COMMUNITY COLLEGES are pivotal institutions in society, and they shape opportunity for a large segment of the population. They exemplify American opportunity ideals, and they have created impressive college access. But they also show how traditional college procedures constrain our ideals. We tell students that college is the way to escape poverty, yet when they try, traditional college procedures and “college-readiness” rhetoric pose unnecessary obstacles at every step and block their opportunity. In the 2016 presidential election, when non-college voters reported that good jobs are out of reach, these views were partly due to perceived college obstacles. This study finds that those obstacles can be removed.

We tell all students that they must attend college, but we design college in ways that prevent most students from succeeding. People rarely imagine that colleges could be designed differently, but this study shows that they can. Extending our prior findings, this book provides a new paradigm that identifies the alternative options and procedures used by some private and public colleges to improve students’ success. Instead of “moving the needle” on one dimension, this study identifies multiple pathways to success, multiple procedures that support students’ success, and multiple job rewards that students can enjoy. Instead of blaming students or colleges, this research identifies the many alternative options and procedures that can enable students to succeed, despite initial disadvantages, and make “college for all” an approach that leads to more career successes for young adults entering the labor market.

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