



# Keeping America's Promise

A Report on the Future of the Community College

*A joint project of the Education Commission of the States and the  
League for Innovation in the Community College*



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EDITORS

Katherine Boswell  
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Education Commission of the States  
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WITH SUPPORT FROM

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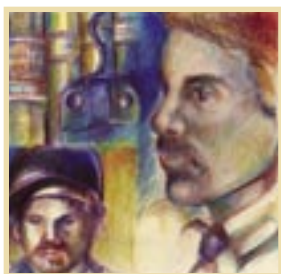
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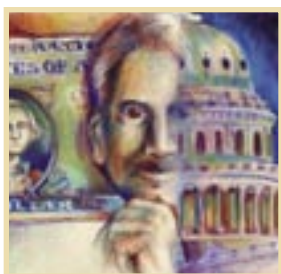
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*Katherine Boswell*

# foreword

This publication is the culmination of efforts begun three years ago following a dinner gathering hosted by Ted Hullar, Director of the Higher Education Program at The Atlantic Philanthropies, Inc. The group that evening included Terry O'Banion, president emeritus of the League for Innovation in the Community College; Bob McCabe, Senior League Fellow, MacArthur "genius" award recipient, and long-time president of Miami-Dade Community College; and Kay McClenney, who at that time was serving as vice president of the Education Commission of the States. The discussion was not about basketball or the weather. It was about community colleges and their enormously important and urgent role in making good on the promises of opportunity and equity in American life. It was also about the need for change and the challenges in making change happen.

The result of that meeting, some months later, was a grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies for a joint project between the League and the Education Commission of the States. The work was to be focused specifically on articulating serious challenges that face America's community colleges – challenges that need to be addressed both at the campus level and through state and federal policy changes. During the course of planning, the theme for the initiative emerged: *Keeping America's Promise*.

In the ensuing months, the initiative commissioned a series of short working briefs about the changing characteristics of the community college student population, about the escalating demand for postsecondary education in the knowledge economy, about changes in the way Americans are going to college, and about gaps that exist across groups in both educational access and educational attainment. All of the papers address implications for community colleges. Complementing these pieces is a discussion guide depicting the ways that state higher education policy may either support or thwart the American promise of opportunity and equity. These papers are provided as companions and supplements to the opening challenge essay written by Kay McClenney, who presently serves as the director of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement and adjunct professor, Community College Leadership Program at The University of Texas at Austin.

The challenge essay, drawing on the data and observations presented in the working briefs, discusses the important promises related to American higher education, especially those involving people committed to the work of the nation's community colleges. What promises have we made? What are the meaningful commitments we ought to make? If we are to keep these promises, what are the challenges ahead?

The League and the Education Commission of the States hope that this *Keeping America's Promise* initiative will serve to enrich the national dialogue at the policy and institutional levels about the important education challenges we face as a nation and the critical roles that must and will be played by our oft-unheralded community colleges. We would particularly like to acknowledge Katherine Boswell and Cynthia Wilson, who co-edited this volume and provided leadership for the initiative, and the efforts of Kay McClenney, who shared her passion and deep commitment to the work of America's two-year colleges and provided valuable advice and counsel to the project. We express our appreciation to the other authors whose commitment to community college education fills this volume: Anthony Carnevale, Donna Desrochers, Russell Hamm, Mario Martinez, and Derek Price. To Terry O'Banion, Robert McCabe, Cindy Miles, Mary Jane Robins, Elaine Thatcher, Sarah Meyer, Robert Palaich, Cynthia Barnes, and Charles Coble, we express thanks for contributions at various points in the initiative's life. We also gratefully acknowledge Marian McDevitt, who prepared the stunning illustrations, and Angie Wingert, designer of the publication. Finally, we would especially like to acknowledge The Atlantic Philanthropies, Inc., without whose generous support this project would not have been possible.

Ted Sanders  
President

*Education Commission of the States*

Mark David Milliron  
President

*League for Innovation in the Community College*



Community colleges today enroll almost half of all undergraduate students in the U.S.



## KEEPING AMERICA'S PROMISE: CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Kay M. McClenney



America and Americans make a lot of promises, about a lot of different things. Just for the fun of it, I googled “keeping the promise.” There will be no surprise about the array of things I found: promises of instant wealth through questionable real estate transactions and instant organizational effectiveness through IT outsourcing; promises and reminders of promises about public school reform, full funding of the global AIDS act, equal access for the differently abled, deposit insurance reform, and prescription drugs for older Americans.

and survivors of the World War II Holocaust: “Never again. Never, never again.”

The most fundamental American promises, though, are the promises of opportunity and equity for every individual. Every individual. This is the land where a person born in humble circumstances, if she is willing to work hard, can rise to the highest level, can grow wealthy and secure, can contribute, can become president.

**Opportunity = Education.** Perhaps one of the most fundamental developments at the end of the 20th

*Opportunity in this country is more and more  
a function of education.*

There's more, though. In the email inbox I find promises of many things. A cure for baldness. Get rich quick by laundering money for a stranger in Africa. Sexual virility. Lose 50 pounds or gain three inches. Then there are the personal promises, made to ourselves and those closest to us: When I grow up.... You'll understand when you're older (my son reminded me of that one). I promise to do my duty to God and my country. I'll call you next Sunday. The check's in the mail. Happily ever after. In the year 2004, I resolve.... 'Til death do us part.

There are the political promises, remarkably plentiful in this election year, but always with us. Securing Social Security. Reducing class size. Ending welfare as we know it. Finding weapons of mass destruction. Peace in our time. No Child Left Behind. There are promises that cut across the cultural, commercial, personal, and political aspects of our lives. I pledge allegiance to the flag. Hard work will be rewarded. A chicken in every pot. A laptop in every lap.

America has made many promises. In the Constitution, “we the people” committed to one another to “promote the general welfare” and to “secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.” Consider these American promises, too: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” “Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” “Liberty and justice for all.” One man, one vote. Equal treatment under the law. And to the victims

century is this: *Opportunity in this country is more and more a function of education*, and that reality is something that sets America apart. As Tony Carnevale has observed:

In today's economy, access to postsecondary education or training has become the threshold requirement for individual career success.... Unlike the European welfare states that guarantee access to income and benefits irrespective of individual educational performance, our increasing reliance on education as the arbiter of economic opportunity allows us to expand opportunity without surrendering individual responsibility. As a result, we emphasize equality of educational opportunity rather than equality of economic outcomes. (Carnevale, 2004, p. 39)

Evidence of the country's commitment to educational opportunity has come, over the years, through some major public policy commitments. The pre-eminent examples include the Morrill Act of 1862, establishing the land grant colleges; the GI Bill, which was invented as a way to do something productive with all of those World War II veterans who were coming home and flooding the labor market, but which also effectively assailed the notion that higher education was only for the elites; the Truman Commission, which in 1947 called for the establishment of

a national network of low-cost public community colleges; and Pell Grants, our most important source of need-based financial aid for college students.

Through these commitments, America has worked to keep its promises of opportunity and of education that opens doors to opportunity. It is time now to revive the discussion of this nation's important promises, in particular the promises related to American higher education and especially the promises involving people committed to the work of the nation's community colleges. What are the promises we, as a nation, have made? What are the promises we ought to make? Are they empty promises, pipe dreams? Or, are they real, meaningful commitments? If we are to keep these promises, what are the challenges ahead?

### TRENDS THAT MATTER

To begin, it will be useful to take a quick look at the context within which we are all working. Obviously, the multiple developments in our global and local environments provide a plethora of forces that community college leaders must take into account. But for the present purpose, it will suffice to highlight briefly four trends that matter significantly in understanding both our promises and our challenges in keeping them.

*An individual's educational attainment level is powerfully correlated with many of the things that we as Americans care most about in our society.*

#### TREND 1. Escalating Demand for Postsecondary Education

This is a reality that is well known: In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, America's ability to educate its people "will increasingly determine its economic competitiveness as the country shifts from an industrial to an information economy" (Carnevale and Desrochers, 2004, p. 39). To put it bluntly, the fastest-growing and best-paying jobs in the American economy are those that require at least some college experience. And as Tom Mortenson (2004) says, "Those who get this education can participate. Those who don't can't."

Furthermore, there is a companion reality that presidents, governors, and other political leaders increasingly understand; that is the fact that "increases in a country's overall level of educational attainment cause corresponding increases in its overall rate of economic growth. *Increasing a country's average level of schooling by one year can increase economic growth by about 5 to 15 percent*" (Carnevale and Desrochers, 2004, p. 39, emphasis added).

Carnevale and Desrochers (2004) paint a powerful picture of future workforce needs:

As the baby boomers with postsecondary education retire over the next 20 years, it will be difficult to produce a sufficient number of Americans with postsecondary education or training to meet the economy's needs. Shortages of workers with some college-level skills could increase to more than 14 million by 2020. (p.42)

In addition to the increasingly urgent needs of the economy, the baby-boom echo will boost the numbers of high school graduates through most of the current decade. There will be state and regional variations in the impact on higher education, but generally, even if current college participation levels are simply maintained, community colleges across the nation will likely see about a 13 percent increase in enrollment over 2000 levels by 2015. If efforts to increase participation rates to the level achieved in the highest-performing states are successful, that enrollment increase could be as much as 46 percent (Martinez, 2004).

**Civil Society and Quality of Life.** As Carnevale and Desrochers correctly assert, "postsecondary education is about more than dollars and cents. It does more than

provide foot soldiers for the American economy" (Carnevale and Desrochers, 2004, p. 39). In fact, an individual's educational attainment level is powerfully correlated with many of the things that we as Americans care most about in our society. The more educated a person is, the more likely she is to be gainfully employed, to pay taxes, to participate in civic life and democratic processes, to vote. At the same time, he is less likely to be dependent on public support, less likely to be on welfare or in prison, and more likely to be able to provide for the educational and health-related needs of his children.

#### TREND 2. Continuously Changing Student "Mix"

Community college students are diverse already, as these institutions serve about half of all of the minority undergraduates in the U.S. Still, though, the student population will become increasingly diverse in every way: more students of color, more English language learners, more first-generation college students, more adult students, more students from low-income families.

## F1. BENEFITS OF EDUCATION

### More likely to...

Be gainfully employed  
Pay taxes  
Participate in civic life and democratic processes  
Vote  
Be able to provide for education and health of children

### Less likely to...

Be dependent on public support  
Be on welfare  
Be in prison

Source: Carnevale and Desrochers, 2004

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2002), the definition of a nontraditional student is one who is financially independent, attends part time, works full time, delays enrollment after high school, has dependents, is a single parent, or does not have a high school diploma. Under that definition, in the 1999 academic year, almost 90 percent of all community college students were nontraditional (Hamm, 2004). Here are representative facts describing the student population:

- About two-thirds of community college students are part-time students, compared to about a quarter of students in baccalaureate institutions (Voorhees as cited in Hamm, 2004).
- 54 percent of community college students work full time (NCES as cited in Hamm, 2004).
- 34 percent have dependents, 16 percent are single parents, and 23 percent spend 6 to 20 hours a week commuting to their college classes (CCSSE, 2003).
- Over 45 percent of community college enrollees are first-generation college students (Wilson, 2004).
- Almost 44 percent of community college students are 25 or older (Wilson, 2004).

### TREND 3. Going to College: Not What It Used to Be

In the not-too-distant past, going to college typically meant going off to college, generally an 18-year-old leav-

## F2. COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Work full time	54%
Have dependents	34%
Are single parents	16%
Commute to class 6 to 20 hours a week	23%
Are first-generation college students	45%
Are 25 or older	44%

Sources: CCSSE, 2003; Hamm, 2004; Wilson, 2004

ing home to live on or near campus, attending classes full time and, usually, earning the degree four years later at the place where he started. In stark contrast, Americans now use higher education in much different ways.

**How students go to college.** Many of today's students attend part time, often going to multiple institutions before attaining a credential, enrolling in two or more institutions simultaneously, stopping in and out, transferring in all directions, and so on. In fact, only one in six current undergraduate students in the U.S. is 18 to 24 years old, attends school full time, and lives on campus.

According to the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (2003), 35 percent of community college students began their college studies somewhere other than their current institution. More and more are concurrently enrolled in high school and community college (12,000 in New York City, for example, and at least 3 percent nationally); a significant proportion already have a degree (about 16 percent on average, but the numbers go up to around 20 percent or more in some locations); and at least another 6 percent take courses simultaneously at another college or university.

Generally, students have more choices available to them, involving more delivery options on campus, in the workplace, or online. They are shopping for educational experiences and trying to piece them together in ways that make sense. Or not.

**Why students go to college.** With regard to educational goals, it is now increasingly well understood that community college students have many different goals; that an individual student often has more than one; and that, especially if the college does its job right, the goals are likely to change over time. Among the goals students cite for their college attendance are these:

- 62 percent want to obtain knowledge in a specific area
- 58 percent aspire to obtain an associate degree
- 47 percent plan to transfer to a four-year institution
- 59 percent want to obtain job-related skills
- 35 percent aim to complete a certificate
- 33 percent need to update their job skills
- 28 percent want to change careers
- 23 percent say they are taking courses for self-improvement (CCSSE, 2003)

**Where students go to college.** Community colleges today enroll almost half of all undergraduate students in the U.S. However, for-profit institutions now award at least 10

percent of all associate degrees, and their share of the two-year college market is 28 percent, up from 19 percent in a decade (Kelly as cited in Hamm, 2004). This growth occurs despite the significantly higher costs to students. Furthermore, there are now more than 2,000 corporate universities in the U.S. alone, many of them offering associate and baccalaureate degrees. Motorola University, for example, has 400 full-time faculty and 800 part timers at 99 sites in more than 20 countries, serving 100,000 students a year (Talisayon as cited in Hamm, 2004).

Rapid escalation in the numbers of students taking online courses is changing the face of the higher education enterprise. According to the U.S. Department of Education, about 54,000 online courses were offered in 1998, with 1.6 million students enrolled. Seventy-two percent of public two-year institutions offered distance education courses (Carnevale, 2000).

If this looks like a complex, dizzying picture, then it helps lead to an understanding of the talk about “swirling students,” and the myriad implications for needed changes in institutional work.

F3. NONTRADITIONAL LEARNING OPTIONS		
<p><i>For-Profit Institutions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10% of all associate degrees</li> <li>• 28% of community college market</li> </ul>	<p><i>Corporate Universities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2,000+ in U.S.</li> <li>• associate and baccalaureate degrees</li> </ul>	<p><i>Online Courses</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 54,000 online courses</li> <li>• 1.6 million students enrolled</li> <li>• 72% of public associate-degree granting institutions offered distance education options</li> </ul>

*Sources: Hamm, 2004; Carnevale, 2000*

#### TREND 4. Funding Squeeze

Here’s a sobering thought: As enrollment continues to grow, funding will continue to fail to keep pace with either inflation or the number of students being served (Martinez, 2004). In high-enrollment states like California, for example, community colleges for some time have been serving large numbers of students for whom they do not receive enrollment-based funding from the state. Furthermore, there are features of state funding mechanisms across the country that either fail to support or are downright hostile to important aspects of the community college mission. Examples include fiscal policy related to remedial education and to financial aid, or more accurately, the lack of it, for part-time students. In other words, there are few financial incentives for community colleges to do the work that society most needs them to do.

### COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROMISES

With this context in mind, consider the important promises that community colleges have made to their students and their communities.

#### PROMISE 1. Provide and Promote Access to College.

“Well, of course,” is the common response. “That goes without saying.” But the influx of aspiring students may well mask some issues that demand attention. The truth is that college access in America is deeply at risk. In particular, the income-based disparities for both participation in higher education and degree completion in this country are scandalous. The threats have to do with finance, to be sure. But inadequate academic preparation for college and disparities across groups are just as serious.

**Financing Higher Education.** Funding remains a critical issue in higher education access, evidenced by these facts:

- Higher tuition rates and slashed state appropriations denied at least 250,000 prospective students access to college in the 2003-2004 fiscal year, according to the National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education.
- Among high school graduates, 77 percent of high-income students enroll in college immediately after high school versus 50 percent of students from low-income families (Price, 2004).
- The shifts from grants to loans and from need-based to merit-based aid (that is, toward middle-class entitlements), together with the lack of financial aid for part-time students, conspire to make participation and success an ever greater challenge for low-income students.

There is another possibility that may create even deeper dilemmas. As traditional baccalaureate institutions continue both to increase tuition and to limit enrollments, there may be a shift to community colleges of more highly qualified students who are seeking a lower-cost alternative. This prospect might be welcomed by some faculty, and it could also be seen as an easy way of improving performance for accountability reporting. After all, the easiest way for a college to look better is to be more selective in accepting students; that’s what Harvard does. But simply serving the more qualified students *will not keep the promise*.

**Academic Preparation.** Almost 50 percent of all first-time community college students are assessed as underprepared for the academic demands of college-level courses (Roueche and Roueche, 1999). The challenges in this regard are, of course, typically more acute for low-income students and students of color – those whose previous schooling has served them least well.

**Racial and Ethnic Disparities.** Among the population of Americans age 18 to 24 – the traditional college age group – 39 percent of Whites were enrolled in college versus 30 percent of African Americans and 19 percent of Hispanics (Price, 2004). Also, 66 percent of White high school graduates enrolled in college immediately after high school versus 56 percent of African Americans and 49 percent of Hispanics (Price, 2004).

#### F4. COLLEGE ENROLLMENT TRENDS BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 1999

Race/Ethnicity	African American		
	White	American	Hispanic
18-24 year olds enrolled in college	39%	30%	19%
Enroll immediately after high school graduation	66%	56%	49%

Source: Price, 2004

**And the men.** Men are underrepresented by a growing margin, comprising only 43 percent of community college enrollment.

#### PROMISE 2. Improve Student Attainment.

Painted in summary form, the community college picture looks like this:

Community colleges have inarguably the toughest job in American higher education. These are open-admissions institutions. They serve disproportionately high numbers of poor students and students of color. Many of their students are the ones who were least well served by their previous public school education and therefore most likely to have academic challenges as well as fiscal ones. Community college students are three to four times more likely than students in four-year colleges to reflect factors that put them at risk of not completing their education. To support services for these students, the community colleges on average charge only 37 percent of the tuition and fees charged at four-year institutions and receive a fraction of the per-student appropriations of state dollars. And these students are likely to be coming to community colleges in ever higher numbers over the next decade at least, even as higher education appropriations as a proportion of state budgets continue to decline. Add all of this to the college attendance patterns described earlier, including the fact that students come to community colleges with many different goals and certainly not always intending to attain a degree or to transfer.

