Preface

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.

We thank the many colleagues who provided thoughtful suggestions—Tom Bailey, Tom Brock, Steven Brint, Charles Clotfelter, Sheldon Danziger, Stefanie DeLuca, Regina Deil-Amen, Kevin Dougherty, Greg Duncan, Adam Gamoran, Sara Goldrick-Rab, Eric Grodsky, Maureen Hallinan, Davis Jenkins, Stan Jones, Takehiko Kariya, John Meyer, Mike McPherson, Richard Murnane, David Neumark, Aaron Pallas, Ann Person, Mike Rose, Mortimer Schapiro, Barbara Schneider, Jennifer Stephan, David Stern, Mitchell Stevens, Tom Sugar, Burt Weisbrod, and Chris Winship.

We offer our appreciation to each of the colleges studied for providing access to conduct this research. We also thank the many staff members and students who thoughtfully and candidly answered what must have seemed like endless questions. They gave generously of their time, shared insights, and impressed us with their dedication and commitment. We are particularly indebted to Judith Marwick at Harper College and Scott Evenbeck, Stuart Cochran, Tracy Meade, and John Mogulescu at CUNY. They took ideas from our writing and translated them into effective operational practices that embody those initial ideas. Researchers call that "implementation," but that term does not capture the creativity required to construct procedures that reflect the underlying ideas but also actually work in the local college context. As we were learning what they had done, their insights and designs repeatedly impressed us. It was thrilling to see how they translated our abstract ideas into real-world practices, which we have endeavored to describe in chapter 8.

We are indebted to Kelly Becker, Kennan Cepa, Amy Foran, and Pam Schuetz, who contributed in many ways—with project planning, data collection, and thoughtful insights in the early years of this study. We are also indebted to David Figlio, director of the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University, whose support was a great contribution to the project. Suzanne Nichols of the Russell Sage Foundation encouraged us when this book was just an idea, and she was helpful in all stages of the publication process.

We thank the Spencer Foundation and the Gates Foundation for their support. When conventional reforms repeatedly fail, it is wise to examine whether our traditional assumptions are faulty. These foundations made commitments to questioning traditional assumptions and learning how colleges actually work. We also appreciate suggestions from Hilary Pennington and Josh Jarrett, who were at the Gates Foundation, and Susan Dauber, who was at the Spencer Foundation. Their substantive comments significantly improved our research.

Special thanks go to Alexis Gable and Kennan Cepa, whose extensive and thoughtful comments greatly improved the entire manuscript. We must take responsibility for the remaining errors, but their comments improved every chapter of the book. Chenny Ng and Rachel Wolfe also made editorial comments on some chapters.

We learned much from Norton Grubb's enormous body of research, and he made valuable suggestions about our work along the way. He inspired many of our insights and improved our understandings, and it is to his memory that we dedicate this book.