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Iowa State education professor receives Iowa Department of Education grant to study impact of state's community colleges

An Iowa State University education professor will determine the economic impact of Iowa community colleges for parents, students and taxpayers.

Frankie Santos Laanan, an assistant professor of educational leadership and policy studies in Iowa State's College of Education, has received a \$270,000 grant from the Iowa Department of Education for two research projects that tie education to economic development.

For the first project, Laanan's research team will assess students' post-college earnings as a measure of economic growth. The second project will be a model for providing adult educational opportunities through Iowa's 15 community colleges. Both projects stress the impact of education on better jobs and financial prosperity.

The joint initiative will provide a targeted curriculum for those most in need of adult educational programs -- recent immigrants and unemployed citizens, Laanan said.

Laanan's research team will study the economic benefits of earning an associate degree, or a career or technical education certificate from an Iowa community college.

To assess students' post-college earnings, the team will match students' educational data with unemployment insurance wage records. As part of the project, community college faculty who work with career development and technical education will be taught how to use the earnings data and labor market information to improve programming and increase student success.

The research will be used to report student success and respond to federal accountability requirements, as well as to alert students to the employment and economic benefits of a community college education.

As part of the grant, Laanan also will develop a blueprint for adult education that centers on family literacy, a learning approach that encourages parents and children to read and learn at home, school, work or in the community.

The plan will include tools for measuring the impact of family literacy programs on adults and their children. Community college planners may base their family literacy programs on the new program.

"Iowa's public community colleges play a critical role in providing educational access to a diverse constituency," Laanan said. "Literacy is a key component of jobs and quality of life, and learning is a

life-long endeavor. Parents can have a significant impact on their children's learning, especially those who are non-English speakers."

The initiative highlights statewide efforts to base policy and teaching on research.

"The partnership will strengthen the important task of bridging research to policy and practice in Iowa," said Larry Ebbers, University Professor in educational leadership and policy studies at Iowa State.

Laanan will work with Iowa Workforce Development and the Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation in the Iowa Department of Education.

For more information, visit the project web site at <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~laanan/doe/doe.html>

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