This is a reasonable description of the community college reality, and *it is the truth*. It is a truth those of us in community college education have become expert in articulating to policymakers and the media. It is a truth that provides

important context for understanding institutional performance and accountability. Nonetheless, it is essential to communicate a tough message: *Community college educators too often hide behind that truth*. With that truth as a shield, we too often fail to look hard at our record with regard to student attainment, too often don't ask ourselves the hard questions about how we are doing and what we could do better.

The American Council on Education recently issued a statement with sector-by-sector statistics on graduation and persistence rates, with this report about community colleges:

One-quarter of students who entered a public two-year institution in 1995-1996 with the goal of earning a degree or certificate had attained a credential at that institution by 2001 [six years later]. However, it is important to note that many students enter community colleges with educational goals other than degree attainment, and nearly 60 percent of entering students attend half-time or less. In addition, nearly one-third (31 percent) of students who began at these institutions transferred to other institutions. After considering transfer students, 39 percent of beginning students who entered at a public two-year institution had earned a degree or certificate within six years. More than 17 percent of students who entered community colleges in 1995-1996 were still enrolled six years later, resulting in an overall persistence and attainment rate of 56 percent. (ACE, 2003)

This is a fairly balanced statement, and ACE was apt in applying the rationale that we in community colleges have practiced so well. The question we have to ask ourselves, and to discuss seriously with colleagues on campus, is whether this is good enough. *I would answer that it is not.*

There is a more alarming piece, though. Another analysis shows that 38 percent of White students who began at a community college earned a degree or certificate within six years versus 26 percent of African Americans and 29 percent of Hispanics (Price, 2004).

#### F5. SIX-YEAR COMPLETION RATE BY RACE/ETHNICITY

White	38%
African American	26%
Hispanic	29%

Source: Price, 2004

With regard specifically to retention, for community colleges nationally, the drop-out rate from the first to the second year is around 50 percent. A closer look reveals that low-income and minority students are too often the ones

most likely to drop out. Another important truth is that we in education *know* about educational practices that contribute to higher levels of student persistence and learning. We need to *do* more of what we *know*.

### PROMISE 3. *Focus on Learning.*

Thanks to Terry O'Banion, to Bob Barr and John Tagg, and to many others in the higher education field, there has been a near tidal wave of interest in work that helps colleges become more powerfully and effectively focused on student learning. Of course, just about every college likes to think that it is "learning centered." After all, educators ask, "Isn't that the business of higher education?"

Of course, the honest answer to that question is, "Sure, well – maybe – sometimes." The colleges that seriously take on the concept of "the learning college" realize that there is substantial and challenging work involved. A piece written for the American Association of Higher Education describes six fundamental characteristics of a learning-centered institution:

1. The institution has clearly defined outcomes for student learning.
2. The institution systematically assesses and documents student learning.
3. Students participate in a diverse array of engaging learning experiences aligned with required outcomes and designed in accord with good educational practice.
4. Data about student learning typically prompt reflection, decisions, and action.
5. The institution emphasizes student learning in its processes for recruiting, hiring, orienting, deploying, evaluating, and developing personnel.
6. Key institutional documents and policies, collegial effort, and leadership behavior consistently reflect a focus on learning (McClenney, 2003).

#### ***Assuming Collective Responsibility for Student Learning.***

It is important to mention one of the most significant cultural changes that must occur in this work. By and large, the business of teaching and learning in American colleges and universities has traditionally been a dramatically isolated and individualistic enterprise. The faculty member designs his own course, develops her own tests, sets his own standards, and gives her own grades, all the while declaring, "My classroom is my kingdom." Collective responsibility for student learning is not something most faculty members learned to value in graduate school.

But the League for Innovation in the Community College's Learning College Project revealed that it is precisely that sense of collective responsibility, cutting across classrooms, disciplines, departments, and divisions, that is requisite to development of a learning-centered college. At the end of the three-year project, a member of one of the college teams said, "The big answer to, 'What's new here?' is that people are taking more collective responsibility for student learning."

A serious focus on learning almost inevitably leads to other challenging questions among colleagues. One such question is, What *kind* of learning are we trying to achieve? Is it the kind of learning that too often results from the lecture method and multiple-choice exams, what the cognitive scientists are calling surface learning? That's the learning that lasts until approximately 20 minutes after the final exam, at which time it is literally dumped from the brain. Or do we seek to produce deep learning, the kind of learning that only occurs through application and performance, through transfer to and use in new situations? That's the learning that lasts.

There is yet another important question: "How good is *good enough*?" What are our standards for student learning and student academic progress? A few real examples illustrate the pertinence of the question:

- The three-year graduation rate for students at College X is 14 percent, which is about average for similar colleges.
- The success rate for Introductory Biology students at College Y is 30 percent.
- In College Z, 50 percent of the students who begin developmental education courses in September are still enrolled at the end of the semester.

If 86 percent of our students are not graduating, if 70 percent are not successful in an introductory science course, if half of the students who begin developmental education have withdrawn from the college by the end of the term, is this good enough? In the end, "Is this good enough?" is a question that must be asked and answered by the faculty and administrative leaders in every college. And when the discussions take place, those faculty and those administrators are defining the meaning of quality at that college, defining the meaning of the associate degree.

### PROMISE 4. *Embrace Accountability.*

No longer a news flash for most higher education leaders is the fact that accountability is here to stay. The actions of state legislatures and the work on reauthorization of the federal Higher Education Act assure that as postsecondary education becomes more important to the economy and resources become tighter and tighter, there will be a continu-

ing and escalating level of interest in the results that higher education produces with the public's money.

This is, or can be, good news. Accountability is not just inevitable; it is a good thing. It is a good thing because it is in the public interest. Community colleges, overwhelmingly, are public institutions. Community colleges are making public promises. And community colleges have an obligation to publicly report results. The urgent priority for these institutions is to be involved in shaping accountability systems so that they are appropriate to community college missions and students, and so that they serve rather than thwart the access and attainment promises.

One healthy challenge is proactively to define appropriate indicators of performance, and there is important work occurring on this front in Florida, Massachusetts, and other states around the country, as well as in several foundation-supported initiatives.

#### **PROMISE 5. *We Must – and We Will – Close the Gap.***

As made clear by data cited above, there remains in American higher education a significant gap in educational

*How good is good enough?*

attainment between students from high socioeconomic levels and students who are poor, between White students and their African-American and Hispanic peers. The gap is dangerous. It is intolerable. It is a blight on America's future. And it is worse in community colleges than elsewhere in higher education.

Of course, the students who come to community colleges are the students who are already most at risk. They experience three to four times the risk, in fact, of their peers in traditional baccalaureate institutions. But guess what? These are the students we in community colleges serve. Community colleges signed up for the open-door admissions policy. Community colleges take these students' tuition money (or the aid money that pays it) and count them as FTEs. And it is crucially important, both to the individual students and to wider society, that they be successful in reaching higher levels of educational attainment.

Furthermore, community college educators are confronted with the fact that for the most part, we cannot blame the students. Some colleges are demonstrating that the gaps can be closed. The Community College of Denver deserves the kudos it continues to receive for having turned possibility into reality. Other colleges now are signing on for the task. Under Chancellor Irving McPhail's leadership, The Community College of Baltimore County conducted an analysis

of student outcomes, including retention and graduation, which revealed stunning gaps between White and African-American students. Rather than filing that report quickly and quietly in the bottom drawer, or talking about all the reasons they couldn't do anything about it, college leaders decided to acknowledge the gap, discuss it openly, and publicly commit to closing it. They have set goals, established timelines, identified strategies, and now at least four other community colleges in Maryland are joining a consortium to attack the problems together.

There is no more important work in American society than this work. Furthermore, it may be said with conviction that *to be successful in this work is not just a professional challenge. It is a moral obligation.*

#### **MAKING GOOD ON THE PROMISES**

No one ever said that keeping a promise was easy, but then, an African proverb advises that, "Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors." What is it going to take to make good on these promises? Truthfully, it is going to take serious, focused, collaborative, and sustained effort over a consid-

erable period of time. A handful of inescapably necessary strategies would include the ones described below:

##### **1. *Create Stronger Connections With K-12 Education.***

There are many examples of such efforts around the country. The League's College and Career Transitions Initiative currently involves 15 site partnerships across the U.S. These are community colleges working with high schools and employers to carve meaningful career pathways for students. In addition, the middle college model now is being even more widely adapted to create "early colleges," thanks to significant foundation support, particularly from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Beyond those models, there are other promising efforts, like the Ford Foundation's Bridges to Opportunity Initiative; and there are community colleges like those in the City University of New York system, where educators have created an astonishing array of collaborative efforts with the public schools, from the thousands of high school students who are concurrently enrolled in college, to the grade school on campus for the children of welfare moms, to the co-located high school, to the Diploma Now program, which provides early-morning GED preparation classes for high school students who otherwise would be dropping out. Whatever the model, the structure, or the form of governance, the clear need is to

create multiple pathways for students both to and through the community college.

## 2. *Build a New Culture of Evidence in Community Colleges.*

For three years, twelve Vanguard Learning Colleges – already fine institutions – participated in the League’s Learning College Project, taking on the tough work of focusing their colleges more powerfully and effectively on student learning. In the course of that work, it became evident that the single most powerful lever for change resided in the second of two questions continuously posed by Terry O’Banion. The first question is, “How will this [decision/action/program/policy] improve and expand student learning?” And that second, more powerful question is, “*How do we know?*”

*We will tell ourselves the truth  
about what happens to our students.*

For a long time, a lot of community college people have lived reasonably comfortably in a culture of anecdote. Those anecdotes are important parts of the culture of our institutions, but by and large, they are stories about the *best* student experiences rather than the *typical* student experiences. So there is a very important promise that we need to make to ourselves: *We will tell ourselves the truth about what happens to our students.*

To be specific, we will decide what questions need to be answered about student progress, student attainment, and student success in our institutions. We will identify the critical performance indicators that will tell us how we’re doing. We will collect clear and credible evidence of institutional performance on those indicators. *And we will break down the data by race and ethnicity, income, gender, and age so that we will have a genuine understanding of how student groups may differentially fare in our colleges.* Then we will use the data and our understandings of it to target improvements in the work we do with students.

The problem here is not that colleges don’t have data. We have lots and lots of data. The problem is that we usually don’t ask the right questions of the data, don’t display it in ways that make sense to most reasonably alert adults, and therefore don’t see or hear the story that it can tell us about our students’ experiences and the efficacy of our work.

But one of our gravest oversights is that we usually do not break down the data in ways that will depict the likely reality of systematic differences in outcomes for different groups of

students. In colleges where people have had the courage to do this, the first time they disaggregate data, they are almost inevitably distressed by what they learn.

Pertinent here is the work of Estela Bensimon, who directs the Diversity Scorecard Project at the University of Southern California. Bensimon (2004) is addressing this issue head on, working with 14 two- and four-year colleges and universities in the Los Angeles area. In general, the process used in each college is for a cross-functional group she calls the “evidence team” to create equity indicators and benchmarks that comprise the “diversity scorecard” for the institution. The premise is that for institutional change to occur, “individuals must see, on their own and as clearly as possible, the magnitude of inequities (*awareness*). They then

must analyze and integrate the meaning of these inequities (*interpretation*), so that they are moved to act upon them (*action*)” (p. 46).

This is not just an exercise in collecting data. Bensimon (2004) and her colleagues “regard the act of *developing equity indicators and creating the Diversity Scorecard as the intervention that prompts institutional change*” (p.46).

This effect may be witnessed in college after college. As noted earlier, the problem is rarely a lack of data. The problem is also rarely a lack of good intentions. By and large, community college people work in these institutions precisely because they want to do good work. They want to help change people’s lives. They want to *teach*; and they’re both perplexed and distressed when, as one faculty member said, “It finally came to me – the inescapable conclusion that students just weren’t learning what I thought I was teaching.”

There is nothing particularly easy about building a culture of evidence. Truth to tell, in the early going, evidence causes problems. It challenges assumptions and traditions. It disrupts informal power structures. It threatens the *status quo* and suggests needs for change. It comforts the afflicted, but it afflicts the comfortable.

On the other hand, it also helps chart a course to excellence; and a collective willingness to insist on, examine, and use evidence builds the credibility and integrity of community college work. As a science instructor said: “I look at it as polishing chrome versus fixing the engine. For too long, we’ve been really busy polishing the chrome.”



### 3. Provide Effective Remediation.

According to McCabe (2000), 67 percent of high school students earn a diploma, but only 43 percent of those students are prepared for college-level work. And 41 percent of all community college freshmen enroll in remedial classes (Voorhees, 2000).

One hoped-for solution is to shift remediation to the high schools, “where it belongs.” This, of course, is much to be desired. Right now, though, it is also wishful thinking. While we need to be hopeful about and supportive of high school reform, we also must acknowledge that for as far as we can see into the future, there is going to be a continuing and critical need for community colleges to be engaged in a significant amount of remedial education. Contributing factors are these:

- the slow rate of change in the quality of high schools, notably in those urban areas where the graduation rates, particularly for students of color, are much lower than the averages;
- the continuing influx of immigrants of all ages;
- the average age of community college students (about 29), which means that even if high schools were perfect tomorrow, the adults who had unsuccessful experiences there will continue to arrive at the doors of community colleges for the next decade; and
- the needs of adults more generally, i.e., people coming from the welfare system, from the criminal justice system, from low-paying or obsolete occupations, or those whose jobs have been outsourced to India.

*The plain truth of the matter is that if students don't succeed in developmental education, they simply won't have the opportunity to succeed anywhere else.*

There are too many policymakers and too many educators who want to believe that the need for remediation is going to go away and, therefore, that they don't have to pay for it, or make policy to support it, or hold institutions accountable for doing it well, or reward the ones that do.

*Effective* remediation is a huge bargain. As McCabe (2000) points out, most students who successfully complete the prescribed remedial course sequence become productively employed, 16 percent as professionals, 54 percent in midlevel, white-collar or technical positions, 20 percent as high-skill blue-collar workers. Only 9 percent remain in unskilled or low-skill jobs.

For all of these reasons, the crucial need is for community colleges to do remedial education *both unapologetically and exceedingly well*. The plain truth of the matter is that if students don't succeed in developmental education, they simply won't have the opportunity to succeed anywhere else. They won't take the advanced courses in literature and history that faculty members love to teach, they won't graduate, they won't transfer, and they won't land one of those high-demand, high-wage jobs. On the contrary, they are all too likely to land on welfare or in jail.

Education or incarceration? That does not seem like a difficult choice.

It is the level of effective performance in developmental education that is the legitimate issue. There are some few colleges that can document doing an exceptional job in developmental education, working with challenging and diverse student populations so that participation in developmental education actually becomes a predictor of student persistence, graduation, and transfer. That takes away many of the excuses for poor performance.

On the other hand, of the half million academically underprepared students who enter community colleges each year, a substantial portion never make it out of remedial education, and only half go on to enroll in a baccalaureate degree program. For students of color, that figure is less than 20 percent (Lumina, 2004).

Sometimes it is necessary to acknowledge that while there are questions about whether students are ready for college, there are equally serious questions about whether some of the colleges committed to open admissions are really ready for the students.

*We can do better.*

### 4. Strengthen Student Engagement in the Community College Learning Experience.

The research on undergraduate learning is unequivocal on this point: The more engaged students are, the more connected – to one another, to faculty and other college people, and to the subject matter – the more they will learn and the more likely they will be to persist to attainment of their educational goals.

Results from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement point to the critical importance of focusing squarely on the classroom, however it might be defined.

What community college educators can do now to enhance retention and learning is the purposeful redesign of student learning experiences. In that redesign process, educators need to incorporate more of what is now known about effective educational practice and how students learn.

Thankfully, there is an expanding array of strategies for teaching and learning that seems to fill the bill: the burgeoning development of learning communities, as exemplified by the Seattle Central Community College, La Guardia Community College, Lane Community College and many others; the expanding uses of process learning, of culturally mediated instruction, of project-based learning and service learning. All of these strategies – and some others as well – help to create what Carol Kasworm (2003) has called “the connecting classroom.” She’s not referring to the internet; she’s

*It requires continuous acts of courage to put data in front of an institution and ask hard questions about what must be learned from it.*

talking about approaches that promote connection among classmates, connections between faculty and students, connections made between students’ lives and work and the subject matter of the course.

In particular, we need to redesign those gatekeeper courses. Every college has them – the high-enrollment courses that also have high failure rates and mark the end of many students’ college careers. At Richland College in Dallas, a group of faculty members took a look at student outcomes for one of their introductory science courses and didn’t like what they saw. As a consequence, they undertook a collaborative redesign process. Every college should consider doing the same. Carol Twigg’s work at the Center for Academic Transformation offers a terrific collection of ideas about how to redesign these courses with two objectives in mind: to increase student learning while also lowering costs.

There’s an important caveat to this enthusiasm about innovations in teaching and learning. Pat Hutchings (2004), in a recent online essay in *Carnegie Foundation Perspectives*, reminds us of the Tibetan Buddhists’ idea of the “near enemy,” the recognition that “any virtue has a bad cousin.” The bad cousin in this case – the downside of these encouraging developments – is “the potential for a kind of insularity and balkanization, with the various teaching camps each going their own direction, in isolation from the others.”

This is a pertinent point, because the community college phenomenon is that we collect innovations. We’re like kids in Toys “R” Us: “Ooh, that’s very cool – I want one of those. And this, too. Oh, and I just have to have this because Sinclair Community College has one!” In another example of competition among institutions, a dean of a college in a multicollage district described the intensity of the institution’s rivalry with another college in the district: “You know,” he said, “if they had a tornado over there, we would insist on having one, too.”

