

HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL WORKING PAPER SHOWS HYBRID COLLEGE MODEL CAN HELP CLOSE COLLEGE EQUITY GAP

Paper Finds Innovative Education Strategies May Help Reduce Racial Inequality, Increase Social Mobility, and Improve Economic Growth

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CAMBRIDGE – A new working paper released by Harvard Kennedy School’s [Program on Education Policy and Governance](#) (PEPG) and [Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston](#), in partnership with [Trio New College Network](#), shows promising initial results that a hybrid college model developed by Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) and the Boston nonprofit Duet improved graduation rates for students participating in the program, with faster time-to-degree outcomes and lower costs than Massachusetts institutions serving comparable students.

The [working paper](#), *College Re-Imagined: Can a new model help close higher education's equity gap?*, authored by PEPG Deputy Director Martin West, Harvard University PhD student Katherine Larned, and Co-founder of Trio New College Network John Gabrieli, examines an innovative partnership between SNHU and Duet launched in 2014 that re-imagines the traditional college experience by combining flexible, competency-based online courses with wraparound, in-person support and coaching for students.

The Duet-SNHU model serves a population of students that is underrepresented in postsecondary education, including students who identify as Black or Hispanic, are over 25, or are parents. Using data on the first 554 students to enroll in the program and pursue an associate degree between 2015-2019, the paper shows the model achieved positive outcomes including:

- A three-year graduation rate of 46 percent, compared to 19 percent at traditional two-year colleges in Massachusetts.
- A higher graduation rate across all racial groups, with graduation rates among students of color more than two times higher compared to traditional two-year colleges.
- Faster degree achievement, with students spending an average of 18 months enrolled at SNHU, compared to an average of 67 months for students at traditional two-year institutions.
- Significantly lower costs for students, with an average Duet student who completes their associate degree in 20 months spending a total of \$11,670, almost half the average cost of \$21,300 at a traditional two-year college in Massachusetts.

“Part of what makes these data so exciting is that a large body of research finds that students from disadvantaged backgrounds often struggle in online higher education programs,” **said PEPG Deputy Director Martin West**. “The Duet-SNHU partnership seems to have identified a set of in-person supports that enables many more historically underserved students to complete degrees—and to provide it through a model many more students can afford.”

“This report shows that when non-academic barriers to college success are removed, and earning a degree is all about learning and working hard, students will take full advantage of the opportunity, and then some,” **said Mike Larsson, CEO of Duet**.

“Today's higher education industry has built financial, logistical, and practical barriers that keep out the very students who are most in need of opportunity,” said Paul LeBlanc, **SNHU President**. “At SNHU, we are proud to partner with Duet to provide the flexibility for students to gain, assess, and certify their knowledge on their own terms and timelines in order to secure meaningful work and successful futures.”

The findings suggest that the hybrid college model is a promising approach for addressing three important challenges facing Massachusetts and the nation: racial inequality, social mobility, and economic growth. According to the paper, systemic barriers have prevented students of color from graduating college at the same rates as white students for decades, with studies showing that white students in Massachusetts are twice as likely to graduate. The Duet-SNHU model closes the opportunity gap between white students and students of color while increasing graduation rates across all demographic groups. The paper also suggests that the Duet-SNHU model can increase economic mobility and provide a path to the middle class for its students, particularly working adults. By lowering higher education costs and increasing graduation rates, the model helps its students take on less college debt and improve their earning potential.

To learn more about the findings of this innovative partnership, read the full report [here](#).

About the Program on Education Policy and Governance

Established in 1996, the Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG) has distinguished itself as a significant contributor to the systematic analysis of education policy and governing arrangements. Located within Harvard University's Government Department and the Kennedy School of Government's Taubman Center for State and Local Government, PEPG's core missions are to provide high-level scientific training for young scholars who can make independent contributions to scholarly research; foster a national community of reform-minded scientific researchers; and produce [path-breaking studies](#) that provide a scientific basis for school reform policy. [Learn more](#).

About the Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston

The Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston strives to improve the governance of Greater Boston by strengthening connections among the region's scholars, students, and civic leaders. A university-wide entity housed at the Harvard Kennedy School's Taubman Center for State and Local Government, the institute pursues this mission by promoting emerging leaders, producing new ideas, and stimulating informed discussion. The institute was founded and funded by the Phyllis and Jerome Lyle Rappaport Charitable Foundation which promotes emerging leaders in greater Boston. [Learn more](#).

About the Trio New College Network

Trio New College Network is a non-profit organization helping communities across the country launch innovative, affordable, and flexible degree programs to increase college success and expand economic opportunity for all students. Learn more at trionetwork.org.

About Duet

[Duet](#) is a non-profit organization that provides coaching and support for students enrolled in Southern New Hampshire University's online, competency-based associate and bachelor degrees. Duet works with students throughout New England.

About Southern New Hampshire University

[Southern New Hampshire University](#) (SNHU) is a private, nonprofit institution with an 89-year history of educating traditional-aged students and working adults. Now serving more than 150,000 learners worldwide, SNHU offers approximately 200 accredited undergraduate, NH. Recognized as the "Most Innovative" regional university by U.S. News & World Report and one of the fastest-growing universities in the country, SNHU is committed to expanding access to high quality, affordable pathways that meet the needs of each learner. Learn more at www.snhu.edu.

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