POLICY OF THE YEAR NOMINEE

Increasing the Graduation Rate: Syracuse Students as Reverse-Mentors
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Who We Are

The Roosevelt Institute, working to redefine the rules that guide our social and economic realities, is home to the nation’s largest network of emerging doers and thinkers committed to reimagining and re-writing the rules in their communities to create lasting change. Our members, organizing in 130 chapters in 40 states nationwide, partner with policy makers and communicators to provide them with clear, principled ideas and visionary, actionable plans. Our members are actively influencing policy on the local, state and national level – from introducing legislation on protections for LGBTQ youth to consulting with local governments on natural disaster flood prevention.

What You’re Holding

Now in its eighth year, the 10 Ideas series promotes the most promising student-generated ideas from across our network. This journal, which includes submissions from schools located from California to Georgia to New York, stands as a testament to the depth and breadth of our network of innovators.

Our 10 Ideas memos are selected for publication because they are smart, rigorously researched, and, most importantly, feasible. We want to see these ideas become a reality.

How You Can Join

As you explore these ideas, we encourage you to take special note of the “Next Steps” sections. Here, our authors have outlined how their ideas can move from the pages of this journal to implementation. We invite you to join our authors in the process. Contact us on our website or by tweeting with us @VivaRoosevelt using the hashtag #RooImpact.

Thank you for reading and supporting student generated ideas.

Together we will design the future of our communities, from towns to countries and all that lies in-between.
Dear Readers,

Young people are incredibly important to the American political process. Millennials and Generation Z now make up the same portion of eligible voters as the Baby Boomer generation. This emerging generation is also the most diverse in our nation’s history: Half of all eligible Latino voters in 2016 are between the ages of 18 and 35. We’re told we can make the difference every election, and candidates and elected officials ask for our votes, time, and money—but they don’t ask for our ideas.

**Young Americans continue to transform our economy and culture. Now it’s time for us to disrupt our political system.**

The 10 Ideas journals, one of our oldest and most competitive publications, elevate the top student-generated policy ideas from across the country. In this year’s journals, you will find solutions to problems in places ranging from South Dakota to North Carolina to Oregon to New York. Whether seeking to make Pittsburgh an immigrant-friendly city or to reduce recidivism in the state of Massachusetts, the following proposals take a creative and locally focused approach to building opportunity for all.

Roosevelters are also committed to turning their ideas into action. Whether that means meeting with decision-makers, writing opinion pieces in their local papers, or organizing actions in their communities, we intend to see the solutions we propose become reality.

Why? As the generation that will inherit the world shaped by today’s decisions, we have the most to lose or gain. Involving the emerging generation in the policy process will lead to outcomes that benefit everyone. We believe it matters who rewrites the rules, and we have ideas for how to change them.

I hope you enjoy reading the proposals in this journal as much as we did.

Onward,

Joelle Gamble
National Director, Network, Roosevelt Institute
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Creating Stipulations on Tenure at Mount Holyoke College

By Danielle Brown, Mount Holyoke College

Thesis
Mount Holyoke College should not wait to evaluate tenure status until after faculty members commit infractions. Appraisal of intellectual and moral competency, re-education of social standards and phased retirement should become tenure stipulations for the sake of an improved faculty.

Background
Tenure is necessary in a job market that is ever changing and fluctuating. The appointment gives college professors the confidence necessary to explore their academic pursuits without fear of backlash. It is a reasonable award for those who dedicate their lives to increasing public knowledge and teaching.

However, there are also significant downsides to tenure. Most faculty under protection were tenured during a previous era, when a highly different population was present at Mount Holyoke College: a rather affluent, privileged and homogenous student body. Times have changed but many professors have not. Tenured faculty at the College can often make mistakes involving microaggressions such as misgendering, classist, ableist or racist statements. They sometimes fail to recognize when their teaching quality has faltered or become ineffective.

These problems don’t require immediate dismissal. The issue is that when certain tenured faculty members refuse to remedy problems, there is rarely any real discipline or re-training aside from temporary suspension, often with pay. Rather than learning from their slip-ups and listening to the criticism of their students or colleagues, tenured faculty benefit from a system that only reprimands with a slap on the wrist.

This policy revolves around how and why some tenured professors stop placing much effort into their careers by refusing to evolve as teachers and thinkers. Tenured professors are not at risk of losing their jobs. Because tenure, once achieved, is seemingly unconditional and lacks stipulations, quality of teaching and care for students’ needs can decline simultaneously and without repercussion. Poor teaching quality can range from an unbalanced focus on research to lack of interest to a dearth of up-to-date knowledge in their fields. But, educators need and deserve job security,
absent a suitable alternative tenure should not be eradicated.

Talking Points
- Colleges that have implemented post-tenure reviews of their professors do not often terminate tenured professors.\(^6\)
- Faculty members as diverse as the student body at Mount Holyoke College would better meet the needs of students.\(^7\)
- The goal of this policy is not to eliminate faculty but rather to offer a choice of improving their quality of teaching or to retire when necessary.\(^8\)
- Student evaluations are a highly important factor in determining continuation of faculty appointments. They should continue to matter even after a professor achieves tenure.

The Policy Idea
Mount Holyoke College’s faculty legislation needs to be amended to add a “triggered” post-tenure review model spurred by different possibilities. Amendments should also include the appropriate selection of dismissal or completion of an improvement plan following a post-tenure review under which the faculty member is found to be substandard. The college should implement and yearly review a student evaluation system. In addition, the college should recognize that post-tenure reviews and student evaluations should matter more after a faculty member has spent many years at the university, not less.