### 5. *Rethink and Redesign.*

If we are to deal with our realities and keep our promises, we are going to have to rethink some of our most basic assumptions, question our familiar structures and practices, and gore some favored oxen. A bit of relevant wisdom,

offered on the menu at the Café des Artistes in New York, is this: “Tradition is often just a form of conspiracy to keep the future from happening.”

This redesign effort is the work of transformational change in our institutions. It is conceptually difficult, politically dangerous, and demanding of a long-term commitment. Those who are really committed to it could lose their jobs. Those who are good at it may never get the credit. It is best that we learn to think of this as fun. And it is essential that we think of it as a team sport.

What kinds of tasks might be on this list for change? For example, colleges will need to

- Focus attention and resources on the “front door” of the college. Community colleges lose half of their students in the first year and untold numbers before the census date of the first semester. We know that we need to connect early, connect often. We know that we need to help students set goals and milestones so that they can see possibilities, so that they have reasons to come back to school on Monday, in January, next year.
- Get rid of late registration and other firmly entrenched institutional practices that are more about revenue generation, bureaucratic folderol, or faculty convenience than they are about student learning and success.

- Remediate our own pervasive but fallacious assumption that any group of adults will learn a set of knowledge and skills at the same rate. We have to figure out how to insist that time will be the variable and learning the constant.
- Create more coherent and rigorous sub-degree certificates or modules of knowledge and skills, some of them in general education areas like quantitative reasoning, writing, and the like, and some linked to emerging career clusters.
- Become expert in the assessment and certification of learning, wherever it occurs; this is the growth industry of the future.
- Develop and employ far more portable mechanisms for documenting learning, such as smart cards and electronic portfolios.
- Construct class schedules not as a list of pet courses taught by individual instructors at their convenience but of linked learning experiences taught by teams of instructors and counselors who assume collective responsibility for a cohort of students.
- Reconfigure staffing to align with commitments to keep the promises, and to acknowledge that all the forms of expertise required for the classroom focus on learning and attainment – instructional design, content expertise, curriculum development, technology applications, multiple teaching strategies, assessment of learning, and student advising – may not frequently reside in a single individual.

### 6. *Exercise Leadership.*

This will be done in a lot of different ways and at many different levels in the college organizations. But this transformational work is hard, and it certainly will not happen by itself. It requires continuous acts of courage to put data in front of an institution and ask hard questions about what must be learned from it. It requires continuous acts of will to make and support decisions that put resources where rhetoric is. And it requires truly relentless focus to avoid all of the possible diversions, the cool gadgets of educational innovation, the easier wins – and to keep all eyes on the Promise.

So keeping the promises will require all of this work and more. In sum, it's going to take

- more effective public and policy advocacy;
- tough questions and truth telling;
- rethinking, redefining, redesigning;
- letting go of things that feel comfortable but don't work;

- scaling up the things that do work; and
- charting a course through the often rough seas of institutional change.

### PROMISES WORTH KEEPING

In a leap year, we get one extra day for Black History Month, and this year provided that benefit. It is appropriate, then, to recall the perspective on America's promise that was expressed by Martin Luther King, Jr., on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963:

When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.... This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

King went on to decry the obvious – that America had defaulted on the promise “insofar as her citizens of color are concerned,” that America had delivered a check that came back marked “insufficient funds.” “But,” he said, “We refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity in this nation.”

And he went on with those famous words: “No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.”

Today we acknowledge again, more than 35 years after Dr. King's death, that even in a society as powerful and wealthy as ours, even as good as we think we try to be, there are people who are not living the American dream. Still there are young people who do not believe that the dream is their dream. Still there are people who should be in our colleges but are not. And there are people who are there now but won't achieve their goals. There are promises that have been broken and promises that just haven't been kept...yet.

As we contemplate the challenges ahead, it is appropriate to give thanks.

To the students – those who learn from us and those who teach us; those so quick we struggle to keep up and those who struggle because we move too quickly; those who know exactly where they're headed, and those who still believe that the only reason they're in college is because someone made a terrible, wonderful mistake; to those who skip class to care for a sick child, run to class because the bus was late, or simply march to a different drummer; to those who challenge us and those whose courage touches our souls. To each and every student, we say, “Thank you.” We are thankful to know them, even if just a little. And we are

grateful to them for the opportunity, with their participation and sacrifice and hard work, to make good on America's promise.

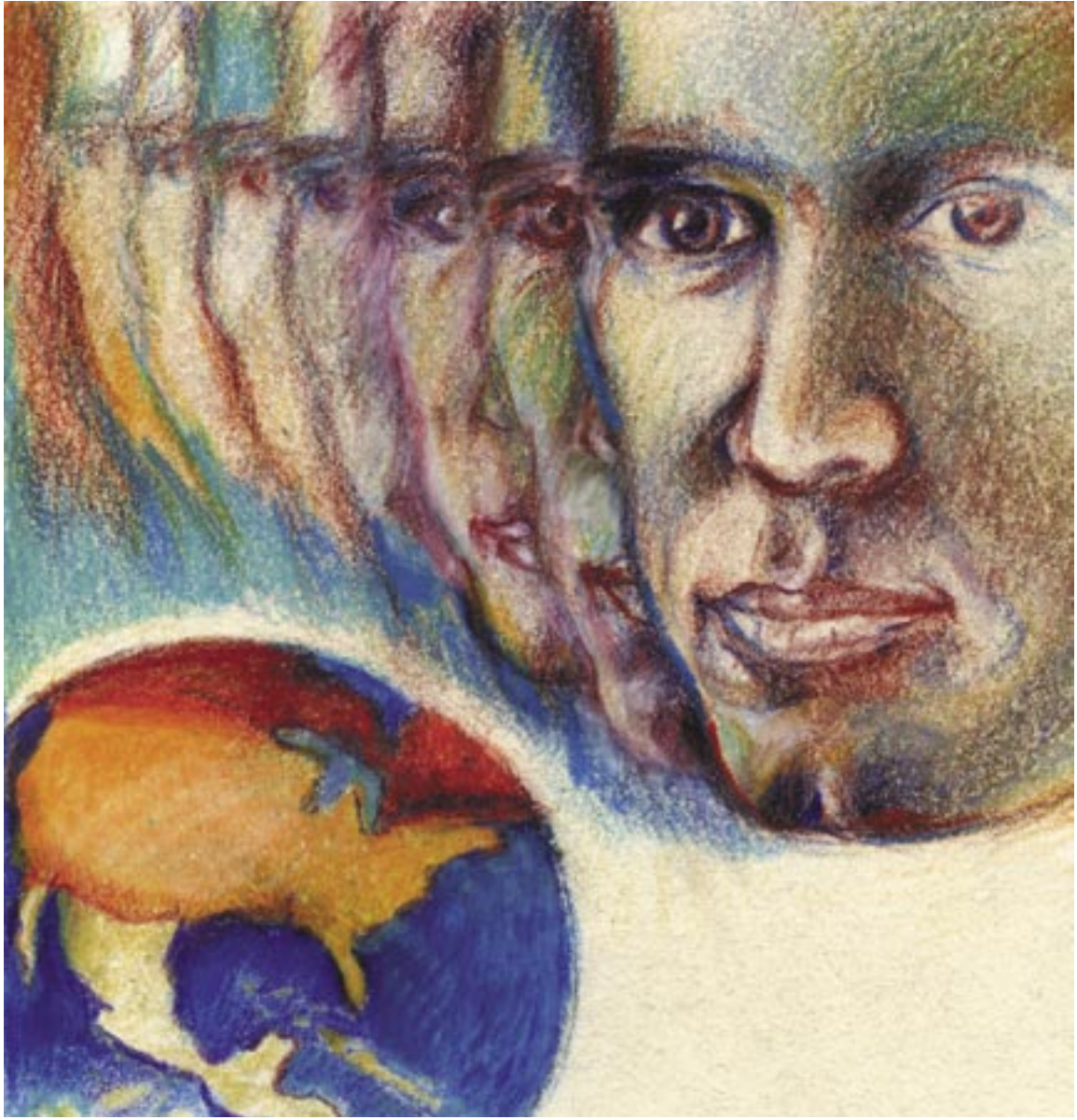
To the people of our community colleges – faculty, staff, administrators, presidents – who daily undertake what should be recognized as some of the most important work in America, we say, “Thank you.” If we keep our promises, we will be indispensably helpful in ensuring that America keeps hers. We all have promises to keep. And miles to go before we sleep. And miles to go before we sleep.

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## HIGH AND RISING: HOW MUCH HIGHER WILL COLLEGE ENROLLMENTS GO?

Mario Martinez

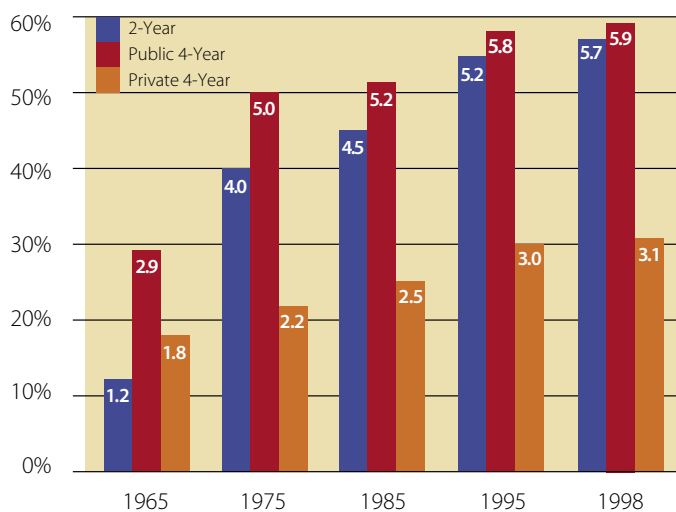
Why have community colleges come to play such an important role in American higher education in a relatively short amount of time? What will the role of community colleges be in the next 5 to 10 years? Will more or less demand be placed on community colleges, and by whom? This brief will answer these questions by providing a view of past, current, and future postsecondary enrollment trends in the United States, with an emphasis on the two-year sector. Relevant economic and demographic trends will be highlighted as the brief continually elevates the issue of why we should not only maintain but improve participation in community colleges in the future.

### THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Community colleges have become an integral part of American postsecondary education, today comprising more than one-third of total college enrollments. Over the last 30 years, no other sector of higher education has matched the growth of America's public two-year institutions. Every other sector of public and private higher education's share of postsecondary enrollment decreased during this same time period, an unmistakable testament to the rising importance of public two-year community colleges.

**F1. TOTAL FALL HEADCOUNT ENROLLMENT IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION**

*In millions*



Note: Data labels rounded to the nearest 100,000.  
Source: NCES, 2001a.

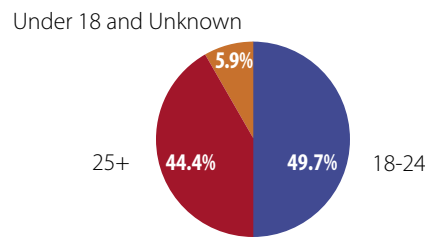
The enrollment shifts shown in Figure 1 are rather dramatic, and the growth in public community college enrollment mirrors the growth in the number of two-year institutions. The number of public two-year institutions rose from 739 in 1969 to 1,069 in 1999 (NCES, 2001a). Community colleges have come to play such an important role in the United States for several reasons:

- The two-year sector's original and continuing role in educating and training a qualified workforce to meet economic demands;
- The improvement and growth in the nation's high school graduation rates;
- The community college's commitment to postsecondary access, which benefits individuals and society; and
- Favorable legislative perception regarding the community college's responsiveness to state needs.

### CURRENT PARTICIPATION AND FUTURE DEMAND

Community colleges have become a legitimate channel to education and training in the United States, among traditional-age, full-time college students as well as part-time adults. Community colleges have always been regarded as accommodating to the 25 and over population, but 18- to 24-year-olds now comprise a slightly larger share of enrollments (USBC, 2002).

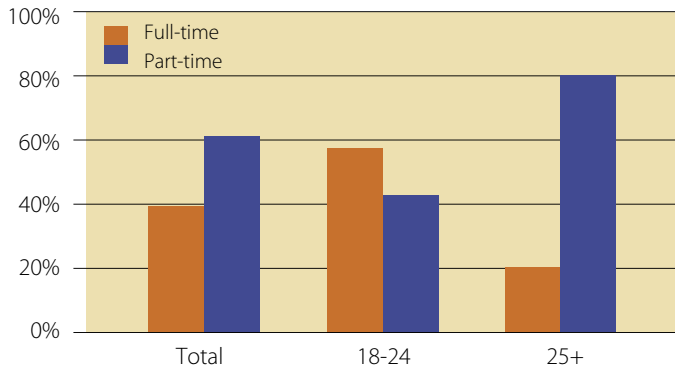
**F2. ENROLLMENT IN TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS BY AGE GROUP**



Source: USBC, 2002

Figure 3 shows that the majority of enrollments in community colleges are still part-time, but there is variation between the two major age groups.

**F3. TWO-YEAR ENROLLMENT BY ATTENDANCE STATUS**



Source: NCES, 2001b

Figures 1, 2, and 3 clearly emphasize the critical role that two-year institutions play in American higher education today; however, implementing sound policy to plan for the future requires a look at future enrollment as well. Current community college statistics and census population projections can together produce future two-year enrollment scenarios to help national leaders initiate policy discussions. Calculations from recently released state-by-state census data reveal participation for the year 2000: (a) The national postsecondary participation rate for 18- to 24-year-olds was 34%, the benchmark (best performing) state’s rate was 47.7%; (b) The national postsecondary participation rate for 25-year-olds and over was 4.5 percent, the benchmark (best performing) state’s rate was 6.4 percent; and (c) Total postsecondary participation for all 50 states was 17,349,267 (USBC, 2002).

Future enrollment scenarios can be projected for each age group by multiplying the age group’s participation rate by the total population estimate for that age group. This can be done for each state, with the national total being a sum of all states. Community colleges currently account for 37.8 percent of total enrollments, so the community college share of the total national postsecondary enrollment estimate is easily extracted. Figure 4 shows projected enrollment growth between 2000 and 2015 for two scenarios: (1) assuming each state’s participation rates continue at status quo levels for each age group, and (2) assuming that every state was able to perform at the benchmark level for each age group.

The community college growth can be disaggregated by age group, assuming current enrollment by age group percentages from Figure 2.

Figures 4 and 5 show that community colleges are going to experience an increase in future demand, even if states do not improve current participation rates. The scenarios of Figures 4 and 5 draw on demographic projections by age for every state; therefore, they account for the changing population. There is variation among the states, with some states projected to see an increase in the 18-to-24 population and others a decrease. Figure 6 shows the population shifts in five sample states from 2000 to 2015. The national change is shown in the last column.

**F4. ADDITIONAL ENROLLMENT IN YEAR 2015, ABOVE 2000 ENROLLMENT LEVELS, FOR THE NATION**

	Additional Postsecondary Enrollment	Additional Community College Enrollment	Percent Growth in Community Colleges, Above 2000 Levels
Status Quo Participation Rates	2,242,903	847,817	12.9%
Benchmark Participation Rates	8,044,367	3,040,771	46.4%

\*Total figure includes “18 and under” and “unknown” categories.

Calculations in Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7 are those used by the author in ECS’s Closing the College Participation Gap Project.

**F5. COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENROLLMENT GROWTH BY AGE GROUP: 2000 TO 2015**

	Total Enrollment Growth	18 – 24 Year-Olds	25 and Over
Status Quo Participation Rates	847,817	421,365	376,431
Benchmark Participation Rates	3,040,771	1,511,263	1,350,102

\*Total figure includes “18 and under” and “unknown” categories

**F6. PROPORTION OF 18 – 24 YEAR-OLDS IN THE GENERAL POPULATION**

	CA	FL	MA	MN	NV	Nation
2000	13.7%	10.8%	11.9%	13.0%	12.1%	13.0%
2015	16.0%	10.4%	13.3%	11.8%	10.9%	12.9%

Policymakers in California and Massachusetts should factor in the percentage growth of 18- to 24-year-olds when formulating future policies to accommodate future demand. Conversely, Minnesota and Nevada will see a decrease in the percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds but an increase in the 25 and over population.

Three general questions emerge from the data presented thus far:

1. How can states draw on the community college sector to accommodate increased enrollment demand and in fact encourage higher participation rates in their population?
2. How can states plan for physical, technological, or other resource capacity needs in the community college sector, given that demand will increase?
3. How will participation be affected if states do not initiate policy discussions on the first two questions?



**F7. HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE IMPACT ON COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENROLLMENT**

	Total Number of High School Graduates	Estimated Number of Graduates to College	Estimated number of Graduates to Community College	Community College Increase over 2000-01 Level	Community College % Increase over 2000-01 Level
2000-01	2,852,533	1,617,411	546,685		
Scenario 1: 2006-07	3,068,732	1,739,998	588,199	41,434	7.6%
Scenario 2: 2006-07	3,068,732	2,130,217	720,013	173,328	31.7%

**THE SPECIAL CASE OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES**

Although planning for the future requires leaders and policymakers to look far enough ahead to begin laying the groundwork to accommodate future demand, some trends are only four to six years out and necessitate an immediate response. The expected number of high school graduates in 2007 is such a trend. Figure 7 provides information for all 50 states on the projected number of high school graduates and the likely effect on postsecondary enrollment using the following information: (a) The college continuation rate, or the current national rate at which high school graduates enroll in postsecondary education, is 56.7 percent, the benchmark state’s rate is 69.4 percent, as calculated by Mortenson (2002); and (b) The U.S. Department of Labor (2001) estimates that 33.8 percent of 2000 high school graduates enrolled in two-year institutions. This percentage will be applied to future two-year enrollments in 2007.

Scenario 1 assumes that states and the nation as a whole do nothing to improve the percentage of high school graduates who move on to postsecondary education. Scenario 2 assumes that high school graduates participate in college at the benchmark rate. Improvements in enrollment rates could happen for any number of reasons: better prepared high school graduates, a decrease in dropout rates, successful recruiting strategies, and so on. Given any scenario, community colleges should expect an increase in enrollment from high school graduates in 2007. Figure 7 is a national total for the 50 states. There will be variation across states, with some states seeing major increases and other states actually seeing decreases in high school graduates in 2007.

