



THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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## BRAINSTORM

Lives of the Mind

BOB ZEMSKY

### **Investment in Improved Learning**

For too long, discussion of access to higher education has been dominated by a belief that what is required is more public money for student aid. The problem is that we have been there, doing that for a quarter of a century with at best uncertain results.

Despite massive infusions of federal student aid which have clearly helped increase higher education participation rates, what has not increased is the proportion of those who start and then succeed in their studies. My conclusion? In the long term, college success rates will not improve until middle and high schools prove more adept at getting students ready for college. My preference, then, is to spend more money, not on financial aid, but on improved K-12 schooling.

Even if my preference was made policy tomorrow, it would take a decade of sustained effort to improve the college success rate unless something was also done to improve retention rates for those students who are now entering college unprepared to do college-level work. What needs to be improved, both quickly and dramatically, is what today passes for remedial instruction for lower division students who cannot pass the basic placement tests in math and English.

Hence the importance of the news last week from Kingsborough Community College in New York. A multi-year experiment, in which random samples of students requiring remediation were taught in learning communities, reported a substantial increase in the rate at which these students passed their remedial courses and then advanced to college-level work. What is important here is not the specific intervention—Kingsborough's learning communities were small cohorts of students who took all their remedial courses together—but rather the fact that direct investment in an alternative learning strategy produced replicable results. Could it be that more money spent developing and testing alternative learning strategies might prove a better investment than more money for financial aid? It's a question worth asking.

Posted at 08:19:48 AM on March 17, 2008 | All postings by [Bob Zemsky](#)

#### ***About the Author***

Bob Zemsky describes himself as being old and round enough to be mistaken for a pooh-bah. He was a member of the Spellings Commission and, as an author and researcher, has focused on making colleges and universities mission-centered and market-smart. He has focused on what globalism might really mean for higher education, on what technology has not accomplished, and how to make learning important to the higher education market. Bob currently serves as professor and chair of The Learning Alliance at the University of Pennsylvania.

## Brooklyn becoming a thriving center of higher education

BY AMANDA COLEMAN AND RACHEL MONAHAN  
DAILY NEWS WRITERS

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Fuhgeddabout the rich Manhattanites - it's the college students who are overrunning [Brooklyn](#).

[Flatbush's Brooklyn College](#) is expected to open its first dorm next spring. Students from around the world have been coming to Clinton Hill's Pratt Institute in droves.

And [New York University](#) may soon have a Brooklyn base because of a merger with downtown's Polytechnic University.

Applications to Brooklyn schools have risen steadily over the last five years for most colleges and universities that released the figures to Brooklyn News.

"It's definitely becoming more college-friendly," said [Jesse Heimowitz](#), 21, of [Queens](#), a senior at Brooklyn Poly, whose board approved a long-discussed merger with NYU.

"I came here because I like [New York](#), but don't like [Manhattan](#)," said [Pratt Institute](#) sophomore Max Palmer, 20, of [Columbus, Ohio](#). "Manhattan is really crazy. There are so many insane people there. It's a lot cheaper here, too, and I really wanted a school with a campus."

About 55,000 students attend 10 major colleges and universities in Brooklyn.

Pratt has had a 60% increase in international applicants this year over last, said [Judith Aaron](#), Pratt vice president for enrollment.

"I never get a question any more about safety - one in the last two or three years," she said. "Just as real estate has skyrocketed in Brooklyn, so has the borough's reputation for prospective college students."

At [Brooklyn College](#), a dorm built by a private developer is expected to open in 2009.

"Students don't bond here. They're all doing their own thing," said Ardit Cela, 20, a sophomore who walks to college from her [Midwood](#) home. "Dorms would bring people together."

"I considered joining a frat, but they don't even have houses," said [Juan Cardona](#), 21, a Brooklyn College junior from [Staten Island](#). "Maybe some bars would pop up. I think it would have a positive effect on the community."

Businesses in [Brooklyn Heights](#) are already benefiting from students there. Since last fall, six restaurants have offered student meals through the privately based Off-Campus Meal Plan.

"This semester we've seen more of the meal plan cards," said Nick Likourentzos, an owner of Park Plaza Restaurant.