Policy Analysis
In the words of former research associate and director, Dr. Cathy A Trower said, “Rather than changing tenure, or considering alternatives, we toil endlessly to work around it, through it, or over it, as if it were some magical, immovable force rather than a man-made employment policy.”\(^9\) It does not harm academic freedom for tenured faculty to coexist with the possibility of being challenged.\(^10\)

The “triggered” post-tenure review model would be enacted by request of students and other faculty and administrators who have previously filed

KEY FACTS
- By 2000, 37 states had established some form of post-tenure review.\(^18\)
- Post-tenure review can occur under the rights of due process.\(^19\)
- Mount Holyoke College only reviews student evaluations when 50 percent of the students taught by a professor complete the evaluations.\(^20\)
grievance reports through the proper channels or a certain number of substandard or highly positive annual reviews. It would serve as not only a check for poor professional performance, but also confirmation of excellent performance.\textsuperscript{11}

An improvement plan would be created by the faculty member in question, his or her department chair, and the Dean of Faculty when and if a faculty member is found to be substandard within a post-tenure review. The plan should include retraining programs that make the faculty member accountable for change.\textsuperscript{12}

To better the circumstances under which student comments are received, the college will need to update student evaluation surveys to clarify inquiries, and perform a regular collection and analysis of surveys, regardless of participation percentages.\textsuperscript{13,14}

Because junior faculty members are often critiqued more harshly than their senior counterparts, weight of faculty performance reviews would become heavier over time.\textsuperscript{15,16}

Faculty, and others, who may be worried about what this policy change means for academic freedom and job security should note that a review system is only necessary for those who are performing very well or very badly. An excellent review would ensure that a faculty member is recognized and rewarded for his or her work. A substandard review would most likely only arise after multiple evaluations because the faculty member has failed to attempt to remedy the problems that the evaluations have identified.

\textbf{NEXT STEPS}

The Faculty Conference Committee should meet and discuss the details of this plan with faculty members. Once approved, as determined in the Mount Holyoke College Faculty Legislation, the Faculty Conference Committee and the Education Committee of the Board of Trustees should meet to consult one another over this change.\textsuperscript{17} Implementation would be targeted for the following academic year.
Increasing the Graduation Rate: Employing Syracuse High School Students as Reverse-Mentors to Educators

By Rachel Brown-Weinstock, Syracuse University

Thesis
To increase the graduation rate of the Syracuse City School District (SCSD), the SCSD Board of Education (BOE) should implement a professional development policy that employs high school students at risk of dropping out as mentors to their teachers in creating culturally responsive classrooms.

Background and Context
There was a 14 percent gap between the New York State (NYS) and SCSD graduation rates in 2005. That gap increased to 25 percent by 2014, with graduation rates that year of 76 percent and 51 percent, respectively.¹ The NYS Department of Education has declared 19 of 30 district schools “Priority Schools” ² because they are among the lowest performing 5 percent of schools in the state in terms of test scores and graduation rates.³ National achievement gaps between minority, low-income, and Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and their more advantaged peers contextualize SCSD’s low performance. Of about 20,000 SCSD students enrolled during the 2014-2015 year, 77 percent were racial/ethnic minorities, 76 percent were economically disadvantaged, and 15 percent were identified as LEP.⁴

A survey of students by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that the primary cause of school dropout is too many absences, followed by poor grades/failing (ranked third), not liking school (fourth), not getting along with teachers (ninth), and working (seventh).⁵ Many of these causes are related to culturally unresponsive schools, characterized by opposition between school culture, structure, and instruction, and many students’ home culture.⁶ Cultural unresponsiveness occurs due to a disconnect between the backgrounds of America’s diverse student body and those of educators who are white and from middle-class and monolingual families.⁷ Characteristics of culturally responsive schools include educators with positive perceptions of minority students; knowledge of different minority groups’ values, societal contributions, and learning styles; effective educator-student cross-cultural communication; and curriculum that incorporates students’ lived experiences.⁸
Talking Points

► The SCSD has one of the lowest graduation rates in the state. Primary causes for low graduation and high dropout rates are related to school culture/home culture dissonance.
► Employing the most at-risk students as mentors to teachers would incentivize students to come to school, build relationships with supportive adults, and create culturally-responsive classrooms and schools for all students.
► The policy has other benefits, including reducing teacher turnover rates, fostering career skill development, lowering suspension rates and violence, and strengthening the school community overall.

The Policy Idea

The SCSD BOE should provide participation in student-teacher reverse mentoring as an option for teacher professional development. Reverse mentoring is a concept typically used in the business sector when mentors are younger than mentees and recognized for their unique cultural and personal experiences. Students are qualified to advise on cultural responsiveness as experts on their home culture and educational experiences. Mentors would be students most at risk of dropping out as defined using criteria in Section 612, Subdivision 6 of the New York Education Law.

Students would be paired one-on-one with their own teachers and receive paid employment for their mentorship services. The SCSD has employed students in custodial work during school hours before, so student employment would not be without precedent. Students would meet weekly with teacher mentees to build culturally responsive classrooms by discussing their home experiences, advising on teaching practices, and helping plan lessons using material and learning techniques relevant to their lives. Other job responsibilities include: planning large-scale professional development sessions, surveying and speaking for other students about desired changes, advising administration on improving parent and community engagement, and measuring the outcomes of their own advice.

KEY FACTS

► The annual cost of employing all mentors is $43,312.50. Employing each teacher after school would also cost $35.78 per hour, but cost can be minimized because teacher professional development is integrated into the school day.
► Volunteers from Syracuse University’s Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs are willing to teach reverse-mentors the skills—such as data collection and analysis—necessary to their job responsibilities, and are willing to provide technical assistance.
Policy Analysis
This policy would boost graduation rates by targeting individual students and the entire student population simultaneously. For individual mentors, employment reduces the necessity to dropout for work and incentivizes strong attendance and school engagement because studying the school is their job. Further, pairing mentors one-on-one with their own teachers builds strong student-teacher relationships, which correlates with educational persistence. To benefit the entire student population, teachers would build culturally responsive classrooms that can increase student achievement.