**PROACTIVELY MEETING THE FUTURE**

The future cannot be predicted with absolute accuracy, but generally enrollment demand for the future will increase. In the near future, there will be a strong demand from high school graduates; on to 2015, some states will see an increase in demand from the 18- to 24-year-old age group, others from the 25 and older group.

Although the level of resources and infrastructure to meet future demand is difficult to project, it is likely that national and/or state fiscal investment and innovation, in one form or another, will have to increase to meet future demand. The likelihood that two-year institutions will be called upon to meet that demand is accentuated by the continuous

rise in the community college share of postsecondary enrollment and the growing number of traditional-age college students now entering higher education through the community college door. Expenditures per student at community colleges are less than at baccalaureate institutions, so policymakers will increasingly look to community colleges to efficiently meet growing enrollment demands. The direct linkage state leaders make between community colleges and economic development will encourage a continued emphasis on this sector.

If the nation and individual states do not plan for future enrollment, capacity constraints are likely to challenge the promise of open access at community colleges. Varying demographic and economic trends will operate differently in each state, but without proactive planning, states may inadvertently begin favoring participation for one age group over another. If the best-case scenarios are what the nation and states strive for, then our leaders must come together to conceive of solutions that will continue to foster innovation in America’s community colleges.

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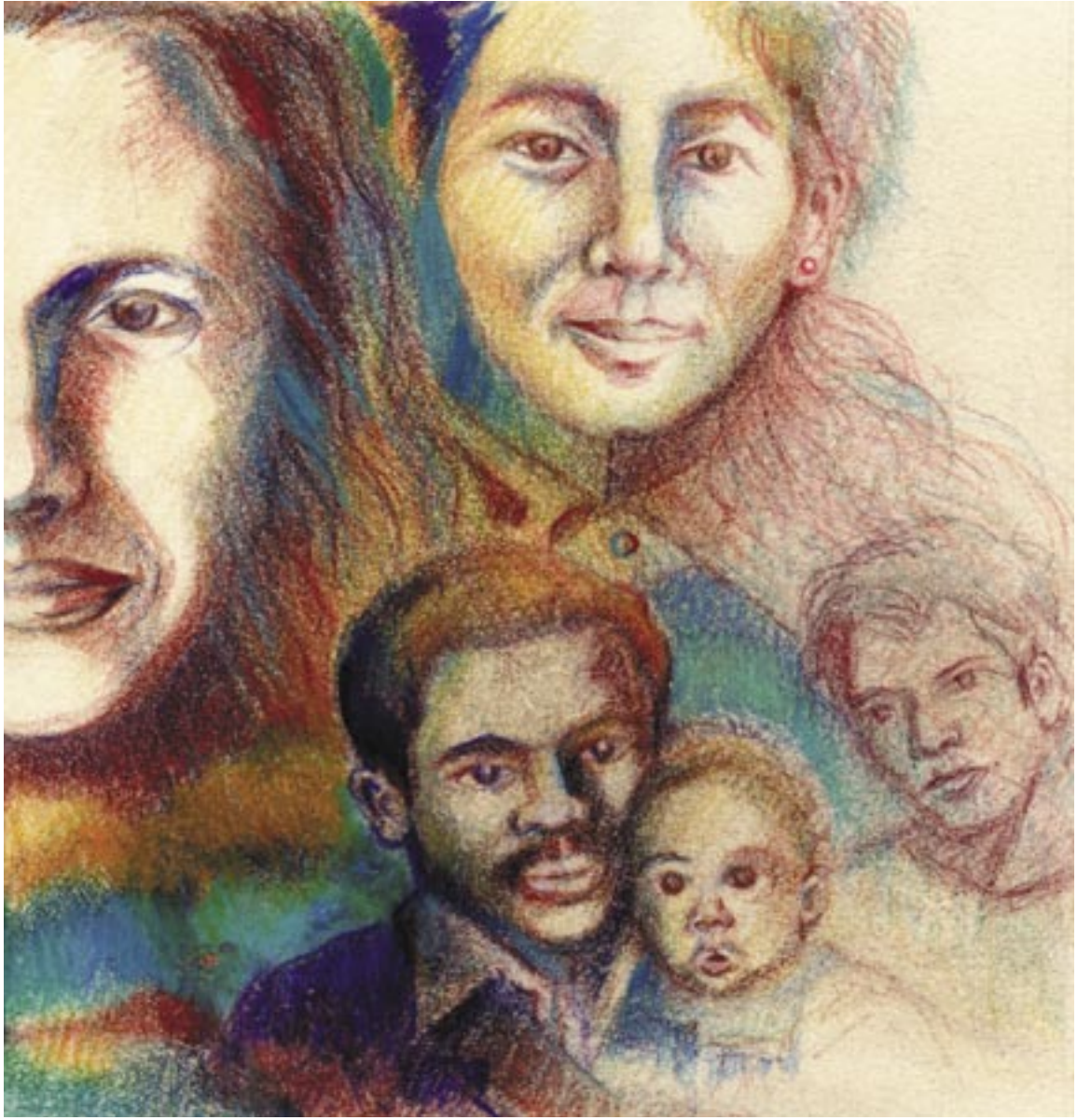
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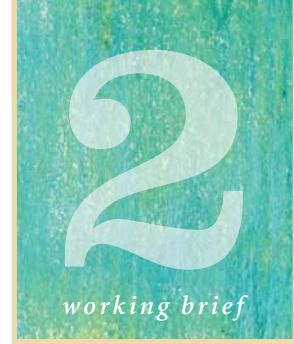
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# COMING THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR: A STUDENT PROFILE

Cynthia D. Wilson

The American community college has long prided itself on its open admissions policies. Community colleges welcome not only the high school honor graduate who seeks an inexpensive local alternative to a state or regional university, but also the single mother who needs employable skills to support her family, the mid-career displaced worker seeking retraining, the professional who holds advanced degrees but wants specialized training for further development or promotion, and the high school dropout looking for another chance. The community college accepts all these and more, thriving in the creation of a diverse community of learners, and undeterred by the countless challenges that accompany widely varied learning needs. Overcoming the challenges requires a clear picture of the student population, and this working brief examines the characteristics of students in two-year public institutions.

**Age.** Despite the perception that most community college students are older than the traditional college-going cohort, almost half of students in public two-year institutions are 18 to 24 years old. With almost a third of the student population age 30 or older (Knapp et al., 2003), community colleges must also meet the needs of a sizeable group of nontraditional-age students.

F1. ENROLLMENT IN PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGES BY AGE, FALL 2001			
Age	Percentage Enrollment	Age	Percentage Enrollment
Under 18	5.5%	30-34	8.8%
18-19	20.0%	35-39	7.0%
20-21	15.9%	40-49	10.1%
22-24	12.8%	50-65	4.6%
25-29	12.2%	65 and over	1.1%
		Age unknown	2.0%

Source: Knapp et al., 2003

**Gender.** Women (57.3%) continue to outnumber men (42.7%) at public two-year institutions (Knapp et al., 2003), a trend that has been ongoing since the 1970s and is projected to continue for the next ten years (Wirt et al., 2004). For some time, community colleges have had programs focused on ensuring the success of at-risk women such as displaced homemakers and single mothers. Similar programs, such as St. Petersburg College’s (FL) Brother-to-Brother initiative, target the enrollment and persistence of at-risk males.

F2. GENDER FACTORS AT TWO-YEAR COLLEGES		
Factor	Men	Women
Enrollment	42.7%	57.3%
B or better grade average*	66%	71%
Often or very often come to class unprepared*	20%	13%
Often or very often work harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards*	42%	53%

\*student self-reported  
Sources: Knapp et al., 2003; CCSSE, 2003

**Race/Ethnicity.** Minority students comprise almost one-third of the student population, with just over 26 percent of community college students either Black or Hispanic (NCES, 2003b). In student surveys, minority students report being more engaged with academic and student services

F3. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION BY RACE/ETHNICITY, PUBLIC TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS	
American Indian	1.3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	6.1%
Hispanic	12.9%
Black	13.2%
White	66.4%

Source: NCES, 2003b, Table 32-1a

than their White classmates. At the same time, they also acknowledge that employment, dependent care, and lack of academic preparation are “‘very likely’ reasons that they would drop out of school” (CCSSE, 2003, p. 17).

**Language Spoken at Home.** Almost 15 percent of students speak a language other than English in the home, a characteristic reflected in the high demand for English as a Second Language programs in community colleges (NCES, 2003, Table 32-1b).

**Family.** Nearly 30 percent of community college students are married, and over one-third have at least one dependent; more than 16 percent are single parents.

**F4. FAMILY RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS**

<i>Marital Status</i>	
Not married	69.2%
Married	29.1%
Separated	1.7%
Single Parent	16.4%
<i>Number of Dependents</i>	
No dependents	65.5%
One dependent	13.8%
Two or more dependents	20.7%
<i>Dependency Status</i>	
Dependent	36.3%
Independent	63.7%
<i>Highest Education Level of Parent(s)</i>	
High school or less	45.3%
Some postsecondary education	24.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher	30.8%

Source: NCES, 2003b, Table 32-1a; NCES, 1999-2000, Tables 192, 193, 197

**F5. PARTICIPATION IN REMEDIAL EDUCATION BY SUBJECT AND LENGTH OF TIME ENROLLED, FALL 2000**

<i>Subject Area</i>	
Reading, Writing, or Mathematics	42%
Reading	20%
Writing	23%
Mathematics	35%
<i>Length of Enrollment</i>	
Less than 1 year	37%
1 year	53%
More than 1 year	10%

Source: Wirt et al., 2004

Thirty-six percent of students are still listed as dependents by their parents or guardians, a figure consistent with the increasing traditional-age student presence on community college campuses (NCES, 2003b, Table 32-1a; NCES, 1999-2000, Tables 192, 193).

**First Generation Status.** Almost half of community college students have parents who did not attend any postsecondary institution (see Figure 4). This first-generation status is an indicator that a student may face particular challenges, sometimes academic but perhaps social, that could lead to attrition from the college (Choy, 2002). Completion of a certificate program is more likely to be a primary educational goal for first-generation students than is academic attainment, with 38 percent of first-generation students seeking to transfer while 52 percent of other students plan to transfer (CCSSE, 2003). Appropriate support is vital for first-generation students. Since increased educational attainment is a precursor to increased likelihood of employment, financial security, and civic engagement, community colleges have the opportunity to introduce first-generation students to possibilities they may not have known existed for them. Colleges would do well to work closely with these students, helping them achieve their initial goals while also assisting them in the development of plans for realizing higher levels of attainment.

**Disability.** Almost 11 percent of public two-year college students reported having a disability (10.7 percent), with 4.9 percent of those reporting learning challenges (NCES, 2003b, Table 32-1a). Open-admissions community colleges have philosophical and legal obligations to provide adaptive services and appropriate learning options for these students.

**Remediation.** Community colleges are well aware that open admissions policies translate into accepting students regardless of their level of academic preparation. That 42 percent of community college freshmen enroll in at least one developmental course is an indication that the open-door policy is able to fill a very real educational access need. Many of these students spend a year or more in remedial courses, a significant investment of time and money for students and colleges alike. Access to college and developmental programs is not enough to guarantee success, however, so ensuring the quality of remedial education and academic support is essential. The reading-intensive nature of much college-level work, for example, can be a daunting obstacle to students with limited reading skills. Reading may be the “most serious barrier to degree completion [and] is associated with more total remedial coursework and with lower rates of degree attainment than other remedial course-taking patterns” (Wirt et al., 2004, p. 63), a factor that further emphasizes the need for successful developmental reading programs.

**Educational Goals.** Almost 85 percent of community college students have degree or certificate completion as a goal (NCES, 2003a). Underscoring the significance of identifying educational intent, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement reported a correlation between attainment goals and student engagement and success:

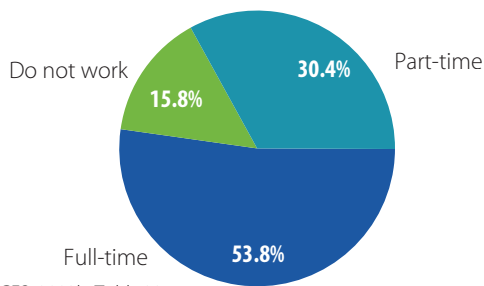
...students who identify attainment of a certificate, attainment of an associate degree, or transfer as their primary educational goal tend to be substantially more engaged than their non-credential-seeking counterparts. They also are considerably more likely to participate in developmental education, study skills courses, and college orientation; to frequently use an array of student and academic support services; to believe those services are important; and to be satisfied with the services they use. Finally, the credential-seeking students indicate stronger educational outcomes as a result of their experience in the college. (CCSSE, 2003, pp. 15-16)

F6. INITIAL DEGREE GOAL*	
Goal	Initial goal
Bachelor's degree	24.8%
Associate's degree	48.9%
Certificate	10.8%
No degree	15.6%

\*For all beginning students, 1995-96  
Source: NCES, 2003a

**Employment Status.** Almost 85 percent of students in public two-year institutions are employed, 53.8 percent full time and 30.4 percent part time. Only 15.8 percent do not have a job (NCES, 2003b). Full-time employment is an indicator that students are at risk of not achieving their educational goals, thus challenging community colleges to provide appropriate scheduling and support for a group that makes up more than half of the student population.

**F7. COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT EMPLOYMENT**



Source: NCES, 2003b, Table 32-1a

**THE MANY FACES OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Community colleges invite all people who are interested in pursuing postsecondary education to begin, or begin again, by walking through the open door, a broad invitation that brings all kinds of learners to the community college environment. Remediation and first-generation data indicate that many students in these groups are at risk of not reaching their educational goals. Almost half of those who accept the invitation are traditional-age students, but a third are older and perhaps more apprehensive than their younger colleagues about returning to school after so many years. A third of the students are minorities. A third have dependents who need their time and attention. Most community college students are either full- or part-time employees. All these factors contribute to the risk of not completing certificate and degree programs.

Managing such a diverse learning environment requires attentive planning if the needs of all learners are to be met. Programs to assist the under prepared, to support the single

parent, to promote diversity, to engage students of all ages, and to otherwise embrace those who walk through the open door require adequate resources, thoughtful development, appropriate implementation, and thorough evaluation. If we invite these students to join us, then we are obligated to help them succeed, to do all we can to ensure that they are welcomed and supported as they work to achieve their educational goals. If we fulfill that obligation, then perhaps they will accept our future invitations and truly become the lifelong learners they need to be.

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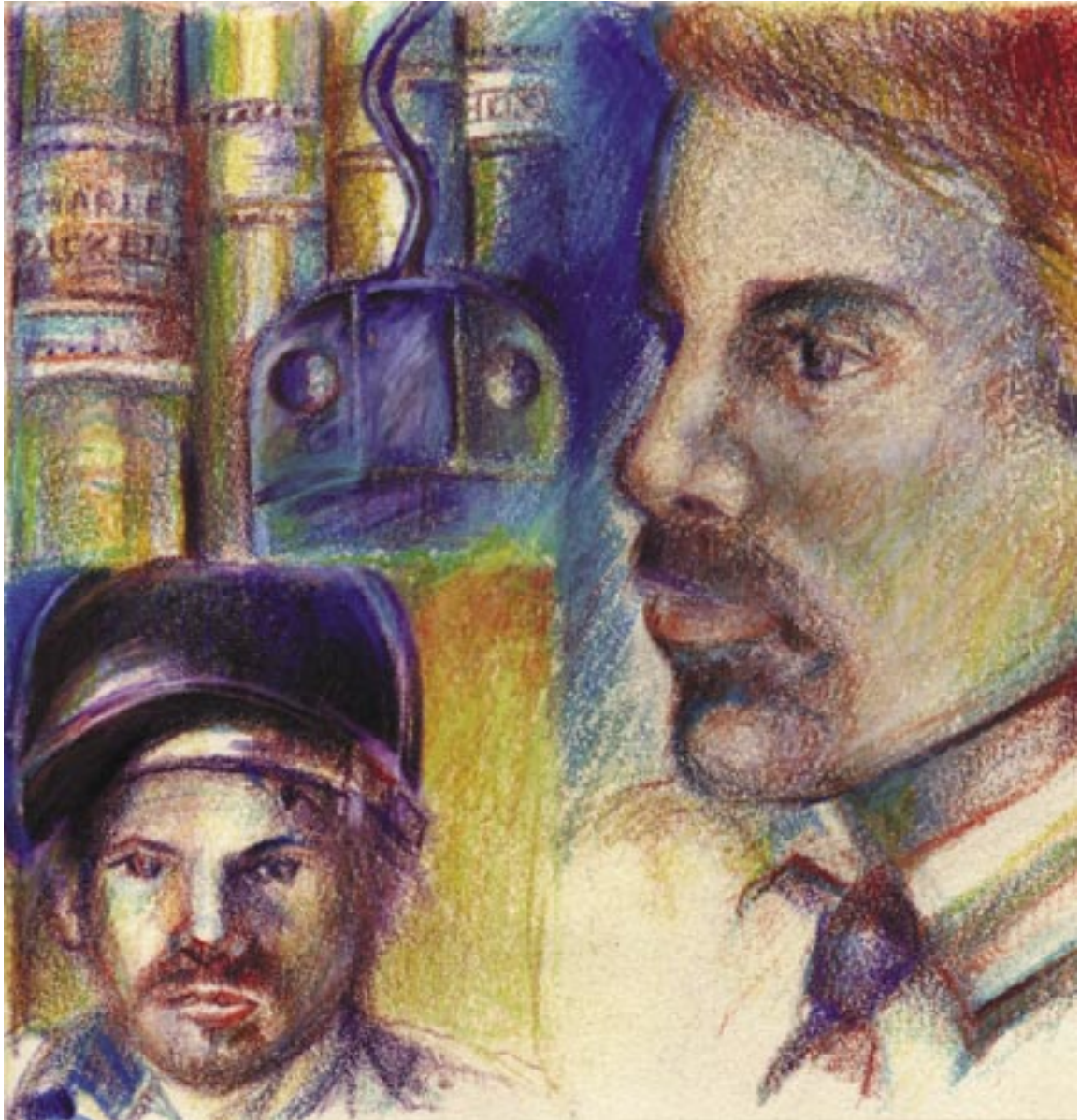
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# GOING TO COLLEGE: NOT WHAT IT USED TO BE

*Russell E. Hamm*



Traditionally, going off to college meant four years in a residence hall or first apartment for the 18- to 21-year-old. Few students worked, were married, or had children to care for, and socializing was at least as important as getting a degree. Classes started in the fall and ended in the spring, and the academic year was sprinkled with vacations. This 20<sup>th</sup> century snapshot has little in common with the streaming video of the 21<sup>st</sup> century community college student: “If you think words like ‘typical’ and ‘traditional’ still have a relevant ring in today’s community college environment, consider this: Only one in six undergraduate students in the U.S. is 18 to 24 years old, attends school full time and lives on campus” (McClenney, 2002).

