USC Rossier
Pullias Center for Higher Education

October 2025
"Career & Workforce Development"

Guest Editors Ronald Hallett and Joseph Kitchen

Dear Colleagues,

We were both first-generation college students who grew up in low-income families. Attending college was an opportunity to gain knowledge, skills and opportunities to pursue career pathways that were unavailable to our families. While we both deeply appreciated the many different opportunities we were afforded to grow and develop as college students, building skills and knowledge to prepare for a future career was the primary goal. Our aspirations align with many students from low-income and first-generation backgrounds who attend college with the hope of enhancing their career prospects and creating long-term financial stability.

In this newsletter, we highlight research from the **Promoting At-promise Student Success (PASS)** project that explores effective practices for supporting low-income college students' career development — with a focus on the importance of students' relationships and support networks.

In the first article, we discuss how students from low-income backgrounds often go to the individuals who they have close relationships with as a primary source of career-related information — in particular, their family and friends. When low-income students had opportunities to develop close relationships with campus educators (e.g., instructors, program directors), they also sought career development and transition advice from these individuals. These campus educators can offer guidance and also serve as bridges to the campus career development resources.

The second article highlights how low-income students' relationships with peer mentors — when they reflect effective mentoring practices — can be an important connection that institutions can leverage to effectively support career development and broker access to career development resources.

We also invite you to check out the Pullias Center's new research and practice webpage dedicated to **Career and Workforce Development**.

Ronald Hallett
Research Professor

Joseph Kitchen
Associate Research Professor

Role of Relational Closeness in Career Development Among Low-Income Students

By Ronald Hallett and Joseph Kitchen

A key reason why students enroll in college is to prepare for their future careers. Students' support networks, connections and relationships can shape how their career development unfolds during college. As part of the **Promoting At-promise Student Success (PASS)** project, we have **found** that low-income students' major and career development during college is increased when faculty, staff and administrators provide support that is proactive, **ecological**, **validating**, coordinated and **tailored**.

Building upon this work, we have explored who low-income students turn to for career guidance — and why — as they prepare for and transition into the workforce. We believe this is critical to informing efforts to support low-income students in asset-oriented ways and to adjust existing career supports accordingly.

Read More

Role of Peer Mentors in Promoting Career Self-Efficacy Among Low-Income College Students

By Joseph Kitchen and Zoë Corwin

For many low-income students, the transition to college brings unique challenges. Navigating unfamiliar academic systems, decoding institutional jargon and finding a sense of belonging can be daunting in environments that often privilege middle- and upper-class norms and expectations.

SPOTLIGHT

Adrian H. Huerta Named a 2025 Aspen Institute Ascend Fellow

Dr. Adrian H. Huerta, Associate Professor at the **Pullias Center for Higher Education** and the USC Rossier School of

These hurdles do not just affect academic performance — they can also limit students' confidence in their ability to succeed in their chosen majors and future careers. Integrating peer mentors into career support programming is a **promising practice** for better supporting low-income college students' major and career development. Peer mentors can demystify the college experience, open doors to resources, and, perhaps most importantly, instill a sense of confidence in students' chosen major and career path which in turn can bolster, motivation and likelihood to persist in college.

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Education, has been selected as **a 2025 Ascend Fellow from the prestigious Aspen Institute.**

The Ascend Fellowship at the Aspen Institute invests in a diverse cadre of leaders throughout the country who are well-connected, well-prepared and powerfully positioned to build goodwill, change systems and drive the policy agenda needed for increased prosperity and well-being of all children and families.

Read More

>> Pullias Center Upcoming Webinar

Register Now for 'Green Book' Part II

Thursday, October 23,10am - 11:15 am PT

"A Green Book for Higher Education: Considerations for Black Communities on Campus in Perilous Times"

At its core, the Green Book was about safe and dignified travel for Black people. Our first webinar was about the factors, forces and policies shaping Black students' experiences. For this webinar, join us as we hear from experts who work with, theorize for and support Black collegians and their families. Listen to scholars explore how Black students and families can navigate, survive and even thrive in higher education today.

This webinar will be facilitated by **Antar Tichavakunda** (UC Santa Barbara) who was awarded a **Pullias Center 2025 Alumni Award** to support racial equity-related research and projects.

Panelists:

Charles "Tre" Watkins III, Point Loma Nazarene University
Deborwah Faulk, University of Richmond
Wilson Kwamogi Okello, Pennsylvania State University
Juana Hollingsworth, Morgan State University and Johns Hopkins University

Register for the 'Green Book' Webinar

Save the Date and Register Now for the Conference on Enrollment Research, Policy & Practice (CERPP), February 25-27

Date: February 25-27, 2026
Location: Hotel Indigo, Downtown Los Angeles
Keynote Speaker: Dr. Kedra Ishop, Sr. VP, The College Board

In a time that seems dominated by political scrutiny, policy rollbacks and financial strain, *resilience* has become more than a buzzword; it is an imperative. The Conference will convene senior enrollment leaders, researchers, legal experts and campus changemakers from K-12 to professional and graduate education to explore what it means for us to endure, adapt and lead with integrity.

Learn More and Register for CERPP

"Career & Workforce Development" Research & Practice Area Now on the Pullias Center Website

Pullias Center researchers are at the forefront with the latest research findings and promising practices focused on postsecondary career and workforce development and have pulled together our work on our **new webpage** devoted to this essential topic.

Our projects focus on how colleges and universities shape students' career aspirations, build students' career self-efficacy, how major and career decisions are affected by their experiences and environments, and how interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers can be cultivated and sustained.

Visit the Career and Workforce Development Webpage

"Transforming Change During Challenging Times with the Change Leadership Toolkit" — Webinar Recording Now Available

Watch this webinar to learn the latest with the **Change Leadership Toolkit (CLT)** and its resources. Hear from two campus change leaders who have used the Toolkit to achieve different types of change goals, including retooling governance structures and advancing graduate education in these challenging times we are all facing.

The **Change Leadership Toolkit Resource Library** has also been updated to feature new resources and tools to help you create systemic change.

Register for the CLT Webinar

Join Pullias Researchers at ASHE in Denver, Nov. 13-15

Please join our Pullias Center faculty and researchers as they present their findings on a variety of issues facing higher education at this year's ASHE conference.

See the full Pullias Center ASHE presenter listing here.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

- **Kitchen, J.A., & Hallett, R.** (2025). **The limits of conventional career services: Rethinking support for today's students.** *Academic Leader*.
- The USC College Advising Corps has documented its impact over the past 12 years with the publication of the **USC CAC 2013-2025 Impact Report**

MORE NEWS

- Pullias Center postdoctoral scholar **Valerie A. Gómez** received an honorable mention from the National Resource Center for the FYE & SIT Paul P. Fidler Research Grant for her proposal titled “The First Year Experiences of Undocumented Students: How Anti-Immigrant Sentiment and Restrictive Immigration Policies Impact College Transition.”

- **Royel M. Johnson** was quoted in Chronicle of Higher Education article, “**George Mason is Under Fire for its Faculty Diversity Efforts. But they Produced Limited Gains**.”

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