

## The Mission of AVID

is to ensure that all students, and most especially students in the middle, capable of completing a college preparatory path will;

- Succeed in rigorous curriculum,
- Enter mainstream activities of the school,
- Increase their enrollment in four-year colleges, and
- Become educated and responsible participants and leaders in a democratic society.

## 2001 Summer Institute Schedule

Northern California Site  
July 8-12  
Oakland, CA

Southwestern Site  
July 15-19  
Austin, TX

Eastern Division Site  
July 29-August 2  
Atlanta, GA

International Site  
August 6-10  
San Diego, CA

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## Equity and Excellence: A Discussion with Mary Catherine Swanson

AVID Founder and Executive Director

AVID continues to promote increased opportunities in rigorous curriculum for all students, especially enrollment in Advanced Placement and pre-AP courses. Mary Catherine Swanson, founder and executive director of the AVID program, recently responded to a series of questions regarding rigor, acceleration, AVID's program components, as well as current and future efforts at increasing student achievement.

**ACCESS:** As a classroom teacher and subsequently the creator of AVID, how did you promote both excellence and equity?

**SWANSON:** First of all, AVID really is all about acceleration rather than remediation because most remediation lies in teaching isolated skills. When I first started AVID and took students into the

class who were on average two years below grade level in their academic skills—and frankly quite a few were below that—I really thought that I was going to teach a skills-based curriculum as well as accelerate them into rigorous classes. The truth was that time didn't allow for that. What happened was the students took notes in all of their academic classes and brought those notes to the AVID class. The tutors and I discovered that the tutoring sessions for the academic classes required all of our time. I also learned that once the students are given the reason to master a skill, they will learn that skill and be able to apply it. To learn the skill without a reason rarely works. As a personal example, I took statistics when I got my master's degree, and when I took

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## Dr. Clifford Adelman: Some Answers Regarding College Completion

With the publication of "Answers in the Toolbox: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment," educators, researchers, journalists, and even students have a definitive study regarding the factors affecting college graduation—not just enrollment in college, not just success through the second year in college, but the actual and final attainment of a college degree. The author of the 124 page monograph, Dr. Clifford Adelman, a senior research analyst with

the U.S. Department of Education, has studied issues related to K-12 student achievement and success in college since 1979, when he joined the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). Before that, Adelman taught at Yale University and the City College of New York, and served as associate dean at William Paterson College in New Jersey. In 1983, Adelman managed higher

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# Adelman

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education issues for “A Nation at Risk,” and wrote the study on which its high school curriculum recommendations were based. He also led the project that resulted in the higher education follow-up “Involvement in Learning.”

“Answers in the Toolbox” resulted from Adelman’s scrupulous analysis of data regarding 12,600 students who were followed from their sophomore

information that will be used for generations. I felt that I should learn to analyze it. So, in a sense, I went back to school and learned computer programming.”

Adelman studied programming at the National Institutes of Health, entering, as he says, “The Information Technology Era” in 1987.

Adelman has authored several books, including studies of the media and the influence of language on politics, and he has written numerous articles for educational and general publications,

including his recent “Why Can’t We Stop Talking About The SAT?” for the Chronicle of Higher Education. However, he prefers producing monographs. “They have a rigorous

review process before being published,” he says. “You know your reviewers and you talk with them. For example, ‘Toolbox’ had 22 reviewers before it went forward.”

“Answers in the Toolbox,” resulted in part from significant developments in higher education during the 1990’s: 1) increasing focus on institutional graduation rates and criticism of colleges and universities for students’ failure to complete degrees; 2) an expanding number of high school graduates entering postsecondary education; 3) increasing mobility on the part of college students; 4) disputes regarding affirmative action policies which have tended to concentrate the discussion on test scores and class ranking as primary indicators of pre-college attainment, ignoring curriculum.

“Toolbox” dispels the myth that test scores and class rank play the most predominant roles in college degree attainment. It also challenges some prevailing assumptions about the impact of socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity on the attainment of a college

degree. **Instead, the monograph concludes that the curriculum students take in high school most strongly influences their graduation from college.**

Clifford Adelman is a frequent speaker at educational conferences for both K-12 and higher education groups. He will provide the opening keynote remarks at the AVID International Institute in San Diego, on August 6, 2001.

Recently, he provided some insights to “Answers in the Toolbox” via phone for ACCESS.

**ACCESS:** What was the impetus for ‘Answers in the Toolbox?’

**ADELMAN:** There had been a whole library full of articles and studies on what makes a difference in college success. However, the previous variable had always been whether or not students made it to their second year of college. I felt that this was short sighted. I was particularly frustrated for disadvantaged and minority students because we were focusing on ways to get them to their second year of college only. ‘Answers in the Toolbox’ is a continuation of the work we had assembled at the U.S. Department of Education, where we had magnificent archives. My job was to do the analyses and help people use the data. Questions came into us from institutions, state systems, and others, and they were continually asking what we can do for post-secondary completion.