Almost six million (40 percent) of America’s college students are 25 years of age or older. The yellowing photos of yesterday’s old images are irrelevant, providing a stark contrast to today’s community college students. By studying the students we have now – most of whom are nontraditional – we are better able to sharpen our focus on the future.

## THE NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT

While the traditional student is “one who earns a high school diploma, enrolls full time immediately after finishing high school, depends on parents for financial support, and either does not work or works part time,” the nontraditional student is financially independent, attends part time, works full time, delays enrollment after high school, has dependents, is a single parent, or does not have a high school diploma (NCES, 2002). In 1999-2000, 89.5 percent of all community college students were nontraditional.

**The Part-Time Student.** Even a brief visit with community college students will sharply focus the differences between the lives of today’s students and those of the traditional students of the past. Survey research depicts students who are very busy and who maintain multiple roles in their lives: 67 percent are part-time students, a percentage that has been unchanged for almost 20 years (in four-year schools, 24 percent attend part time) (Voorhees, 2000).

**The Multiple-Role Student.** These part-time students are not idle during their time away from college: 54 percent work full-time, 34 percent have dependents, 16 percent are

single parents (NCES, 2002), and 29 percent spend more than 11 hours a week and 17 percent spend more than 30 hours a week caring for dependents. Work and child care are not alone in taking time and energy. Traveling to campus is also significant: 93 percent commute to college, and commuting takes 6 to 20 hours a week for 23 percent of students. Further, most students are carrying the cost of college themselves; 56 percent do not receive assistance from parents for college costs, and 75 percent do not have student loans (McClenney, 2002).

F1. MULTIPLE-ROLE STUDENTS	
Work full time	54%
Have dependents	34%
Are single parents	16%
Commute to college	93%
Receive no financial assistance from parents	56%
Have no student loans	75%
<i>Sources: NCES, 2002; McClenney, 2002</i>	

**The Working Student.** The college experience is more difficult, more stressful, and longer for students who work. Those who claim to be working students reported that working limited their class schedule (46 percent), limited the number of classes they could take (39 percent), limited the choices of classes (33 percent), and prevented access to the library (30 percent) (NCES, 2002). And working may contribute to four alarming findings concerning how students relate to faculty and to college services. Eighty percent do not participate in college-sponsored extracurricular activities. Only a small number of faculty at community colleges had frequent meetings with their students to discuss transferring, and only one-third of those faculty had any information on their student transfer intentions. Fifty-one percent of part-time students and 39 percent of full-time students have never discussed ideas from readings or classes with an instructor outside of class. Forty-five percent of part-time students never worked with classmates outside class to prepare assignments (McClenney, 2002).

### F2. LIMITATIONS ON WORKING STUDENTS

Work limits class schedule	46%
Work limits number of classes	39%
Work limits choices of classes	33%
Work limits access to library	30%

Source: NCES, 2002

**The At-Risk Student.** A nontraditional student is a student at risk. The characteristics that define nontraditional students are risk factors because they relate negatively to staying in school or earning a degree. Among students seeking an associate’s degree, 62 percent of highly nontraditional students (having three or more nontraditional characteristics) leave without a degree, compared with 19 percent of traditional students. Among highly nontraditional students who sought a bachelor’s degree, only 11 percent obtained one within five years, compared with 51 percent of traditional students (NCES, 2002). Colleges must prepare for the future by providing services to assist nontraditional students. The Opening Doors study gathered information using focus groups of community college students or former students, most of whom were single parents. They listed what helped them stay in college: stable child care; personal support from family, peers, and college faculty and staff; and employers who accommodated school attendance (Matus-Grossman and Gooden, 2002).

### F3. PERSISTENCE TO DEGREE FOR TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

	Highly Nontraditional Students	Traditional Students
Seek but do not earn associate’s degree	62%	19%
Seek and obtain bachelor’s degree	11%	51%

Source: NCES, 2002

**The Dual-Enrollment Student.** The small but growing percentage (less than 3 percent of community college enrollment) of high school students enrolled in community colleges creates another cohort requiring the attention of community college planners. Concurrent enrollment enables high school students to get college credit prior to attaining a diploma. There exists no estimate of the number or percentage of the current 5.7 million two-year students who are dual enrollers, but Utah reports about 17,000 annually; Minnesota estimates 8,000; Virginia about 7,000; and New York City more than 12,000.

**The Goal-Setting Student.** The good news is that 76 million adults are enrolled in formal learning, with more than half in work-related learning (Voorhees and Lingenfelter,

2003). Today’s nontraditional student sets multiple goals and is savvy about using higher education to achieve them. Adults 25 years and older who seek education for various reasons have replaced the notion that kids go to college to get a degree. Students claim they attend college to obtain knowledge in a specific area (59 percent), obtain a degree (58 percent), transfer to a four-year institution (58 percent), obtain job-related skills (54 percent), complete a certificate (32 percent), update job skills (28 percent), change careers (23 percent), or take courses for self-improvement (22 percent) (McClenney, 2002).

### F4. REASONS ADULTS 25 AND OLDER ATTEND COLLEGE

Obtain specific knowledge	59%
Obtain a degree	58%
Transfer to baccalaureate institution	58%
Obtain job-related skills	54%
Complete a certificate	32%
Update job skills	28%
Change careers	23%
Self-improvement	22%

Source: McClenney, 2002

### IT’S ABOUT A JOB — AND WHAT THEY THINK ABOUT THE JOB

Preparing for a job and managing a career compete strongly with getting a degree, and factors surrounding students and their work may alter community college practice in dealing with working students. Although 32 percent of all undergraduates do not work, 48 percent report that they work to be able to go to school. Distinct from working students are the 20 percent who see themselves as employees seeking education (Hudson and Hurst, 2002).

### F5. UNDERGRADUATE PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO WORK

Students who work to support their education	48%
Students who are employees seeking education or skills training	20%
Students who do not work	32%

Source: Hudson and Hurst, 2002

Research indicates that the differing perceptions between *students who also work* and *employees who also attend college* cause differing behaviors as students make academic choices:

- Employees are more likely...to have first enrolled in a two-year institution and less likely...to have first enrolled



in a four-year institution (73 percent of this group selects community colleges first).

- 78 percent of employee students are seeking a certificate, an associate degree, or no degree; only one in five wants a baccalaureate degree.
- “Employees...are less likely than ‘working students’” to persist in school and are more likely to drop out.
- In short, for a variety of reasons, employees appear to be a group of postsecondary students who are particularly at risk for not persisting (Hudson and Hurst, 2002).

### FURTHER CHALLENGES

Beyond the pressures of full lives, many community college students carry added burdens onto campus. Some of the 40 million Americans reportedly functioning at the lowest literacy levels become community college students, presenting a challenge to the typical community college. Moreover, since the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, increasing numbers of current and former welfare recipients have been joining the low-wage workforce. They go to community college to upgrade skills but are often not college ready. Many students have a devilishly uphill climb:

- 67 percent of high school students earn a diploma, but only 43 percent are prepared for college-level work (McCabe, 2000).
- 41 percent of all community college freshmen enroll in remedial classes (Voorhees, 2000).
- 60 percent of community college students are minority students whose attrition rate is 60 to 80 percent (Nora, n.d.).
- The community college serves a higher proportion of students with disabilities, and the largest category is learning disabilities (Voorhees, 2000).
- Remediation classes are offered in 100 percent of community colleges (NCES, 1996b).
- Only one in four (26.7 percent) completes the associate degree being sought (NCES, 1996a).

Beyond the moral obligation to help students are practical economic questions: Is the community college investment in remedial education good for economic development? Is it good for the local community? Indeed it is, for students who are successfully remediated become productively employed. Almost 16 percent become professionals; 54 percent obtain midlevel, white-collar, or technical positions; 20 percent become high-skill blue-collar workers; and only 9 percent remain in unskilled or low-skill jobs (McCabe, 2000).

### F6. POSITIONS ATTAINED BY SUCCESSFULLY REMEDIATED STUDENTS

Professional	16%
Midlevel, white collar, or technical	54%
High-skill blue-collar	20%
Unskilled or low-skill	9%

Source: McCabe, 2000

### THE COMPETITORS

Although community colleges are inexpensive and otherwise accessible, students may go elsewhere based on a perception that other postsecondary experiences are faster or more effective. Four-year colleges and universities compete directly with community colleges, but no data has been found to quantify numbers of students who are enticed away. Rather than taking this more traditionally academic route, some students seek institutions focused primarily on job skills. For-profit institutions and business and industry training are two options that capitalize on the get-a-job desire among students.

**For-Profit Institutions.** These institutions fall into three categories: (1) Local enterprise colleges have one or several campuses and are regional, privately owned, and typically enroll fewer than 500 students (e.g., Potomac College, Washington, DC); (2) Super-system organizations are multicampus and multistate and are traded on the New York Stock Exchange (e.g., The University of Phoenix, DeVry University, and ITT Technical Institute); and (3) Internet institutions use the internet exclusively and have no campuses (e.g., Jones International University) (Kelly, 2001 July).

Twenty-eight percent of all two-year degree-granting institutions are for-profits (NCES, 1999). They awarded 10 percent of all associate degrees, and their share of the two-year college market is 28 percent, up from 19 percent in a decade (Kelly, 2001 August). Students choose the for-profit sector because “they like the convenience, the schedules and calendars designed for them, and the services. They want to learn the skills to get a job without having to take courses they think are irrelevant” (Kelly, 2001 July). The for-profits are doing something right in the eyes of students, who are willing to pay far more to attend them. Indeed, the net tuition (published tuition minus financial aid) is about \$4,000 higher at the two-year for-profit (Bailey, Badway, and Gumpert, 2001).

**Business and Industry Training and Corporate Universities.** Business and industry training also competes with community colleges. The well-documented skills shortages in business, especially high-tech business, have led to the rapid growth of industry-based training, particularly

in the alternative training arena. “When community colleges are not fast or flexible enough to offer courses that business or industry needs, they will find a way to train them in house or through consultant services” (OCCRL, 2000). While the number of students drawn away from the college by this training has not been determined, it is fair to conclude that much business and industry training is not the business of the colleges. The training is often specific to a business application, and developing a college course is not necessarily perceived by the college as a good investment.

Corporate universities may be the more serious competitors. “A corporate university is a portal within a company through which all education takes place, an organization’s strategic hub for educating employees, customers, and

Research confirms that online and alternative education produce learning results equivalent to class-based learning. Of particular note, however, is the value of online delivery in meeting the needs of the nontraditional student. For example, the U.S. Department of Education has released a study showing that older women with families and jobs were more drawn to undergraduate distance education programs during the 1999-2000 academic year than were members of other groups (Carnevale, 2002).

Online delivery offers opportunities to tailor courses to individual learners, to styles of learning, and to methods that engage learners. It also has the potential to strengthen on-campus learning: “What’s ahead for most faculty and most students is some kind of hybrid learning experience in which

*To remain competitive, community colleges must do more than offer a low-cost alternative in postsecondary education.*

suppliers...and (linking) an organization’s strategies to the learning goals of its audiences” (Talisayon, 2001). Corporate universities number in excess of 2,000 in the U.S., and many offer sanctioned two- and four-year degrees. Best known is Motorola University, which has 400 full-time faculty and 800 part-time specialists at 99 sites in more than 20 countries, serving 100,000 students a year (Talisayon, 2001). FedX University, Intel University, Sprint University, Disney University, Oracle University, and University of Toyota are additional examples. There is good news in this field: Valencia Community College (FL) and Mott Community College (MI) have flourishing educational partnerships with corporate universities (Walt Disney World and Ford Motor Corporation, respectively). In fact, about two-thirds of corporate universities have alliances with colleges and universities.

**Online and Alternative Learning.** Online education is not a competitor to community colleges itself but is a delivery mode that, used by a competitor, does take students. In its second survey of distance education programs, the U.S. Department of Education found that 1,680 colleges and universities offered a total of about 54,000 online education courses in 1998, with 1.6 million students enrolled. Seventy-two percent of public two-year institutions offered distance education courses (Carnevale, 2000). Over all, about 7.6 percent of students taking college courses during the 1999-2000 academic year did so through distance education (Carnevale, 2002).

technology supplements, not supplants, both the content and the discourse that have been part of the traditional experience of going to college” (Continuing Challenge, 1999).

Online learning also offers a manageable way for colleges to collaborate and compete more effectively. For example, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education has approved a plan for its public colleges and universities to develop online courses jointly and to share them in an effort to keep the state’s distance education programs locally and nationally competitive. The 28 state institutions will collaborate in developing a catalog of all of their online courses and in creating reciprocity agreements. Students will be able to take courses from any of the institutions and accumulate credit in the colleges in which they are enrolled; the courses will be transferable among all of Colorado’s institutions (Carnevale, 2001).

### PATCHING TOGETHER A COLLEGE EXPERIENCE IN A CHANGING EDUCATIONAL MARKETPLACE

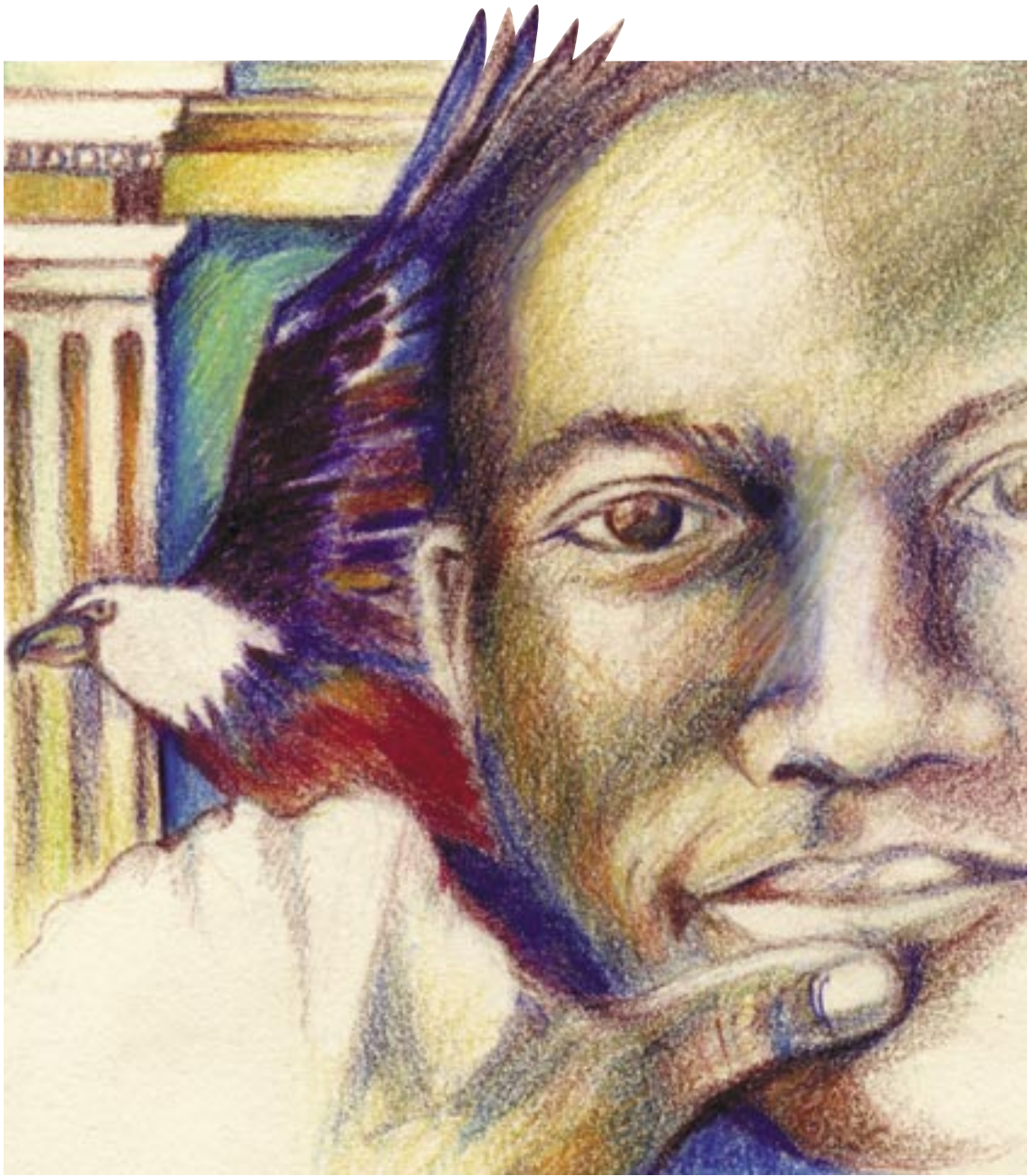
Students exercise choice among institutions as they assemble the training and education they require. They drop in, drop out, stop out, or attend more than one institution, a phenomenon often referred to as swirling. Although many students attend a single college, other students have different experiences. For example, 33 percent of students started at another institution, 12 percent have already earned a degree, and 11 percent are taking courses concurrently at another

institution (Adelman cited in McClenney, 2002). To remain competitive, community colleges must do more than offer a low-cost alternative in postsecondary education. They must also position themselves to meet the many, diverse needs of the wide variety of students who seek an assortment of credentials from these institutions.