While this policy has never been implemented, it has high potential because it unites evidence-based strategies that address the NCES causes for dropping out. For example, “student voice” is a school reform strategy in which students consult faculty on issues such as cultural responsiveness. One high-minority, high-dropout school’s student voice club substantially improved teacher efficacy, student-teacher relations, and students’ perceptions of school. Further, the non-profit National Urban Alliance for Effective Education, which incorporates student voice into teacher professional development for cultural responsiveness, boasts gains in math and English Language Arts across all grade levels in partner schools. For the employment aspect of the policy, monetary education incentive programs targeting low-income and minority students increase positive behaviors such as attendance, doing homework, and engaging in classwork. The policy has supplementary benefits as well. It teaches mentors career skills, and may reduce school suspension if teachers better understand students and students perceive the school environment as more fair. Pairing new teachers with mentors may also reduce the district’s high teacher turnover rate, which was 25 percent in 2012-2013.

NEXT STEPS
The policy should be piloted in Henninger High School, which had the lowest 2014-2015-graduation rate of district high schools that will remain open. Henninger administrators should determine how to market the program to new teachers in particular, and faculty should nominate students as mentors. Nominees should apply for the positions. A committee of teachers and administrator mentees should select fifteen student mentors. The committee should be in charge of creating monthly work schedules for mentors of 10 hours per week (within hours worked by SCSD students employed through a local non-profit). The committee also should be in charge of case management for students who are not fulfilling their job responsibilities. The district’s Special Programs office should apply for federal, state, and local grants and use funding from their 21st Century Community Learning Center grant to cover costs for the first two years of the policy. If successful, the BOE should allocate money from general funds to support expansion.
Increasing Michigan State University’s Research Capacity through a Virtual Campus Supercomputing Center

By Nathan Feather, Michigan State University

Thesis
Michigan State University (MSU) should fix their lagging mass computing capabilities by creating a Virtual Campus Supercomputing Center (VCSC) to use idle university computers’ power for faculty and student research.

Background and Context
MSU is falling behind in the critical area of mass computing. Data-intensive research, which requires millions of mathematic calculations, can only be done through mass computing, usually by supercomputers. Large amounts of groundbreaking research—such as observing high-energy space particles, modeling segregation and cohesion in communities, and performing large-scale simulations of water and contaminants in the Great Lakes—is conducted at MSU through mass computing. Better computation output leads to more accurate models.

The demand for mass computation is so great that MSU created a High Performance Computer Center (HPCC). However, the faculty must pay thousands of dollars to use the HPCC due to high demand. This stifles potentially revolutionary research, as the faculty is not given the tools they need at an accessible price. Meanwhile, thousands of computers across MSU sit idle each day when they could be computing groundbreaking research.

The creation of a VCSC would fix this problem. A VCSC is a distributed computing network that delegates small parts from large research projects to idle computers on campus. In effect, it would dramatically increases the research potential of MSU at a cost 1/50th of the current rate, launching MSU into the future of mass computing, and establishing the university as a pioneer in this critical research area. If MSU wants to advance as a leading research university, investing in a VCSC is a cost effective way to significantly increase research potential.

Talking Points
- Faculty is required to pay thousands of dollars for some HPCC use, hindering professors’ capability to conduct research at MSU.
A VCSC would establish MSU as a premier institution for mass computing, which is a major technology of the future.

World-class resources would attract acclaimed faculty to do their research at MSU.

**The Policy Idea**

The university should create a VCSC, a distributed mass computation network that sends each one of Michigan State University’s idle computers tiny, proportional tasks of large data research projects for them to compute. Each computer’s small tasks combine to complete research significantly faster, meaning more research can be done. The Institute for Cyber-Enabled Research will be the facilitators of this grid, which will be a free resource for students and faculty.

**Policy Analysis**

MSU needs to remain on the cutting edge of computational technology to be considered a premier research university. MSU’s administration understands this urgency; it recently established a department just for this purpose, the Department of Computational Mathematics, Science, and Engineering. This department cannot be effective without the proper tools and needs the greater computational power a VCSC provides.

A 10,000-computer network could attain 10 times MSU’s current output for just 1/50th of the current $500,000 initial setup cost. Syracuse University, a significantly smaller university, already has a VCSC that provides more than 50 percent more computing power than MSU currently has.

The University of Westminster uses a VCSC and spends $187,683 less per year than MSU. A VCSC is a cost-effective way to increase the mass computational power for any university, which helps produce substantive research with far-reaching effects.

**KEY FACTS**

- A VCSC would produce 10 times the current computational output at MSU for around 1/50th of the cost.
- The use of a VCSC has saved another university $187,863 per year compared to MSU’s current model.
- Since Syracuse instituted a VCSC, they have had a computing surplus of more than 29.831 teraflops, or almost 30 trillion individual calculations.
NEXT STEPS
MSU’s administration must be lobbied. This proposal aligns with the university’s goals of education and advancement, and this policy will help achieve those goals in a cost effective manner. One of the main allies on campus will be the Department of Computational Mathematics, Science, and Engineering, because a VCSC would provide resources to expand their capabilities. Another key ally on campus is the Institute for Cyber-Enabled Research. This proposal would further develop the department and align with its current projects.

A comprehensive proposal will outline the potential upgrades needed to MSU’s IT infrastructure and the projected costs. Next, the coalition will lobby the offices of Information Technology Services, Research and Graduate Studies, and University Advancement for funding as soon as possible while applying for various grants. Once in place, this idea can be spread to other universities and institutions, making mass computing widely available and generating impactful research across the globe.
Leveling Educational Opportunities: Integrating NYC High Schools

By Nicole Felmus, Columbia University

Thesis
In New York City, selective academic hubs draw the best teachers, have the most parental involvement, and present a culture of academic success, which prevents minority and low-income students from receiving a quality education. New York City Council should replace their specialized high school system with magnet programs—specialized academic curricula for select students in standard high schools—to level educational opportunities.

