.

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