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## DEFINING THE GAPS: ACCESS AND SUCCESS AT AMERICA'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Derek V. Price



If the past two decades are an indication of the future of federal and state higher education policy, then several trends will continue to shape access to postsecondary education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: (a) Federal financial aid will grow, but primarily in the form of student loans; (b) State appropriations will grow, but become a smaller share of general and educational expenditures; (c) Tuition and fees, as well as the total price for college, will increase faster than inflation and faster than family median income; and (d) State student financial aid will grow, but the trend toward merit-based aid rather than need-based aid will continue.

These trends have contributed to increasing opportunity gaps among students from different race, ethnic, and class backgrounds (Price, 2004; Price and Wohlford, 2003).

The trend of a widening access and attainment gap is especially troubling because most of the increase in the traditional college-age population during the next decade will consist of students of color and students from low-income homes. According to U.S. Census Bureau projections, between 2003 and 2010, 75 percent of the growth in the 18- to 24-year-old resident population will be persons of color. Persons of color tend to be proportionately overrepresented among lower-income groups. For example, the U.S. Census Current Population Survey (March 2002) indicates that 50 percent of Hispanic households and 55 percent of Black households had incomes in the lowest two quintiles of all households, yet Black and Hispanic households made up only 23 percent of all households. On the other hand, significantly fewer White households (37 percent) had incomes in the lowest two quintiles of all households despite making up about two-thirds of all households.

The community college remains the institution of choice for students of color and for students from less-affluent family backgrounds. In fact, the tradition of open access at America's community colleges provides opportunity for students who traditionally did not participate in postsecondary education (Michelau, 2003). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2003a), 88 percent of the 206 public two- and four-year colleges and universities that have 50 percent or more minority enrollment are community colleges. Similarly, in 1999-2000, 55 percent of dependent students from families with incomes below \$30,000 and 65 percent of adult students with incomes below \$20,000 were

enrolled in community colleges as first-year undergraduates (Cunningham, 2002).

Given the traditional role of community college as the gateway to postsecondary education credentials for students of color and low-income students, these demographic projections and state and federal policy trends point to particular challenges for community colleges in the next century. That is, how can the community college continue to expand access to students from underserved populations and increase the success of those students while maintaining the flexibility to respond to the local needs of government, industry, and the community of residents it serves? Defining the access and attainment gaps is a necessary first step toward aligning federal, state, and institutional policies with the needs of community college students.

### WHERE ARE THE GAPS?

The research on postsecondary access and success clearly shows that low-income students and students of color participate in college at lower rates; are less academically prepared and thus require remedial or developmental education; are averse to student loans and unlikely to qualify for merit aid; and are less likely to persist, transfer to a four-year college, or attain a postsecondary degree.

**Academic Preparation.** Low-income students and students of color overwhelmingly attend secondary schools with significantly fewer resources than wealthier, predominantly White suburban schools (Frankenberg and Lee, 2002; NCES, 1998). One of the consequences of this variability of resources for primary and secondary schools is academic preparation. In 2000, only one in five high school graduates from families with income less than \$25,000 was highly or very highly qualified for college based upon secondary school curriculum, compared with more than half of high school graduates from families with income greater than \$75,000 (NCES, 2000).

**Participation Rates.** According to the US Census Bureau, 39 percent of all White 18- to 24-year-olds were enrolled in a degree-granting institution in 1999. The comparable rates for African Americans and Hispanics were 30 percent and 19 percent, respectively. In 2000, almost 50 percent of high school completers from low-income families

enrolled in college immediately after finishing high school compared with 77 percent of high school completers from high-income families (NCES, 2003b). A similar gap is present among students from different race and ethnic backgrounds: 66 percent of White high school completers immediately enrolled in college compared with 56 percent and 49 percent of Black and Hispanic high school completers, respectively (NCES, 2003b).

**Financial Aid.** Low-income students and students of color are sensitive to the type of financial aid available. For example, students of color and low-income students perceive student borrowing as limiting their college choices. Forty-one percent of low-income borrowers felt loans limited their college choices; among different race and ethnic groups, a larger proportion of Black (44 percent) and Hispanic (51 percent) borrowers felt loans limited their college choices compared with White (35 percent) borrowers (Baum and O’Malley, 2003). In addition, low-income students and students of color are less likely to qualify for merit-based financial aid, which tends to flow to higher income and more affluent White students (Heller and Marin, 2002; Price, 2001; Heller and Nelson Laird, 1999). In 1999-2000, the average need-based federal grant for full-time, full-year students was \$2,524 (including Pell and SEOG), which covered only 49 percent of the total price of attendance at community colleges and less than 30 percent of tuition, room, and board at public four-year institutions (NCES, 2003a).

F.1 PERCEPTION THAT LOANS LIMIT COLLEGE CHOICES, BY RACE/ETHNICITY	
Hispanic	51%
Black	44%
White	35%

*Source: Baum and O’Malley, 2003*

**Remedial Education.** Estimates of the proportion of community college students in need of developmental education ranges, conservatively, between 25 percent and 50 percent, but could be as high as 75 percent (Grubb, 2001). Among 1992 high school graduates who first enrolled in community college, 44 percent scored at the lowest level or below on reading proficiency, and 30 percent scored at the lowest level or below on math proficiency (NCES, 2003c). According to The Institute for Higher Education Policy (2002), all community colleges offered remedial education courses by 1995, a fact unlikely to change, given the variety of students who enroll in community colleges.

**Persistence and Attainment.** Of students who initially enrolled in community college in 1995-1996, 35 percent attained a certificate or degree within six years (NCES, 2003c). This percentage varies considerably by race and

ethnicity; only 26 percent of Blacks and 29 percent of Hispanics attained a degree or certificate within six years, compared with 38 percent of Whites and 39 percent of Asians (NCES, 2003c). When compared with degree and certificate attainment rates for students who initially enroll at public four-year institutions (60 percent after six years), it appears that community college students are less likely to persist to a degree (NCES, 2003d).

F.2 PERSISTENCE TO CERTIFICATE OR DEGREE OVER SIX-YEAR PERIOD, BY RACE/ETHNICITY	
Black	26%
Hispanic	29%
White	38%
Asian	39%

*Source: NCES, 2003d*

**Transfer and Bachelor’s Degree Attainment.** According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2001), only one in four students initially enrolled in community college in 1989 transferred to a four-year college by 1994; however, among community college students who expected to complete a bachelor’s degree, 36 percent transferred to a four-year college or university. Among students who began their postsecondary education in 1995-1996 at community college and expected to earn a bachelor’s degree, 51 percent of students transferred to a four-year institution within six years, and 23 percent attained a degree (NCES, 2003c; NCES, 2003d). By comparison, 57 percent of students who initially enrolled in four-year institutions in 1995-1996 and expected to earn a bachelor’s degree attained a degree within six years (NCES, 2003d).

These data indicate that community colleges serve a diverse student population, many of whom aspire to a postsecondary education credential. Although students who attend community colleges can be successful, they face difficult challenges, including academic underpreparedness, high financial need, and competing work and family obligations.

### COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS AT RISK

According to the U.S. Department of Education, students with characteristics known to adversely affect persistence and attainment are at risk of not succeeding in college. These characteristics are (1) delayed postsecondary enrollment, (2) high school dropout or GED recipient, (3) part-time enrollment, (4) financial independence, (5) having dependents other than spouse, (6) single-parent status, and (7) working full-time while enrolled (see NCES, 2003c). *More than 70 percent of students who first enrolled in community colleges had at least one risk factor, and more than 50 percent had two or more risk factors* (NCES, 2003c). In contrast, 72 percent

of students who first enrolled at public four-year institutions (and 80 percent who began at private four-year colleges) had *no* risk factors (NCES, 2003c). Figure 3 illustrates this stark dichotomy between community colleges and four-year institutions based on these seven risk factors:

F.3 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS BY RISK FACTOR AND TYPE OF INSTITUTION			
At-Risk Factors for Beginning Students	Public Two-year	Public Four-year	Private Four-year
Delayed Enrollment	45.6	18.0	13.0
GED/HS dropout	12.1	1.8	2.5
Part-Time Attendance	47.4	11.2	5.7
Financial Independence	34.5	8.1	6.7
One or More Children	20.6	4.2	2.9
Single-Parent	10.0	2.4	1.5
Worked Full-Time	35.1	10.5	8.4

Source: NCES, 2003c

Among all 1995-1996 beginning postsecondary students with two or three risk factors, 36 percent earned a degree or certificate within six years. By comparison, less than 25 percent of students with two or three risk factors who initially enrolled at a community college earned a degree or certificate within six years. Because community colleges are the primary postsecondary access point for at-risk students, low-income students, and students of color, how can they better serve these populations? And how can state and federal policymakers help community colleges better serve these students?

### NEED FOR CHANGE

The data on access and attainment gaps for community college students indicate that institutional policies and state and federal postsecondary education policies need to change. Community college leaders and state policymakers should be asking a number of questions about issues and challenges that have led to the widening gaps in academic preparation, college participation, and educational attainment, and these issues must be considered in the broader context of demographic shifts and changing student needs. If community colleges are to continue providing educational opportunities for all Americans, policymakers and community college leaders must assess the needs of their communities and craft policies that close the access and attainment gaps in their states.

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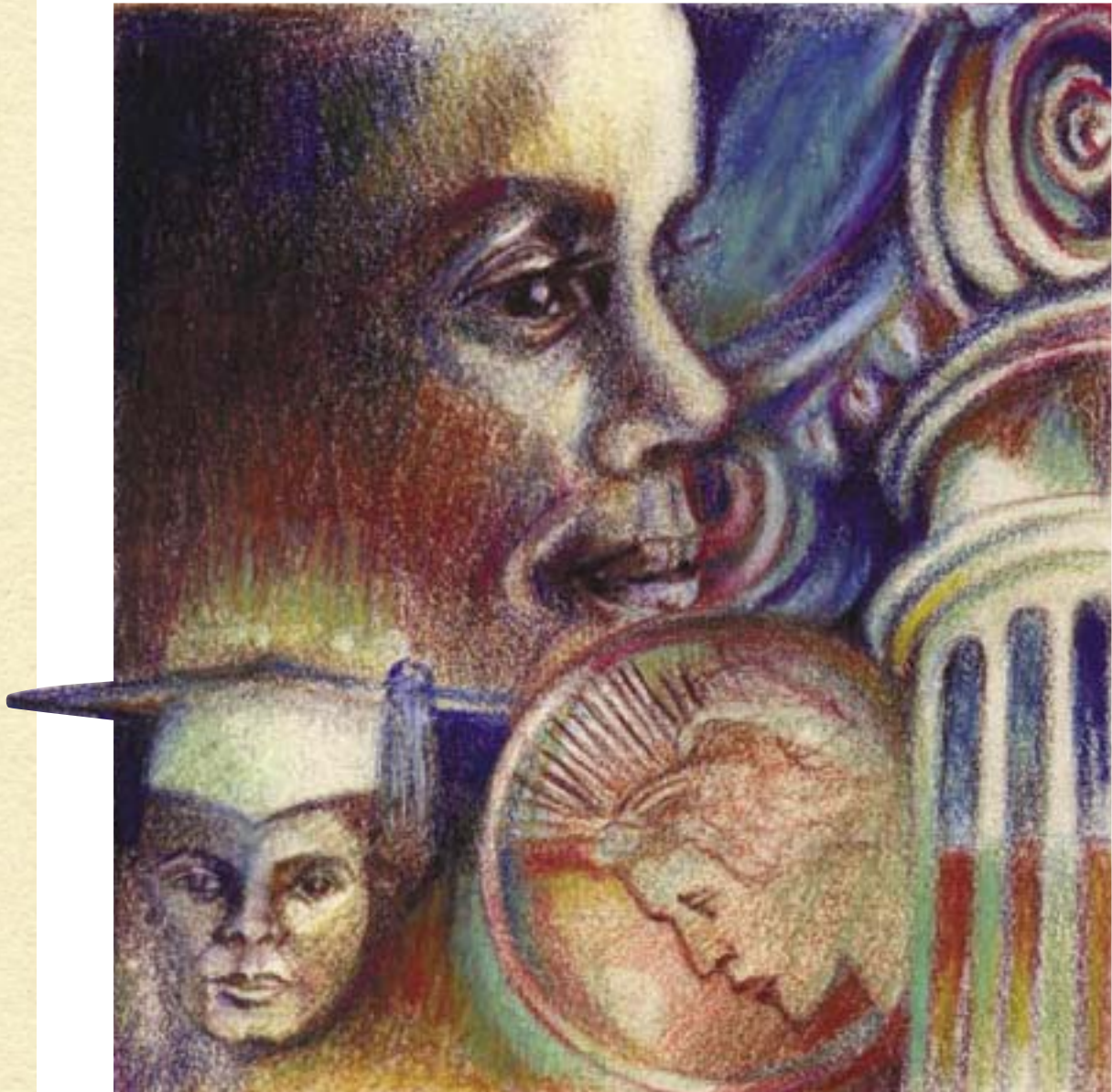
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## WHY LEARNING? THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO SOCIETY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

*Anthony P. Carnevale and Donna M. Desrochers*

In today's economy, access to postsecondary education or training has become the threshold requirement for individual career success. And successful business organizations now depend on employees with at least some education or training beyond high school. The increasing economic value of a postsecondary education is good news in a society that strives to make economic opportunity subservient to individual merit, rather than family background. Unlike the European welfare states that guarantee access to income and benefits irrespective of individual educational perfor-

### EDUCATION FOR THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

The economic pressure for increasing access to education has been building over the past half century. The economic value of human capital has accelerated, and skill requirements on the job have increased markedly since the end of World War II, constantly upping the ante on education and training for good jobs.<sup>1</sup>

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century begins, America's ability to produce and disseminate education will increasingly determine its

*Increasing a country's average level of schooling by one year can increase economic growth by about 5 to 15 percent.*

mance, our increasing reliance on education as the arbiter of economic opportunity allows us to expand opportunity without surrendering individual responsibility. As a result, we emphasize equality of educational opportunity rather than equality of economic outcomes.

But higher education is different from other economic commodities. Postsecondary education is about more than dollars and cents. It does more than provide foot soldiers for the American economy. College educators also have cultural and political missions to ensure that there is an educated citizenry that can continue to defend and promote our democratic ideals. Nevertheless, the inescapable reality is that ours is a society based on work. Those who are not equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to get, and keep, good jobs are denied full social inclusion and tend to drop out of the mainstream culture, polity, and economy. In the worst cases, they are drawn into alternative cultures, political movements, and economic activities that are a threat to mainstream American life. Hence, if postsecondary educators cannot fulfill their economic mission to help youths and adults become successful workers, they also will fail in their cultural and political missions to create good neighbors and good citizens.

economic competitiveness as the country shifts from an industrial to an information economy. Education facilitates the current transition in two ways. First, the initial stock of education in individual nations determines growth potential in the new information economy. Low levels of education stocks make it difficult to implement complex growth-inducing technologies and productivity-enhancing practices (Rosenzweig, 2000). Countries whose populations have high levels of education are fertile soil for new technology and productive institutional changes (Romer, 1990). Second, increases in a country's overall level of educational attainment cause corresponding increases in their overall rate of economic growth. Increasing a country's average level of schooling by one year can increase economic growth by about 5 to 15 percent (Krueger and Lindahl, 1999; Topel, 1998).<sup>2</sup>

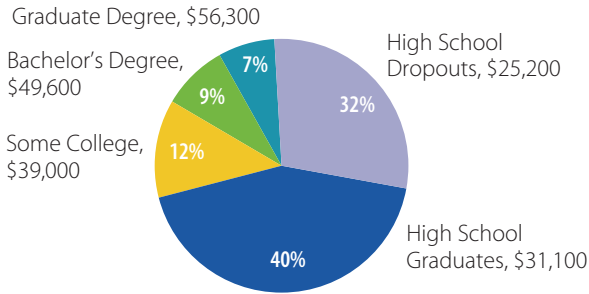
The fastest-growing and best-paying jobs have been those that require at least some college (see Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> Currently, almost 6 in 10 jobs are held by workers with at least some postsecondary education or training, compared with 2 in 10 in 1959 (see Figures 2-5).

The kind of education and skill demanded also has changed as a result of the shift to a service- and information-

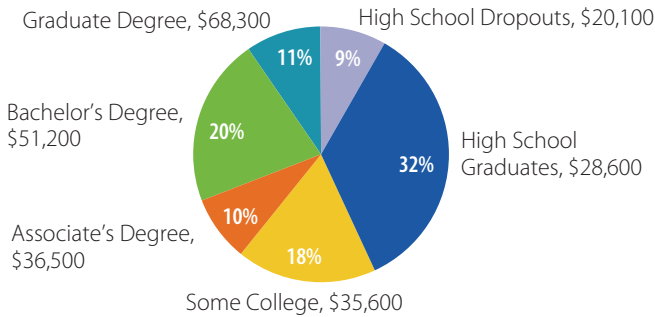
**F1. DISTRIBUTION OF EDUCATION IN JOBS, 1973 AND 2000**

Percent of prime age (30-59) employment. Earnings in 2000 dollars.

**1973**



**2000**

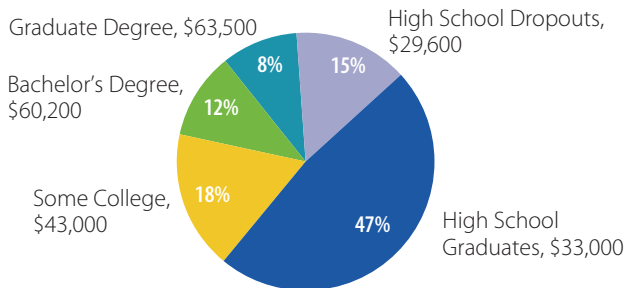


Source: Authors' Analysis of Current Population Survey (March 1974 & 2000).

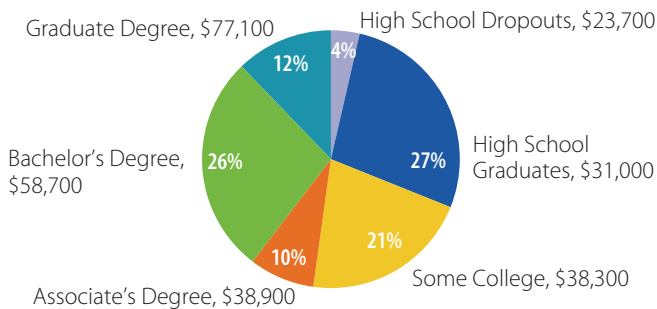
**F2. DISTRIBUTION OF EDUCATION IN OFFICE JOBS, 1973 AND 2000**

Percent of prime age (30-59) employment. Earnings in 2000 dollars.