Background and Context
Currently, there are 235,852 students in NYC public high schools. Only 27,000 of them attend specialized high schools. Across all five boroughs, there are nine specialized high schools that aim to “serve the needs of academically and artistically gifted students,” which students test into in 8th grade (excluding LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts). These schools, such as Stuyvesant High School, are predominately Asian and White, and therefore unrepresentative of the city’s population. All other NYC schools are more diverse. This creates several problems that include the fact that underrepresented groups are less likely to receive the same parent participation, underrepresented groups have less educational opportunities than peers at specialized high schools, and students at specialized high schools receive access to better quality teachers than those at non-specialized high schools. There is evidence that the measures of teacher quality—including experience, licensure exam score, and value-added estimates of effectiveness—are distributed unevenly, concentrating high quality teachers in specialized high schools.

A study published in April of 2015 by the Independent Budget Office (IBO) found that 26 percent of students who attend specialized public high schools were in the top income quintile, compared to 7 percent in other high schools. Furthermore, a 2014 study published by the NYC IBO shows that teachers at high-poverty high schools have 2.3 fewer years of experience than teachers at low-poverty high schools. This perpetuates a cycle of poor education, which makes access to and preparation for specialized high schools even harder to achieve for students from high-poverty schools. Additionally, NYC’s standard high schools have great room for improvement, only 4 in 10 offer access to both chemistry and physics classes.
Teacher attrition rates in high-poverty schools are 14 percent higher in a two-year span than teachers in low-poverty schools. Many policy makers propose creating more charter schools to improve educational opportunities, yet these further exacerbate the problem, increasing the achievement gap—otherwise known as the education debt.8

Talking Points
► Specialized high schools expanding the growing educational debt between students from different socio-economic backgrounds.
► Replacing specialized high schools with magnet programs at all schools would spreads high quality teachers among all schools.
► Replacing specialized high schools with magnet programs would create more racially diverse schools, which fosters more innovation and cross-racial relationships.
► Higher quality teachers can help reduce the school-to-prison pipeline when applied to high-poverty schools.9

Policy Idea
New York City should end its specialized high school program and replace it with magnet programs within every high school. Teachers should be redistributed to help lead the magnet programs and teach magnet program classes as well as courses offered in the normal school environment. This allows for the sharing of best practices, specifically in schools that are struggling to meet standards set by the city, state, and country to work towards eliminating educational disparities among minority groups. Additionally, magnet centers provide an opportunity of knowledge transfer between students of varying levels.

To transition from the current specialized high school system, students
Currently in a specialized public high school would be given the opportunity to pick their magnet program of choice.

Policy Analysis
If the academic meccas of the nine specialized high schools were dismantled and funneled into magnet programs within non-specialized high schools, students from both arenas would benefit. Some studies have shown that racially diverse work environments lead to innovation.\textsuperscript{10} Studies also show that students at racially diverse schools are more likely to develop cross-racial friendships. If this policy were instituted, schools would better reflect the NYC population and teacher quality would be spread more evenly.

In addition, more experienced teachers are more likely to use culturally responsive teaching, a method that takes into account the cultures that students come from and legitimizes these backgrounds in the classroom. This method has been proven to work towards reducing the school-to-prison pipeline.\textsuperscript{11} While charter schools offer greater educational choices, they often use a lottery system for admission and take away funding from regular city schools.\textsuperscript{12} If New York City were to implement a magnet schools system, they could divert some of the $1.5 billion allocated to charter schools to normal public high schools, giving more students the opportunity to receive a quality education.\textsuperscript{13}

**NEXT STEPS**
The New York City Council should redesign the current school choice and specialized high school programs. Through this process, the council should consider the racial demographics of specialized high schools, with specific attention to underrepresentation of Black and Latino students. This investigation can be done under the provisions of the School Diversity Accountability Act recently passed by the New York City Council.\textsuperscript{14} Legislative action should be taken to replace the specialized high school system with magnet programs in all high schools.
Closing the Diversity Gap: Creating Support Programs for STEM Minority Students

By Heather Huynh, University of Georgia

Thesis
To counteract the lack of diversity in the computer science department, the University of Georgia should integrate a year-long mentorship component into the current curriculum and create support for underrepresented students through minority focused clubs.

Background and Context
Enrollment in U.S. institutions of higher education has been on the rise. In 2009, the enrollment rose to 20.7 million students from 14.5 million in 1994. Even though enrollment has been increasing, there is still a gap in capable and diverse workers in the computer sciences. In 2013, 51 percent of the science and engineering workforce were white males. This is due to a lack of diversity in many undergraduate computer science programs. In 2010, only 38 percent of freshmen were planning to study a science and engineering (S&E) related field and among these, the proportion of men planning to major in S&E fields was higher than for women in every racial group. While women earned 57.3 percent of all bachelor’s degrees in 2011, women only received 18.2 percent of computer science bachelor’s degrees. This number is even lower for minority women where only 4.8 percent of degrees earned are in computer science.

To increase diversity in the computer science workforce, it is necessary to increase the number of women and minorities graduating from computer science programs. The issue will not resolve itself without action, particularly in an environment such as the University of Georgia where 70.1 percent of the undergraduate population is white. Increasing the enrollment and graduation from computer science programs at the undergraduate level for women and minorities will increase the number of skilled workers from these groups who are able to join the workforce, which, in turn, will increase diversity on a larger scale.

Talking Points
► Diversity in technology has been a big topic recently due to dismal diversity statistics released by big companies such as Google, Microsoft, and Apple.
Women who actively engage in the academic community and participate in activities that make STEM an accessible career path are more likely to graduate with a STEM degree than those who do not.7

Universities should create learning environments that promote peer-to-peer interaction, co-curricular involvement, and access to undergraduate research opportunities specifically for minority students.8

**The Policy Idea**

To increase women and minority participation in the computer science program at the University of Georgia, the department should create support for these students by integrating a year-long mentorship component for every student into the curriculum. Through this program, students would meet one-on-one with faculty or another role model to discuss their progress. Through this mentorship, students may be exposed to research opportunities in computer science and encouraged to join computer science related clubs such as the Association of Computing Machinery. Co-curricular activities will be encouraged, not required, but the mentorship portion of the policy should be integrated into the current computer science curriculum as a year-long requirement.