**ACCESS:** What does ‘Answers in the Toolbox’ tell us about SES and ethnicity, as far as college degree attainment?

**ADELMAN:** When you follow a large sample for a dozen years, demographic background characteristics don’t have much impact, whereas student behaviors do. Race is a marginal variable. SES, on the other hand, has continuing effects, though these are modest and diminish over time.

**ACCESS:** AVID’s founder, Mary Catherine Swanson, has said that ‘Students can’t learn what they’re never taught.’ This sounds a bit like the state-

**“The SAT or ACT were decent predictors of first-year college grades—but so what? Did you go to college for the sake of earning good grades in your first year?”**

year in high school over nearly a thirteen year period, examining factors affecting their attainment of college degrees. “Toolbox” is one of nine monographs that Adelman has produced after studying and editing the data bases at the National Center for Educational Statistics. With an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in the History of Culture, Adelman might seem an unlikely candidate to scrutinize databases and do extensive computer runs, but he sees data analysis as a logical endeavor for a historian.

“History was very good training for the work I’m doing now,” he says. “It makes you fiercely empirical. As a historian, you learn to look at the sources, to decide what is credible versus non-credible evidence.”

Upon joining the U.S. Department of Education in 1980, Adelman found himself with access to information about students that would prove invaluable as a resource informing the work of educators. “At midlife,” he says, “I was surrounded by these massive historical archives at the Department of Education,

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## Adelman

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ment in 'Toolbox,' that 'Opportunity-to-learn is our most important objective.' Why has this seemingly simple objective been so hard to reach?

**ACCESS:** Opportunity-to-learn in the context of pre-college preparation means, first, that there are courses and instructional power in the schools that do the preparation. Certain types of schools are disadvantaged in this regard; for example, isolated rural schools to which it is difficult to recruit a math teacher who can teach pre-calculus, and poor schools with inadequate science laboratories. Opportunity-to-learn, in other words, is unevenly distributed, but there are efforts everywhere to rectify this problem. There are pre-collegiate outreach programs that supplement secondary school programs; there are cooperative undertakings between colleges and school districts to bring more advanced curricula into schools; dual-enrollment strategies are spreading; and on-line instruction and tutorials are increasing reaching previously isolated populations.

**ACCESS:** What does 'Answers in the Toolbox' tell us about the role of Advanced Placement coursework for American students, particularly minority students?

**ADELMAN:** I will be more comfortable with the Advanced Placement vari-

ables in the next data set we are generating right now (cohort followed from 8th grade in 1988 through 2000, when most were 26 or 27 years old) because our data entry is more sophisticated in recording actual AP credits granted by colleges. But the AP data for the Tool Box cohort show that, controlling for other variables, AP helps more in college completion than in mere college going—and this is true for everyone. It's common sense: AP (and its cousins like the International Baccalaureate) is a momentum builder.

**ACCESS:** 'Toolbox' notes that mobility is increasing for college students. Why is this occurring and what are the implications for both K-12 and college educators?

**ADELMAN:** By mobility, 'Tool Box' refers to post-matriculation behavior in higher education. More and more students (nearly 60 percent of undergraduates) attend more than one school during their college years, and half of this group crosses state lines in the process. There are a few reasons for this phenomenon: First, in 1972, we changed the focus of federal funding in higher education from the institution to the student. In other words, we made the student the consumer, and, after some time for that to set in, we are now witnessing consumer behavior. Secondly, institutional loyalties are weaker than they once were. For example, in the 1970s, if your college girlfriend (without whom you cannot live, right?) moved from Ohio

to Arizona for school, you stayed in Ohio and that was the likely end of that relationship; in 2000, you are far more likely to pack up for Arizona, too!

**ACCESS:** The findings revealed in 'Toolbox' regarding the importance of the core academic curriculum seem to connect to recommendations made regarding the 'New Basics' in 'A Nation at Risk.' Do you think American educational systems K-12 will now get the message about the importance of a rigorous core curriculum for all students?