**1973**



**2000**

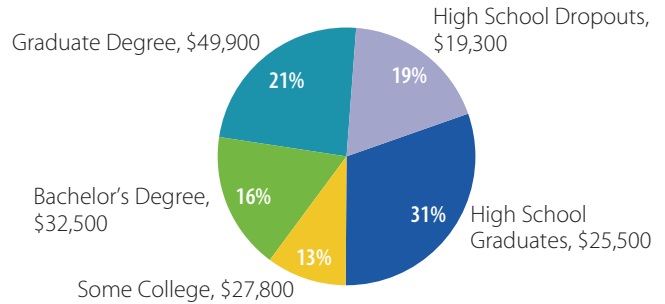


Source: Authors' Analysis of Current Population Survey (March 1974 & 2000).

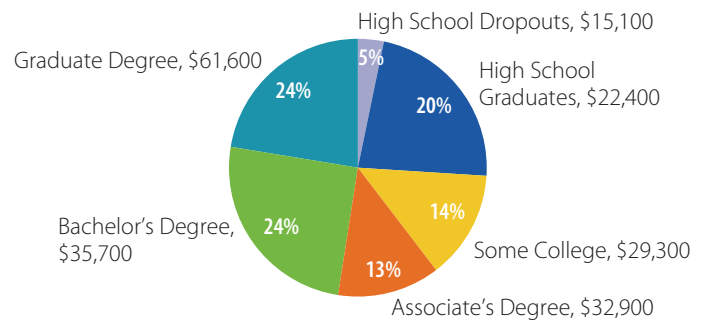
**F3. DISTRIBUTION OF EDUCATION IN EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE JOBS, 1973 AND 2000**

Percent of prime age (30-59) employment. Earnings in 2000 dollars.

**1973**



**2000**

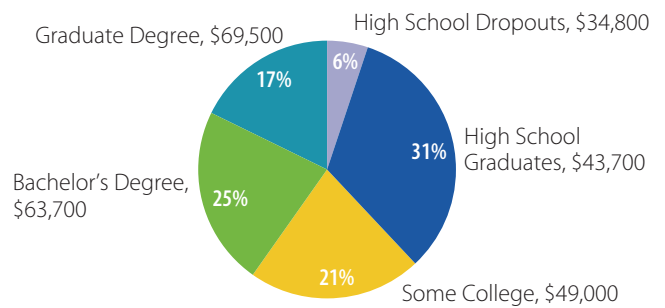


Source: Authors' Analysis of Current Population Survey (March 1974 & 2000).

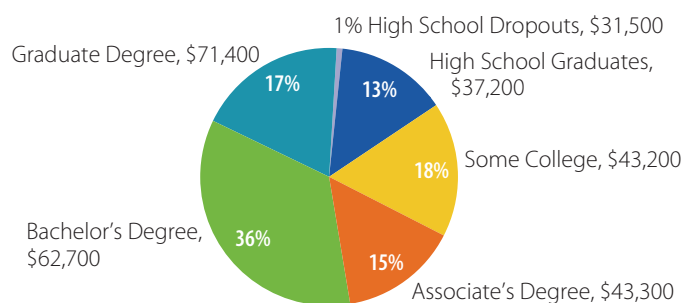
**F4. DISTRIBUTION OF EDUCATION IN TECHNOLOGY JOBS, 1973 AND 2000**

Percent of prime age (30-59) employment. Earnings in 2000 dollars.

**1973**



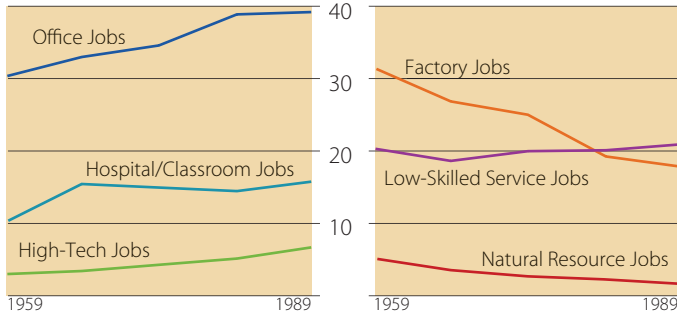
**2000**



Source: Authors' Analysis of Current Population Survey (March 1974 & 2000).

### F5. EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION, 1959-2000

Percent of total employment



More than two-thirds of workers in growing, good-paying occupations have postsecondary education

Only one-third of the workers in these declining or low-paying occupations have postsecondary education

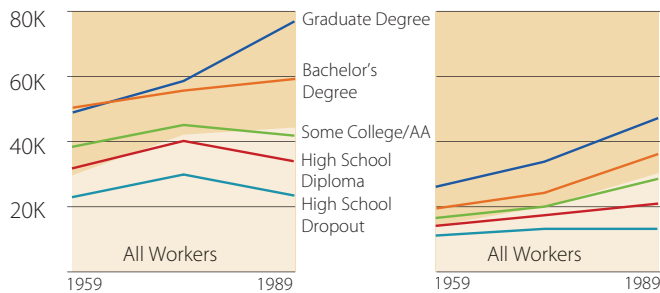
Source: Authors' Analysis of Current Population Survey (March 1974 & 2000).

### F6. EARNINGS DEPEND INCREASINGLY ON EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Percent of prime age (30-59) employment. Earnings in 2000 dollars.

#### MALE WORKERS

#### FEMALE WORKERS



Source: Authors' Analysis of Current Population Survey (March 1974 & 2000) and Public Use Microdata Sample, 1960 Census.

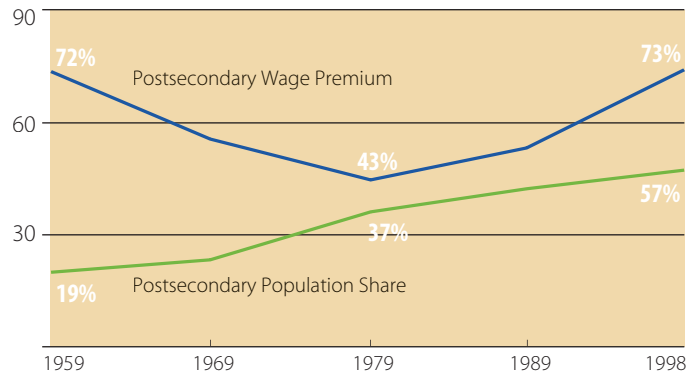
based economy. Skill requirements have expanded to include soft skills, such as problem-solving and interpersonal skills, that supplement the more narrow cognitive and occupational skills sought in the industrial economy. Attitudinal skills, such as a positive “cognitive style,” also are growing in importance because they allow workers to cope with the accelerating pace of change in the workplace.

### LEARNING AND EARNING

Increasing skill requirements are beneficial for the most educated and skilled workers, but they are ever more problematic for the least educated and skilled. As the United States has increasingly turned to workers with at least some college or postsecondary training to fulfill a wide variety of labor-market slots, the least educated workers have been left with few opportunities to access good-paying jobs. Since the 1980s, the real inflation-adjusted earnings of male high school graduates and dropouts have declined precipitously, while the earnings of college-educated workers have increased (see Figure 6).

### F7. THE DEMAND FOR COLLEGE-EDUCATED WORKERS HAS RISEN FASTER THAN SUPPLY SINCE 1979

Wage premium includes earnings of prime age (30-59) workers with at least some college relative to high school graduates.



Source: Authors' Analysis of Current Population Survey (March 1974 & 2000) and Public Use Microdata Sample, 1960 Census.

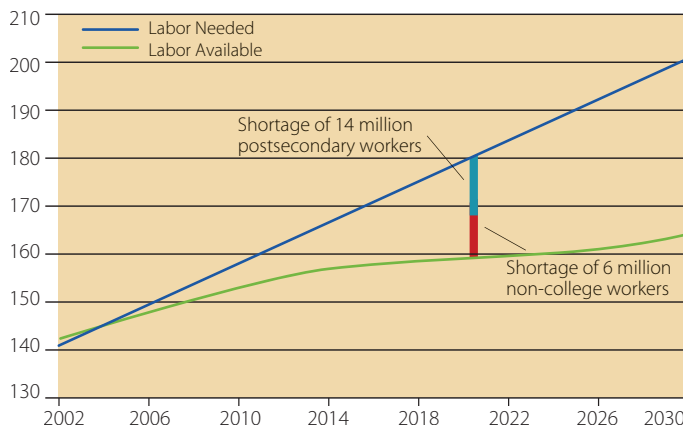
Among women, earnings are rising because of increased labor force participation rates and because the service- and information-based economy is more accessible than was the industrial economy. However, as with men, the earnings gap has increased substantially between college-educated women and those with a high school diploma or less. Overall, the wage premium for experienced college-educated workers, compared with high school educated workers, has increased from about 43 to 73 percent since 1979, in spite of the fact that the supply of college-educated workers has doubled over the same period (see Figure 7).

The dramatic increase in the wage premium paid to college-educated workers since the 1980s is the best evidence that the knowledge economy is here to stay. It also is the counter argument that college-educated workers are “taking jobs that do not require college” or that “employers are just hiring degrees,” especially since these same employers reduced the wage premium for college-educated workers in the 1970s. Nor is it plausible that the college-level job applicants in the 1980s were smarter than those a decade before by such a large degree.

While workers with associate’s degrees earn less, on average, than those with bachelor’s degrees, 83 percent of workers with associate’s degrees have earnings that are similar to bachelor’s degree holders (see Figure 8). Differences often depend on students’ majors and what they do after they graduate. After separating the contributing effects of workers’ different characteristics, women with associate’s degrees in business, for instance, earn about 18 percent more than otherwise similar high school graduates; the returns for social science degrees are about 38 percent (Grubb, 1996). Overall, associate’s degrees generally provide workers with a wage boost of about 20 to 30 percent over a high school diploma (Grubb, 1999; Kane and Rouse, 1995; Leigh and

**F10. LABOR DEMAND WILL OUTSTRIP SUPPLY**

*Expected Labor Forces (in millions) and Labor Force Demand (2002-2030)*



Source: Adapted from Employment Policy Foundation, 2001.

We may not be able to afford all the postsecondary education and training we need. Financing will be difficult, as competition for resources throughout the education pipeline will force hard fiscal choices. Preparation for college begins in preschool, and increasing access to postsecondary education requires increases in investment in the quantity and quality of education throughout the entire pre-K-16

to finance an “adequate education” for all students could cost an additional \$52 billion, increasing current education expenditures for the nation as a whole to \$387 billion.<sup>4</sup>

While the costs of delivering the education needed will be high, the costs of failure will be even higher. Failure to meet new standards will jeopardize America’s future competitiveness in the global economy. The United States is currently number one in the global economic race but mediocre performances on international assessments of educational quality suggest that its preeminent status is living on borrowed time. Its current edge in global competition is based more on size and market-based flexibility and less on the quality of the American workforce. In the future, as the European Union and other global trading coalitions achieve scale and learn flexibility, and as financial capital and technology become even more footloose, the quality of human capital will become the decisive competitive edge in global competition.

The new stakes are particularly high for individuals because of America’s increasing reliance on education as the means to economic opportunity. With the emphasis on equality of educational opportunity rather than equality of economic outcomes, individual educational performance ultimately determines access to income and benefits.

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system. The cost of developing a network of pre-kindergarten systems is estimated at \$40 billion, and the added costs of providing postsecondary education for Generation Y could reach \$19 billion by 2015 (Carnevale and Fry, 2001; The Century Foundation, 2000).

Implementing new state standards in K-12 education that prepare all students for some form of postsecondary education or training will also be costly, especially as many states are facing budget shortfalls. The greatest need will be in school districts with high proportions of economically disadvantaged, special needs, and limited English proficient (LEP) students. The cost of educating these students so that they meet state standards is roughly twice as high as for other students (Augenblick and Myers, 2002; CEFEE, 2002; Duncombe, 2002). The increased resources needed

And as economic and demographic changes increase the demand for workers with at least some college, income differentials between the most and least skilled will continue to grow, threatening the egalitarian base at the core of America’s culture.

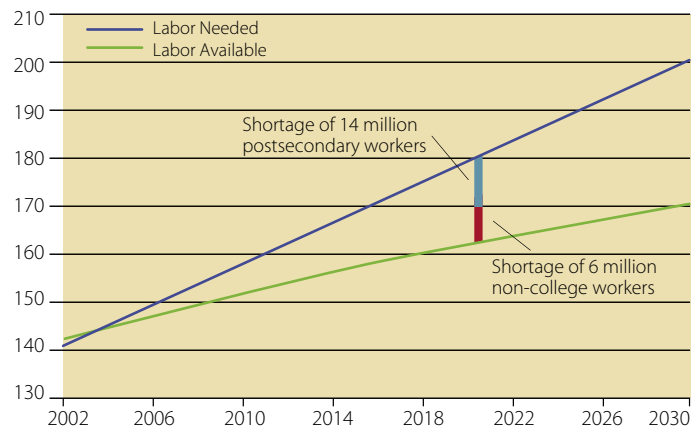
*Anthony P. Carnevale is a Senior Fellow with the National Center on Education and the Economy. Donna M. Desrochers is a Director of Policy Research with the Educational Testing Service.*

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## (Notes)

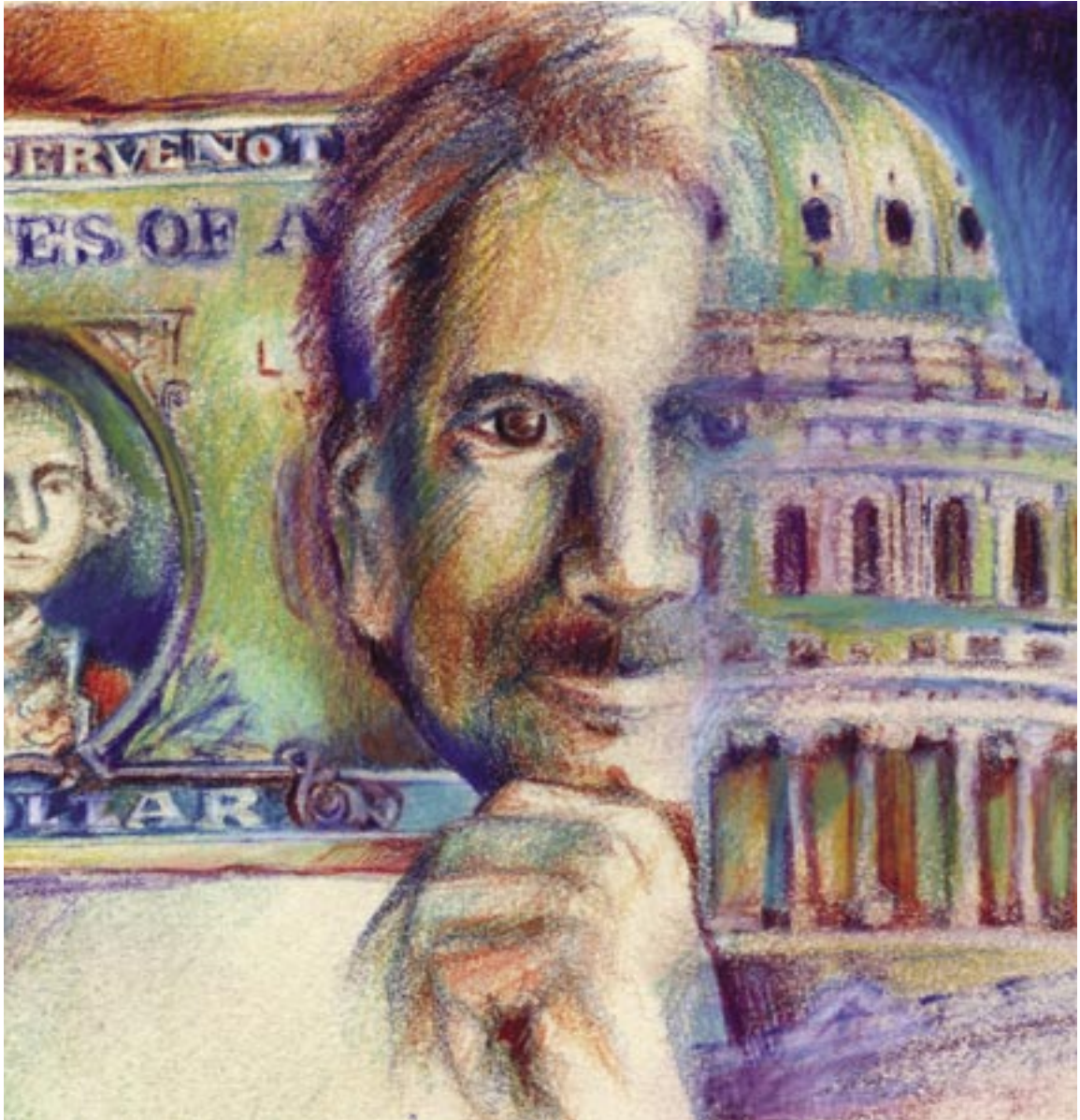
- <sup>1</sup> The notion that knowledge increases economic growth and productivity, skill requirements are growing, and people are becoming more skilled is a safe bet. The economic value of knowledge has increased inexorably for roughly 3,000 years since early efficiencies in agriculture provided food surpluses that freed up human labor for more complex tasks (McNeil, 1999). Increasing complexity requires more formal teaching and learning. At the same time, daily life and work in environments of growing complexity also enhance knowledge and reasoning ability as we learn by doing (Greenfield, 1998; Neisser, 1998; Schooler, 1998). The empirical evidence of the synergy between social complexity and new learning ability is that the performance on standardized tests of human reasoning power has been rising about three points every decade ever since testing began early in the 1900s. For instance, the average scores for Americans taking the Wechsler-Binet or the Stanford reasoning test have increased by 15 to 25 points since 1918 (Neisser, 1998). In Great Britain, scores on the Raven Progressive Matrices test of abstract reasoning show that score levels that included the bottom

90 percent of the population born in 1877, include only the bottom 5 percent of the population born in 1967 (Flynn, 1998). These increases in basic reasoning ability have occurred in spite of the fact that the highest fertility rates persist among the lowest scorers. Although the dispersion in the scores is not changing, scores are rising at similar rates across the board.