**Policy Analysis**

Studies show women of color who join a major-related club are 7.38 percent more likely to persist in a STEM field when compared to women who don’t.9 Mentorship has also been shown to be critical in increasing STEM student retention. In a pilot program at Louisiana State University, mentorship increased the retention of students in STEM programs to 94 percent, a significant increase over the six-year graduation rates of students not enrolled in the program, which is around 34 percent.10

**KEY FACTS**

- In 2015, women received 50.4 percent of science and engineering degrees, but only 18.2 percent of computer science degrees.14
- In 2013, women accounted for 47 percent of the total workforce. They were substantially underrepresented in computer and mathematical occupations when compared to their total participation in the workforce.15
- As of 2012, even though minority participation in S&E fields had risen, underrepresented minorities only earned 19.4 percent of undergraduate degrees in S&E.16
This policy proposed that meetings with a mentors should be “intervention meetings,” which work to identify what issues students are running into, communicate academic progress, and give students the mindset that they have the ability to learn “hard” material.\textsuperscript{11} The meetings should sometimes be accompanied by assignments to commit students to improving themselves once problems are identified.\textsuperscript{12} Mentoring should help students envision and then realize their self-identity as STEM scholars with potential to offer meaningful contributions to their disciplines.\textsuperscript{13}

Unfortunately, in the computer science program, there are only 23 faculty members who teach nearly 700 students, so the burden of mentorship won’t only rest on them. Mentors should be recruited from among the local startup community and alumni of the program. Upperclassmen students might also be able to contribute as mentors.

**NEXT STEPS**

The mentorship program should be a required component of the degree program, which will involve convincing the department head of the idea’s benefits. Community leaders at organizations such as Four Athens and computer science faculty should be allies to the mentorship program.

After the computer science department agrees to the mentorship program, students should be made aware of the proposal and invited to collaborate with the undergraduate coordinator to head up the efforts to increase participation in major-related clubs as well as create major related clubs for minorities. For example, a women in computer science club is in the process of being created this semester.

The mentoring and research components should be formalized on a bill presented to the Student Government Association by students in the department and a Franklin College senator to put pressure on the administration to enact changes.
Learning for Life: Practical Health Literacy Education

By Emily Lau & Saumya Bollam, Georgetown University

Thesis
Low health literacy has both individual and societal consequences in the form of poorer health outcomes and unnecessary healthcare expenditures. California should adopt a new health education curriculum that prepares students to interact with the healthcare system and make decisions about their own healthcare.

Background and Context
Health literacy is recognized as an important part of encouraging people to make decisions that positively impact their health.1 Forty-six states and D.C. have some form of mandatory health education between grades K-12.2 However, the health education curriculum in many states focuses on theoretical health concepts, personal health decisions, and community influences on health while ignoring the practical knowledge that a person needs to navigate the healthcare system.

In California, where health education is mandatory at all levels of education, the content standards for K-12 students focus on “enabl[ing] students to make health choices and avoid high risk behaviors.”3 To meet that goal, California has established eight content standards that aim to introduce students to the determinants of health, reduce risky behaviors, and enhance individual and interpersonal health.4 Despite claiming to provide the knowledge needed to make decisions that enhance health outcomes, these educational standards only address the healthcare system in a superficial way.5 Without education on how to navigate the healthcare system or make decisions regarding care, students lack an essential part of the foundational knowledge needed to make informed health decisions.

Talking Points
- Low health literacy costs the U.S. between $106 billion and $238 billion annually.6
- According to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, only 12 percent of the adult population in the U.S. has a proficient level of health literacy.7
- Health literacy is a stronger predictor for health outcomes than any other social determinant of health.8

Policy Idea
The California State Board of Education should adopt a new set of Health Education Content Standards that includes a ninth content standard on basic interactions with the healthcare system such as the processes of health
insurance, essential components of using primary care, how to interpret and follow drug instructions, and navigating managed care. This new content standard should be developed based on free curriculum resources such as those provided by the National Institute for Literacy.

Policy Analysis
Improving the Health Education Content Standards means that California students would receive a practical introduction to the healthcare system and how to make decisions regarding access to care. An additional content standard and goal that addresses issues of care utilization would be complementary to California’s already robust content standards.

Since this content standard would simply be an addition to existing standards, there is no cost above that which would usually be spent to update content standards, which already occurs regularly. Additionally, new teaching materials would not need to be purchased for schools because free curriculum resources have been made available by organizations such as the National Institute for Literacy. In fact, due to the dynamic nature of healthcare systems it is more practical to teach using the most up-to-date online materials rather than tying curriculum to a textbook.

KEY FACTS
▶ In 2006, the costs of inadequate health literacy would have been equivalent to providing health coverage to every uninsured person in the U.S.
▶ Approximately 80 million Americans have limited health literacy, which results in poorer health outcomes and access to care.
▶ California already has statewide health education content standards and somewhat limited mandatory health education requirements.

NEXT STEPS
Testimonials about the detrimental effect of lack of familiarity with healthcare knowledge should be sought from adults aged 26-30 who previously attended California high schools. Additionally, it will be important for physicians to testify to the importance of health literacy since they can speak, personally, to their experience with patients who have had trouble accessing and navigating the healthcare system. We would need to target individual legislators to persuade them to introduce a bill that would direct the Board of Education to revise health education content standards. Presenting a robust set of testimonials from former students who can speak to the value of having this education, as well as physicians who can speak to improved health outcomes, will have the most promising impact.
Academic Redshirting: Fighting the Gender Gap in College through Primary Education

By Kate Loving, George Mason University

Thesis
The Fairfax County Public Schools should require boys to enter kindergarten at age six, one year later than girls, to combat an exponentially growing gender gap in higher education. This gives boys an opportunity to mature properly before starting school, positively affecting intersectional aspects of their adult lives.