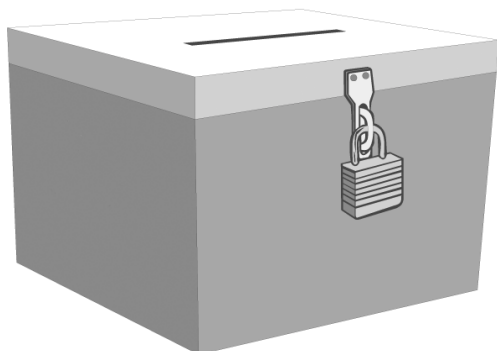
**ADELMAN:** Well, I never use the word 'rigorous' it's a machismo, academic mush word. I can teach chemistry or economics in a very laid-back way, after all. What we're really talking about-then and now-is a curriculum of high academic intensity and quality. I think everyone gets the message, whether they can or do take the opportunity to run with it is another question. Some will simply put new labels on old bottles. Others will put new contents in the bottles. Others may change the shape of the containers themselves.

**ACCESS:** What cautions do you have for educators regarding 'Answers in the Toolbox?' Is there a danger we will read too much into it?

**ADELMAN:** A caution for secondary school educators is that the answers are not all pre-collegiate: a lot happens after students enter higher education that is more the responsibility of college and community college advisors, faculty,

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## SUGGESTION BOX



**Do you have topics you would like for us to cover in future issues? If so, please send your suggestions to [fstatom@avidcenter.org](mailto:fstatom@avidcenter.org)**

and administrators. Looking at the cloud from the other side, higher education folks should not shirk these responsibilities and think merely that if the students enter with appropriate academic momentum, that their academic destinies are on autopilot.

**ACCESS:** If, as you have written, SAT scores are a weak predictor of bachelor's degree attainment, why are we continuing to emphasize the SAT as a nation? How can we move away from this?

**ADELMAN:** What I said was that the SAT or ACT were decent predictors of first-year college grades—but so what? Did you go to college for the sake of earning good grades in your first year? Of course not! You went to college-or community college-to finish a program. Controlling for everything else, your secondary school curriculum was a better explanatory variable of completion than were your test scores. What I also said was that because everybody wants to talk about the SAT, they block dis-

cussion of these other factors that are far more important.

**ACCESS:** To what extent do you see K-12 education aligned with efforts at the college level?

**ADELMAN:** I am not an expert in this area, and prefer not to comment beyond noting the increasing incidence of 'dual enrollment.' This is the situation in which the secondary school student can enroll for some courses at local colleges and community colleges and receive credit, simultaneously, toward both high school graduation and college degree requirements. In a way, 'dual enrollment' is a form of 'alignment.'

**ACCESS:** After 'A Nation at Risk' was issued in 1983, you directed a higher education extension of that re-

port, titled 'Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education.' What are some key connections that educators K-16 should make between your recent 'Answers in the Toolbox,' and those reports from the 1980's?

**ADELMAN:** 'Involvement in Learning' recommended the development of the data bases and the kind of studies that eventually resulted in 'Tool Box.' It also placed curriculum at the center of the enterprise, and made a number of recommendations regarding assessment in higher education. While 'Tool Box' does not spend time on postsecondary assessment issues, it does keep the focus advocated by 'Involvement' on the student, not the institution.



## WANT TO HEAR MORE FROM CLIFFORD ADELMAN?

### Some recommended reading...

"Why Can't We Stop Talking About the SAT?" (Chronicle of Higher Education, Nov. 5, 1999...[www.chronicle.com](http://www.chronicle.com))

"More Than 13 Ways of Looking at Degree Attainment" (National Crosstalk, a publication of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education...[www.highereducation.org/crosstalk](http://www.highereducation.org/crosstalk))

## Selected Findings from "Answers in the Toolbox"

The following findings are based on the study of 12,600 students from the time they were sophomores in high school, over a subsequent 13 year period, to determine the factors in college degree attainment.

- High school curriculum reflects 41 percent of the academic resources students bring to higher education; test scores, 30 percent; and class rank/academic GPA 29 percent. No matter how one divides the universe of students, the curriculum measure produces a higher percent earning bachelor's degrees than either of the other measures.
- The impact of a high school curriculum of high academic intensity and quality on degree completion is far more pronounced—and positively—for African-American and Latino students than any other pre-college indicator of academic resources. The impact for African-American and Latino students is also much greater than it is for white students.
- Of all pre-college curricula, the highest level of mathemat-

ics one studies in secondary school has the strongest continuing influence on bachelor's degree completion. Finishing a course beyond the level of Algebra 2 (for example, trigonometry or pre-calculus) more than doubles the odds that a student who enters postsecondary education will complete a bachelor's degree.

- Advanced Placement course taking is more strongly correlated with bachelor's degree attainment than with college access.
- Academic Resources (the composite of high school curriculum, test scores, and class rank) produces a much steeper curve toward bachelor's degree completion than does socioeconomic status. Students from the lowest two SES quintiles who are also in the highest Academic Resources quintile earn bachelor's degrees at a higher rate than a majority of students from the top SES quintile.

To access "Toolbox," go to [www.ed.gov/pubs/Toolbox](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Toolbox)