- <sup>2</sup> The overall increases in gross domestic product from an additional year of schooling are roughly similar to the earnings returns to individuals from an additional year of schooling (Krueger and Lindahl, 1999).
- <sup>3</sup> The phrase, “at least some college,” as well as the term “college-educated,” includes all those who have had coursework that leads to

associate or baccalaureate degrees, including both those who attain a degree as well as those who pursue college coursework but do not attain a degree.

- <sup>4</sup> Various state studies on adequate funding levels recommend increases in basic expenditures ranging from 4 to 37 percent to enable all students to meet state standards (Augenblick and Myers, 2001, 2002; Duncombe, 2002; Griffith, 2001). An additional \$53 billion in education expenditures assumes a 20 percent increase in spending, as well as an extra 130 percent in per pupil spending for each special-needs student and an extra 100 percent in per pupil spending for each economically disadvantaged or LEP student.





# KEEPING AMERICA'S PROMISE: A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR STATE AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS

*Katherine Boswell*



“Opportunity in this country is more and more a function of education.” That is the clear message of the opening challenge essay and the accompanying working briefs in this *Keeping America’s Promise* collection. Its close corollary is that “individual educational attainment levels are powerfully correlated with many of the things we as Americans care about in our society.”

Education matters. Those with the most education are less likely to experience violence, addiction, illness, or

colleges (Cohen and Brower, 1996). By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, revenue sources in most areas of the country had shifted, and on average community colleges now depend upon state support and student tuition and fees for 65 percent of their budgets (ECS, 2000).

While colleges in 26 states still collect support from a local tax base, the trend for the past three decades has been for states to assume an increasing percentage of community college operating costs. With the recent downturn in

*Community college leaders express profound concerns about the shift from need-based to merit-based financial aid.*

incarceration. The poverty rate in households headed by a high school dropout is 10 times higher than that in households headed by a college graduate. And, as Carnevale points out, increasing the average level of schooling by even one year can increase a country’s economic growth by 5 to 15 percent. If America is to fulfill the promises that have been implied, if not directly made, to its people and maintain its status as a land of opportunity and leader in the global economy, then policymakers and educators alike must carefully consider the serious challenges raised by the writers in these pages.

Undoubtedly, community colleges must and will play a critical role in educating and training a growing percentage of our population for the requirements of a globally competitive workforce in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But what is not as apparent is whether the public policy frameworks are in place that will support America’s community colleges as they gear up to meet the challenges that lie ahead. The policy issues are clear, from funding and distribution of resources to student access and success.

## ***The Move From Local to State Support***

From their creation in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present, there have been significant shifts in the sources of financial support for community colleges. In 1918, local funds made up 94 percent of the support for junior

the economy resulting in the most serious fiscal crisis to hit states in half a century, colleges have experienced drastic rollbacks in state support. At the same time, they have also been confronted with burgeoning enrollments from students seeking new education and training opportunities.

## ***A Clash Over Student Share of Cost***

An ongoing conflict from the earliest days of the junior college movement has been the question of how much students should pay to attend a two-year institution. The 1947 Truman Commission recommended the establishment of a national system of two-year community colleges within commuting distance of every American, stressing the importance of making public education free through Grade 14. But the decreasing availability of local support, exacerbated by the precipitous drop in state allocations for higher education over the past few years, has led to significant reliance by community colleges on student tuition and fees.

Concerns over dramatic tuition increases and the resulting impact on student access have once again amplified discussion among some state and federal policymakers about the appropriate student share of cost for the first two years of a college education. Politicians in South Carolina, Massachusetts, and Texas, among others, have proposed making community college education available at no or reduced cost to their citizens.

### **Shift From Need-Based to Merit-Based Aid**

In 1997 President Bill Clinton signed legislation authorizing a federal tax credit called the “Hope Scholarship,” modeled after the merit-based scholarship program of the same name in Georgia. One of the stated goals of the tax credit is to provide universal access to at least two years of college. Thirteen states have initiated their own merit programs to encourage greater participation in higher education (ECS, 2001).

While applauding the goals of making access to the first two years of postsecondary education universal, many community college leaders express profound concerns about this shift from need-based to merit-based financial aid programs. Such programs typically do not benefit the part-time, low-income, nontraditional community college student. Public investments in merit-based student aid have significantly increased over the past decade; however, over

*Access and attainment gaps make it clear that institutional practices and state and federal policies need to change.*

the same time period, the purchasing power of the Pell grant, the largest need-based financial aid program, has decreased by half (NCPPHE, 2002).

### **Battles Over Shares of the State Higher Education Pie**

Surveys of current high school students indicate that 80 percent intend to continue on to higher education, and almost half of all undergraduate students are now enrolling at public community colleges. These traditional-age students are being joined by adults who are returning to postsecondary education in search of new job skills in an uncertain economy. These combined factors suggest that enrollment pressures on two-year colleges are only going to increase.

Indeed, spiraling student enrollments are sparking significant battles in some legislatures over the appropriate distribution of increasingly limited state higher education resources. Leaders of many four-year colleges and universities fear that discussions about higher education funding will be increasingly dominated by issues related to enrollment growth, which will tend to benefit community colleges. They question funding policies that in their view provide for access at the expense of ensuring quality at upper-division colleges and universities.

### **Creating Seamless Systems**

Fiscal issues are not the only battleground in the postsecondary policy wars. A recent study (Wellman, 2003) “uncovered a vital connection between effective state policies and the success of students who transfer from two-year to four-year institutions” (NCPPHE, 2004). The study identifies ineffective state policies that tend to serve as barriers in the transfer process from two-year to four-year institutions, discouraging students from attaining baccalaureate degrees. Ensuring seamless articulation and transfer between community colleges and four-year institutions is critical because it has become “the single most important means for low-income and minority students to attain their baccalaureates” (NCPPHE, 2004).

Policy concerns on student transitions, however, extend beyond two-year to four-year articulation issues. There is increasing recognition of the need for community colleges

to work more closely with the high schools in helping ensure that graduates have the academic skills they need to succeed in higher education and/or technical training opportunities. Postsecondary enrollment options, including concurrent enrollment, middle or early college initiatives, and student bridge programs like Upward Bound and Gear-Up, are recognized for the important role they play in encouraging high school students to continue on to college. But such programs necessitate new K-16 policy frameworks that require cooperation and collaboration among our traditionally disconnected educational sectors.

### **Other Policy Conflicts**

Questions continue to be raised on the nation’s editorial pages and in state capitals across the land regarding the high percentage of entering college students who require remediation. Regardless of the rhetoric, for the foreseeable future community colleges are going to need to continue providing the basic-skills education necessary to help students succeed in college-level academic work. And state and institutional leaders will continue heated debates over who should pay and what is to be done to improve college readiness.

Other challenges have been raised by the courts and citizen initiatives that call into question institutional affirmative-action policies and programs. While such initiatives

have typically been targeted at universities' selective admissions policies, minority outreach programs and targeted scholarships at community colleges have often fallen victim in the ensuing policy debates.

### CHALLENGES FOR POLICYMAKERS AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS

The data on access and attainment gaps for community college students make it very clear that institutional practices and state and federal postsecondary education policies need to change. Educators and state policymakers have a joint responsibility to consider carefully the trends and challenges facing these open-access institutions. They must adopt wise, effective policies and practices that will ensure the educational opportunities that are the fulfillment of America's democratic ideals. *State policymakers* must address the realities of escalating access demand at a time of severe fiscal constraints brought on by sharp cutbacks in public appropriations. They must also consider the increasingly diverse nontraditional student population, many of whom come to campus with significant needs for academic support. At the same time, *community college leaders* have a responsibility to re-examine their own practices and assumptions, holding themselves accountable for adopting cost-effective and learning-centered strategies that help ensure student success.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATE POLICYMAKERS

State leaders should consider adopting a change in focus from the endless debates between colleges and universities over institutional capacity. They should avoid the false dichotomy reflected in access versus quality arguments, centering instead on identifying the education and training needs of their state's citizens. Resulting policies should provide incentives to colleges to respond to these pressing requirements and meet state priorities. Policymakers must hold institutions accountable for educational outcomes while providing the necessary fiscal investments in promising academic initiatives that meet the needs of students.

With structural deficits in state higher education funding projected for most states into the indefinite future, state policymakers must also become better informed and base policy decisions on data rather than parochial political interests. A constructive step is to encourage the participation of public community colleges in such data-driven programs as the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and the Achieving the Dream Initiative, recently launched by the Lumina Foundation.

Policymakers should also take advantage of a growing body of national research and state-by-state data sets. A key example is the "Measuring Up" report card on higher

education, issued biennially by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and allowing states to benchmark their own educational policies and performance against other states. Also beneficial is participation in projects such as the National Collaborative for Postsecondary Education Policy, a joint initiative of the National Center for Higher Education Management Services, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and the Education Commission of the States. Such projects help public leaders rethink fundamental assumptions about how to achieve the public purposes of higher education.

By providing incentives for institutions to collaborate across educational sectors, supporting student unit data systems that track students and their performance at every level, and rewarding those institutions that meet expectations, states can create more seamless systems that overcome artificial or unnecessary educational barriers to student success.

### Policy Questions for Discussion

State policymakers should consider the following 10 sets of questions and issues raised by the *Keeping America's Promise* Initiative.

#### 1. *Funding Mechanisms.*

- Is participation in public higher education a private or public good? How is that value reflected in our state's policies and practices?
- If an educated citizenry is our state's goal, what changes should we consider for moving away from funding based primarily on full-time enrollment of traditional-age students and toward mechanisms that encourage returning adults who seek additional education, training, or lifelong learning opportunities?

#### 2. *Postsecondary Participation Rates. Although surveys of high school students indicate 80 percent intend to attend college, the current national college-going rate is only 56.7 percent, with the best-performing state having 69.4 percent of students enrolling in college after high school.*

- What are current participation rates of both 18- to 24-year-olds and older working adults in postsecondary education for our state?
- How can we increase our state's participation rate to match the benchmark participation rates of the best-performing states?
- What difference will a higher participation rate in education and training make to our state's economic vitality?

**3. Access and Capacity Issues.** *Given demographic trends cited in this report, community colleges are going to experience increase in demand even without an increase in college participation rates.*

- How can our state plan to meet the resource and capacity needs of our two-year colleges today and into the future, including times of budgetary constraints?
- How can our state manage the mix of state appropriations and other revenue sources to ensure the fiscal viability of our community colleges?
- What are the economic and social costs if we don't increase postsecondary capacity and students are turned away?
- Where are we going to find the fiscal investments and innovations to meet future demand?

**4. Remediation.** *Many states are directing more remediation and developmental education activities away from four-year colleges and universities to community colleges.*

- Has this state directed community colleges to assume the primary role in providing remediation to students who lack college-level skills?
- If so, are we providing adequate financial support to accomplish the work?
- What is the return on public investments in remediation for students who lack college-level skills in our state?
- What state policies support the delivery of remedial education at community colleges?
- Are colleges with successful programs rewarded?

**5. Participation and Attainment Gaps Between Different Racial and Socioeconomic Groups.**

- Do the data show that there are gaps in postsecondary participation among different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups in our state?
- How can we do a better job of encouraging less-represented groups to participate?
- Are state appropriations, tuition levels, and financial aid programs aligned to expand opportunity for community college students in our state, especially students historically underrepresented in postsecondary education?
- Does the state collect and monitor data about student persistence and attainment, requiring that the data be broken down by income level and ethnicity of students?

**6. Resources for Support of Nontraditional Students.**

- Does the current allocation of state higher education resources adequately support the colleges that serve English as a Second Language students, adult learners, and other groups that reflect the emergent majority of postsecondary education students?

**7. State Funding Formulas.**

- To what extent do traditional higher levels of state support for upper-division institutions than for two-year institutions represent a state's legitimate interest in creating a diversified system of higher education?
- To what extent do these differences represent inequities that are not in a state's best interest and which may be counter to the policy of providing affordable access to all citizens for postsecondary education and training?
- Does our funding formula differentiate between and provide adequate support for high-cost versus lower-cost academic and technical programs?

**8. K-16 Education Systems.**

- How can our state use its funding leverage to encourage greater cooperation and more seamless transitions between K-12, community colleges, and public universities?
- Does our state require four-year institutions to accept general education and academic major credits earned at community colleges?
- Have we adopted a common core curriculum, common course numbering, or other policy mechanisms that help encourage student transitions between the two- and four-year sectors?

**9. Collaboration and Community Partnerships.**

- What state policies support partnerships among local organizations, businesses, and community colleges to facilitate training and education opportunities linked with well-paying jobs?

**10. Higher Education Accountability.**

- Have we as policymakers gone beyond the traditional one-size-fits-all approach to higher education policy to design appropriate and meaningful performance indicators that reflect the discrete mission of the community college?
- Do our state's performance indicators take into consideration the distinctive differences among institutions (e.g., rural or urban colleges with a heavy

technological focus versus those with a primary role of transfer education)?

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS AND TRUSTEES

In a time of increasing demand and shrinking resources, it is somewhat understandable that community college leaders are tempted to play the blame game or view themselves as victims while avoiding responsibility for some of the difficult challenges that are within institutional control. It is easy enough to fault others: “If the high schools would only send us better prepared students. . . .” or, “If we were funded adequately to do what needs to be done, we could. . . .” But as McClenney’s essay states so clearly, this is the work for which these colleges were created, and these are the students who need our help. In light of these challenges, community colleges’ traditional reliance upon anecdote rather than data-supported evidence to report on performance may no longer be good enough.

College leaders must begin to ask hard questions of themselves and their institutions: Do we regularly collect, analyze, and report on student learning and persistence? Does our college break down student performance and persistence data by age, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, and other variables to identify groups of students who may be falling behind? Has our college tried to identify and adopt successful practices identified by the League’s Learning College Project, or other policy and practice initiatives that focus on student achievement?

### Policy Questions for Discussion

These debates raise the following 10 sets of policy issues and questions that college leaders should consider as they seek to shape institutional policies and practices to meet state and local needs:

**1. *The Open Door. Traditional wisdom holds that it is easier to serve better-prepared, full-time students than nontraditional students who have significant remediation, English language, or other student support needs.***

- With increased access demands and pressures at a time of severe fiscal constraints, what policies can we adopt that will ensure access to those students who may be hardest to reach, but who are most in need of our services?
- How do we deal with capacity constraints without favoring one group over another?
- How do we ensure that the traditional open door of the community college remains open?

**2. *Needs of Nontraditional Students.***

- With strong demand from traditional-age students, how do we balance the needs of adults 25 and older who are returning to community colleges?
- How do we shape college programs, services, and systems to meet the needs of nontraditional students, including those who are less engaged on campus because of family or work responsibilities?

**3. *Needs of the Employed Student.***

- What are the implications of having a high proportion of “employees who attend school” in our community college classrooms as opposed to “students who work”?
- How do we accommodate each group’s distinct needs?

**4. *Accountability.***

- Have we embraced a culture of evidence and adopted data-based decision making that informs our institutional policies and practices?
- Do we regularly collect, analyze, and report data on student learning and persistence?

**5. *The Opportunity and Attainment Gap.***

- Does institutional enrollment data show an opportunity gap or lower participation rates by socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity than is represented in our institution’s service area?
- Are low-income students and students of color, especially African Americans and Hispanics, succeeding at rates comparable to their enrollment proportions at our institution?

**6. *Remediation and Basic Skills.***

- Are remedial and developmental education courses providing pathways to vocational certificates and academic degrees, or are they holding zones for students who eventually drop out?
- How has our community college responded to the demographic changes among our student population, particularly the growing English as a Second Language population and the increasing needs of adults to learn basic skills?

**7. *Transfer and Articulation.***

- How many four-year institutions does our community college partner with to facilitate the successful transfer of our students?

- How well do our students do once they transfer?
- Do we use data on student performance after transfer to reform our academic programs and practices?

### 8. *Noncredit and Workforce Development.*

- Are the noncredit courses offered by our college aligned with job opportunities in the local community?
- Do we work closely with program advisory committees from business and industry to ensure that our curriculum is up to date and preparing our students with skills needed in the real world?

### 9. *Financial Aid.*

- Do we know the impact of recent increases in tuition and fees on our at-risk student population?
- What is our institution doing to offset a greater reliance on student loans than grants and to make need-based aid available to part-time and other nontraditional students and at-risk populations?

### 10. *Supportive Learning Environments.*

- Given that, nationwide, 70 percent of students who first enrolled in community colleges had at least one risk factor and more than 50 percent had two or more, what institutional policies can we adopt that will help overcome these challenges to persistence and degree attainment?

## EPILOGUE

An old adage suggests that “one will catch more flies with honey....” As policymakers and college leaders consider the reforms required to create more responsive education systems, it may be useful to consider the value of incentives as a tool for promoting institutional change, in addition to traditional regulatory approaches. Do we reward or provide positive reinforcement to those institutions willing to tackle the toughest issues or challenges? Or do we inadvertently bring truth to another adage, “no good deed goes unpunished”? Is there congruence between what we say we value and what we support with resources? Do we inspect what we say we expect?

As we conclude this examination of the policy issues related to keeping America’s promise, it might be worthwhile to repeat Kay McClenney’s powerful challenge to each of us:

“Today we acknowledge again, more than 35 years after Dr. King’s death, that even in a society as powerful and wealthy as ours, even as good as we think we try to be, there are people who are not living the American dream. Still there are young people who do not believe that the dream is their dream. Still there are people who should be in our colleges but are not. And there are people who are there now but won’t achieve their goals. There are promises that have been broken and promises that just haven’t been kept...yet.” (McClenney, p. 17)

It is the sincere hope of the League for Innovation in the Community College and the Education Commission of the States that this report will stimulate a fresh dialogue among education leaders and policymakers at the state and local level and a renewed commitment to ensuring that we are a nation that keeps its promises.

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