Background and Context
Since 1981, the gender gap has affected more than wages and job opportunities, the widening gap in college graduation rates between men and women is drastic. The graph below represents the number of men and women in the U.S. who receive undergraduate degrees. In 2012, 34 percent more women than men graduated from college. Within the next ten years, that number will reach nearly 50 percent.

During the college admissions process, many qualified women are rejected for less-qualified men in an attempt to combat the gender gap. The gender gap in college also affects the social behavior of men and women on campus. Elevated rape rates have a direct correlation with a scarcity of men, clearly showing a crucial need for gender-equitable practices in education policy.

The reason for the widening college gender-gap can ultimately be attributed to the age at which boys and girls begin primary education. During maturation, the brain becomes more efficient and develops the capability to streamline cognitive behaviors and actions. While this process of development occurs in all genders, female maturation occurs much earlier, similar to puberty. Generally, the intellectual and social maturity of a five-year-old girl is equivalent to that of a six-year-old boy. This is most apparent in reading, writing, and mathematics. Introducing boys into a classroom before they are ready severely disadvantages them because they may lack the ability to consciously learn and retain information. To keep from falling behind, boys develop coping mechanisms, which ultimately deter them from continuing their education. These coping mechanisms trace back to kindergarten, where instead of gaining a thorough understanding of why 1+1=2, boys simply memorize it as fact. While this may not seem to be...
hindering early education, it will hinder later understanding of more complex mathematics.

**Talking Points**
The gender gap in college also affects the social behavior of men and women on campus.
- Introducing boys into a classroom before they are ready severely disadvantages them because they lack an ability to consciously learn and retain information.¹¹
- Redshirting boys does not give anyone the upper hand in gaining an education, but rather evens the playing field of primary education.

**The Policy Idea**
Fairfax County Public Schools should require boys to enter kindergarten at age six, while continuing to allow girls to start at age five. Immediate implementation means the starting kindergarten class in the fall of 2016 will be comprised exclusively of girls. Subsequently, the kindergarten class in the fall of 2017 would include six-year-old boys and five-year-old girls.

**Policy Analysis**
Delaying the age at which boys start school is the most effective approach to decrease the widening gender gap in college graduates, as it allows boys another year to gain the intellectual and social maturity needed to succeed in the classroom. Other proposed solutions, such as affirmative action for men and curriculum reform, are not as effective because they fail to address the biological reality that girls’ brains are at a higher level of social and intellectual maturation than boys of the same age. In addition, those alternative reforms will ultimately hinder women who have the ability and aspiration to gain a higher education.¹² Redshirting boys does not give anyone the upper hand in gaining an education, but rather evens the playing field of primary education.

In Switzerland and Finland, most children do not begin primary school until age six or seven. The World Bank has shown both countries have a smaller

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**KEY FACTS**

- In 2014, 70 percent of high school valedictorians were girls.¹⁵
- In 2012, there were 34 percent more women than men who graduated from college. By 2023, that gap is expected to reach 47 percent.¹⁶
- The intellectual and social maturity of a five-year-old girl is equivalent to that of a six-year-old boy.¹⁷
gender gap in higher education than the U.S., where children generally start school at age five. In Switzerland, the gender ratio in higher education is 50:50. If given an extra year to mature socially and intellectually, boys will perform at a higher level in the classroom and have the biological ability to keep up with girls.

**NEXT STEPS**

Redshirting boys for a year should begin in local Fairfax schools, where many parents have the time and income to allow boys to start their education at age six. Parents, community members, and the Fairfax County school board will be the most important actors to pursue. After the first generation of older boys completes the fifth grade, research will be begin at George Mason University, the largest public research university in Virginia. Students pursuing a degree in education will evaluate the test scores and social maturation of the “redshirted boys” throughout their education.
Teaching Inmates to Code: Using Technology Education to Reduce Recidivism in Massachusetts

By Olivia Pinney, Amherst College

Thesis
Massachusetts State Prisons should incorporate vocational training for the tech sector into the education programs at all low- and medium-security facilities by 2025. This would lower high recidivism rates and increase the technology-trained workforce, which are both national priorities.

Background & Context
Currently, more than half of inmates released in Massachusetts will return to prison within three years. Prisons fail as correctional facilities if they cannot provide an opportunity for inmates to live a better life upon release. Low-level offenders often resort to crime because of the lack of job opportunities that offer a living wage and prospects for advancement. There are even fewer opportunities for ex-offenders due to discriminatory hiring practices.

Receiving an education within prison dramatically lowers rates of recidivism. Unfortunately, educational budgets are increasingly tight. Beyond GED and ESL classes, vocational classes make up the majority of educational opportunities for inmates. Vocational courses increase self-esteem and employability. However, these courses are limited in their depth, do not utilize breakthroughs in online education, and do not target higher paying job sectors.

The tech sector is fast growing and lucrative. The ability to code, regardless of socioeconomic situation, has become so important that all public schools in Chicago, New York City, and San Francisco will be required to start teaching computer science within the next 10 years. The tech sector needs more trained employees. TechHire, a 2015 Obama initiative has devoted $100 million in grants to train workers for jobs in technology. The initiative has identified short online courses as the optimal way of spurring job growth and higher wages for underserved communities.

Talking Points
- Prisons should teach inmates marketable vocational skills to address unemployment or underemployment of the previously incarcerated.
The tech sector has high demand for new employees, but many individuals in underserved communities lack the skills to apply. Computer coding is an increasingly important skill, and can be taught both quickly and cheaply in a manner accessible to those without a higher degree. Teaching inmates how to code will improve their confidence and employability, will lower their chance of returning to prison, and will give them an opportunity to build a brighter future before their release.

The Policy Idea
It is in the State of Massachusetts’ best interest to train inmates for jobs in the technology sector. To this end, the state should 1) establish a pilot coding course in Massachusetts, 2) change regulations to better accommodate online classes within educational curricula, 3) research best methods to deliver tech skills, to increase inmates’ self-confidence, employability and decrease their chances of returning to prison, and 4) expand this program to all state facilities by 2025 to meet the demand for jobs post-incarceration as well as the demand of the tech industry for trained employees.

Policy Analysis
The close correlation between unemployment and recidivism makes it clear that these issues cannot be solved separately. To reduce recidivism, prisons must do a better job addressing the situational conditions that lead to crimes being committed. Massachusetts’ prisons could better serve inmates, as well as save money through less recidivism, if they prioritized computer science training. The tech sector offers higher paying jobs, hires people with lesser degrees and has fewer conflicts hiring people with minor criminal records, than

KEY FACTS
- A Massachusetts Department of Corrections study found a three-year recidivism rate of 50.7 percent for inmates released in 2011.\(^{16}\)
- Participating in prison educational courses lowers an inmate’s chances of returning to prison by 43 percent.\(^{17}\)
- Prison educational programs currently cost between $1,400 and $1,744 per inmate. Re-incarceration costs for inmates who participated in correctional education are $8,700 to $9,700 less than inmates who did not.\(^{18}\)
- The average salary of jobs requiring information technology skills is 50 percent higher than that of the average American private-sector job.\(^{19}\)
customer facing services. The sector needs people of employable age who have been recently trained. Inmates are ideal candidates because they have time to complete training, will receive additional benefits from educational opportunities, and appreciate having a meaningful way to improve their future prospects while still in prison.

Prison education is indisputably cost effective, especially compared to the cost of recidivism. Online courses are free, need not have instructors and require little money outside of purchasing additional computer modules. A pilot program can be run off pre-existing computers. Resources like the Carl D Perkins grants or one of the new TechHire grants could finance the expansion of computer coding programs. Online coding resources can be provided such that they comply with prisons’ technology regulations. The Massachusetts Department of Corrections should review their rules to more effectively incorporate online classes into the available educational opportunities.

NEXT STEPS
The first goal is to demonstrate the feasibility and success of combating recidivism via tech education to the Massachusetts Department of Corrections. It will be two to three years before conclusive data on trial programs can be collected. Though outside facilitators will be valuable for running initial programs, due to the security implications of using computers in prisons and the far-reaching benefits of providing technology training, state facilities should eventually take over the teaching of these skills.

The pilot program will first target students who have completed high school or an equivalent, and have less than 2 years remaining in minimum-security facilities. It will use the facilities currently in place for basic computer literacy courses. Code 7370, a program in California is the ideal model, and has already compiled an offline repository of coding educational materials. Such a program is easily scale-able.

Further goals include development of a curriculum focusing on rehabilitation goals such as confidence, critical thinking, and employability. Local employers should be recruited to sponsor the computer coding training through mentorships and projects.
**Diversion Not Detention: Halting Juvenile Delinquency for American Indian/Alaskan Native Communities**

By Joe Russell, George Mason University

**Thesis**
To reduce rates of juvenile detention in American Indian communities, the Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s Tribal Youth Program should place one state-certified counselor in every Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) funded school to lead a diversion program for at-risk youth.

**Background and Context**
While the entire American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) community suffers from a fractured and underfunded criminal justice system, native youth are especially at risk. Native youth are two to three times more likely to be arrested for minor offenses, and twice as likely to receive more punitive sanctions than white youth. Because few federal or state juvenile detention facilities are located in AI/AN communities, native youth are either sent to juvenile facilities far away from their homes or sent to adult incarceration facilities. Additionally, most youth who have been detained in the juvenile justice system are re-arrested within a year of being released. Diverting native youth away from the criminal justice system is difficult because they face more risk factors than any other group. More than 25 percent of AI/AN families live below the poverty line and most live in communities with few social services. Only 51 percent of native youth complete high school. Native youth are 33 percent more likely to be abused and witness violence 2.5 times more often than white youth. With poverty, lack of education, history of abuse and exposure to violence listed among the top risk factors for juvenile delinquency, native youth need targeted attention rather than the federally administered, top-down youth diversion programs currently in place.

**Talking Points**
- With $100,000, each BIE-funded school could hire a certified counselor and develop a diversion program for AI/AN students.
- Community-based diversion is the most effective program to keep youth out of juvenile detention.
- Diversion programs improve educational outcomes and professional opportunities for AI/AN youth.

**The Policy Idea**
Congress should annually allocate $100,000 to each of the 183 schools funded by the BIE. Between $60,000-$70,000 will be dedicated to the salary of a full-time, state-certified counselor who is a member of the AI/AN community. The counselor will use the remaining funding to develop and administer a BIE sanctioned diversion program for, and serve as an advisor to, the school’s AI/AN population. Programming, while at the counselor’s discretion, should teach youth about their heritage, provide academic support, aid in professional development, and foster positive relationships with law enforcement.
Policy Analysis
Diversion programs run by members of the community and designed to serve the needs of the local population (e.g. the Boys & Girls Club in Indian Country) are more effective than previous one-size-fits-all AI/AN youth diversion programs. Across the country, tribes have had great success with programs such as after-school homework clubs, community recognition awards and dinners, scholarships for academic success, heritage lessons taught by tribal elders, professional development, leadership opportunities and much more. By guaranteeing that every BIE School is able to invest in programs similar to these, and ensuring that every AI/AN child has access to a certified counselor, nearly all risk factors faced by AI/AN youths can be addressed. These programs have proven results. Tribal public housing communities that participate in the national SMART Moves initiative, a community-based youth diversion program, experience 13 percent fewer juvenile crimes and 22 percent less drug activity. Native youth who participate in diversion programs are 17 percent less likely to have a negative encounter with law enforcement. In fact, 91 percent of youth who participate in privately run diversion programs have no negative encounters with law enforcement. By diverting these youth away from the juvenile justice system, federal, state and tribal governments save money. On average, it costs approximately $408 per day, or $149,022 per year, to incarcerate one juvenile. Therefore, if nationwide 123 tribal youth are diverted from the juvenile justice system each year, then the diversion program will pay for itself.

NEXT STEPS
Because the federal government provides BIE funding, Congress must pass legislation allocating $18.3 million to the Tribal Youth Program for grants to be distributed to BIE schools. Due to the large population of American Indians and Alaskan Natives in their districts, Democratic Representatives Ann Kirkpatrick and Ben Ray Lujan—as well as Republican Representatives Don Young and Markwayne Mullin—will be approached and asked to co-sponsor legislation allocating the funding, as will Senate Indian Affairs Committee Chairman, Republican Senator John Barrasso. Groups who work with similar diversion programs, such as the Boys and Girls Club and Diné Youth, will be asked to lobby in favor of the legislation and assist BIE schools to hire counselors.

KEY FACTS
- AI/AN youths are 60 percent more likely to commit suicide than their non-native peers and are more likely to have PTSD than military veterans.
- AI/AN youth are 3 times more likely to be arrested than white youth.
- Ninety-one percent of native youth participating in a Boys and Girls Club diversion program were never arrested.
Elementary Foreign Language Education: Increasing U.S. Students’ Ability to Compete Globally
By Clare Shafer, University of Michigan

Thesis
To properly prepare students to compete in the increasingly competitive global marketplace, the state of Michigan should require foreign language instruction beginning in elementary school.

Background and Context
Currently, Michigan students are required to take two credits of foreign language by the end of twelfth grade.¹ In 21 out of 25 of the world’s leading industrialized countries foreign language instruction begins in elementary school.² Early language acquisition is directly correlated with higher test scores.³ Students who study a foreign language consistently outperform students with more math instruction.⁴ The benefits of a second language are tremendous as SAT math and verbal scores increase with each year of study.⁵ When the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) completed its last rating cycle in 2012, the U.S. education system lagged behind almost all other developed nations, ranking a disappointing 31st in math, 24th in science, and 21st in reading.⁶ Investing in foreign language will dramatically improve these statistics.

In today’s global economy, knowing a foreign language can dramatically increase earning potential and set students apart from the competition. Studies have found that knowing German, Italian, Russian, or Chinese leads to increased pay of up to 4 percent.⁷

The Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools (FLES) model of learning language focuses on developing elementary students’ communication skills while strengthening material in other subjects. This program consists of 20 to 30 minute lessons taught several times a week. These programs have proven to increase understanding for other cultures, while building a foundation for later language learning.⁸

Talking Points
- Foreign language improves higher-order thinking skills, as well as informs students that there are other cultures besides their own, which dramatically decreases levels of prejudice and racism.⁹
Spatial and verbal abilities are improved through foreign language study.\(^\text{10}\)

Being bilingual actually increases the amount of grey matter in the brain’s left parietal cortex, a structure that improves language processing skills.\(^\text{11}\)

**Policy Idea**

The state of Michigan should require elementary schools to include at least two hours of foreign language instruction spread out throughout the week as part of their curriculum. This instruction would be based on the FLES model and correspond with lessons already taught in student’s other classes such as history and math. Since little instruction time is required, foreign language teachers could rotate between classrooms. This would dramatically decrease the cost of implementing foreign language programs, as each school would only need to hire one or two new teachers.

**Policy Analysis**

By failing to introduce foreign language in elementary school, educators are missing out on the critical acquisition period, after which language learning requires more time and is more difficult due to cerebral lateralization.\(^\text{12}\)

Three years of research done on a Japanese FLES program for grades K through five found that students made considerable progress in proficiency while developing positive attitudes toward foreign language. When students’ progress was measured at the end of three years 90 percent of children had made significant progress on one or more of the seven measures of proficiency. The students also began to speak the language in their daily lives; 72 percent of students began using Japanese outside of class.\(^\text{13}\)

**KEY FACTS**

- Twenty-one of 31 countries in Europe required students to study another language for at least nine years.\(^\text{17}\)
- In 2008, only 15 percent of public elementary schools taught foreign language compared to 24 percent in 1997.\(^\text{18}\)
- Knowing a second language can help a person accumulate between $50,000 and $125,000 of extra earnings throughout the course of a career.\(^\text{19}\)
- Only 18 percent of Americans report speaking a second language compared to 53 percent of Europeans.\(^\text{20}\)
- The National Committee for Economic Development released a report in 2006 expressing the need for increased foreign language skills for the U.S. to remain economically competitive.\(^\text{21}\)
Fairfax Public Schools already has an afterschool FLES program in place. On a standardized math exam, students involved in the FLES program outscored students with no foreign language who were a year older.\textsuperscript{14} The biggest factor preventing the inclusion of foreign language in elementary school curriculum is cost. However, by sharing one or two foreign language teachers among classrooms at each school, the program becomes economically feasible. The average starting salary for a teacher in Michigan is $35,901.\textsuperscript{15} When this cost is divided by 2,684—the average size of a Michigan public elementary school—it amounts to only $13.37 per student.\textsuperscript{16}

**NEXT STEPS**

A team composed of Michigan foreign language teachers, interested parents, representatives from school districts with FLES programs, and interested legislators should present to the Michigan Board of Education. Representatives from Fairfax Public Schools could discuss their experiences with FLES and testify before the Board of Education. Other key allies would include both local and international businesses with an interest in hiring bilingual workers. A pilot program should then be developed to introduce the program gradually to Michigan elementary schools. The program could be introduced starting in fall 2018 with the new kindergarten class. The program could then be introduced to each year’s incoming kindergarten class, thereby slowly increasing the size of the program.
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