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AUTHOR Cohen, Arthur M.
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ABSTRACT

Community colleges, in order to maintain a credible place within higher education during the 1980's, will have to integrate arts and sciences instruction into a curriculum provided for an increasing percentage of non-transfer students. This increase, due to an expected intensification of the competition from universities for a shrinking pool of 18-year-olds, will result in an increased emphasis on remedial, vocational, and community education. In the face of this shift from transfer education, community colleges should guard against the expansion of quasi-educative activities devoid of instructional content and goals. Such activities, including recreational programs, fairs, and the offering of credit for experience, fall outside the definition of formal education and reduce institutional credibility in the eyes of the public. Further, colleges must abandon the practice of limiting liberal arts education to academically inclined transfer students. This can be accomplished by: (1) sharing in the activities of liberal arts organizations such as the Community College Humanities Association, (2) providing interdisciplinary liberal arts courses, (3) offering liberal arts non-credit options, and (4) incorporating liberal arts instruction into vocational and remedial programs. (JP)

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New Decade, New Campus, New Issues

Arthur M. Cohen

Speech presented to the faculty and staff of Oakton College, Morton Grove, Illinois, February 19, 1980

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New Decade, New Campus, New Issues

Arthur M. Cohen

It is a great pleasure for me to return to Oakton College in its tenth anniversary year. I have stayed in close touch with developments at the college primarily because of my work with President Koehnline on various committees and councils over the years. Dr. Koehnline is a true humanist and educational leader. The college reflects his ideals in both areas. That he has maintained an atmosphere of collegiality in an era of antagonism between faculty and administrators is a tribute not only to his managerial skills but also to his qualities as a sensitive human being.

This year you will be moving to some new buildings and adjustments will have to be made. There will be more committees, more forms, more checkbacks, additional levels of bureaucracy. But it is possible to avoid the worst of those blights. And one way to avoid them is to build the new buildings without the pretext of their being a separate campus. You may well want to consider one campus with the buildings somewhat separated; you could even number the first of the buildings in the new location, number 7, to follow on the six you have here. Thus you would have no separate campus dean any more than you have separate building supervisors now.

The idea of one college on several locations is definitely a trend. I refer you to an article in the February 12 issue of "The San Jose Mercury News" which discusses the vicissitudes faced by the West Valley Community College District under its newly elected board. The Board is pledged to

reduce administration as their first effort in cutting costs and the reduced administration is to come from merging the separate campuses into a one college, different locations concept. Other examples of similar agonizing changes might be mentioned; the point is that the 1980s will see many such consolidations. It seems the wrong time for you to be moving toward a multi-campus mode.

When I came here first in 1970 I had just completed a book, Dateline '79. This book was a fanciful look at the way community colleges might develop in the 1970s. I say, "fanciful," because I did not expect that colleges would develop in quite the ways I articulated. It was the quixotic dream of a person who believed that an educational institution should center all its efforts on educating people.

The book had several points woven around the theme of defined outcomes. The community college was seen as a learning institution in which varied media were used, all with the intent of teaching toward common objectives. My hypothetical college of '79 was one institution with several locales. Its registration procedures made it extremely easy for students to matriculate in courses. It had a core curriculum of communications, science, social science, and humanities. There was no counseling outside the classes, no academic probation or tracking. The library had no hard cover books. There were centralized data processing, a reduced emphasis on occupational education, and a striving for general education of all the citizens in the district. The faculty were seen as managers of this learning enterprise.

When I came here in 1970 I emphasized the points that I had made in my version of the ideal community college. I said that instruction, defined as a sequence of events organized deliberately so that learning occurs, should be the hallmark of the college. I felt that the community colleges' custodial functions and sorting and certifying activities should be subordinate to instruction. I made a plea for the use of objectives: specific, defined learning outcomes that could be used as communication links between teachers and students, objectives that reveal the value positions of the instructors and focus the students' attention on information that is important to learn. In my 1970 talk I placed the faculty member in the center as the manager of the learning enterprise. And I saw the faculty as a professional group defining its own responsibilities, accepting accountability for its effects on its clients. I predicted that the period of unionism would be traumatic but that it would be passed through without changing college functions.

In that talk I also discussed trends in community college development in the 1970s. I saw an expansion in the custodial function and I have been proved right but for the wrong reasons. I thought that the custodial function was to prevent the downward mobility of the children of the middle class. Accordingly even those young people who were not quite as bright or ready as early as were their professional parents would find college a holding place where they could remain until they matured, a college where they would be prevented from falling out of class in both meanings of the term. As it turned out the expansion in financial aids offered the greatest impetus to the custodial function. For many people going to college has become a job, a way of making a living. And I predicted a decrease in the sorting and certifying function, a prediction that has certainly been borne out. Many

institutions have effectually abandoned grade marks. We offer withdrawal without penalty until the last day of the term, and an assortment of "Rs," "Ys," "Zs," and other alphabetical notations to accommodate the phenomenon of students' course taking behavior with the impositions laid down by funding agencies. Some of these grades are used to note a student who has attended class for the entire term but has done no work at all.

By the time I arrived at Oakton in 1970 you had planned a Directory of Courses. I am pleased to see that the Directory is still being published and am proud to say that it is one of the best of its kind. There are not ten comparable Directories in the United States. The Directory sprang from the concept of specific measurable objectives and although it is not perfect it is useful. In reviewing the current issue of the Directory I noticed some elaborate point scale grading systems that seemed not to communicate a great deal and some uninformative generalizations such as, "Students are expected to attend class," and "The final grade is determined by the performance on the exams." Some of the ommissions were notable, for example, "Texts to be announced," and the Directory seems to have strayed far from the concept of defined outcomes. I noted statements such as, "Some of the topics covered in the course will be..." instead of "At the conclusion of this course you will be able..." Not to carp however it is important that the corpus of the directory is there even though its evolution has been towards softness in language. My recommendation would be for a series of one day in-service workshops on preparing tighter copy for the Directory.

Having given my impressions of Oakton College and its contemporary context I would move now to three points regarding community colleges of the 1980s. The first of these is accepting the loss of the transfer function. For my remarks on the transfer function I am indebted to John Lombardi, a colleague at the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges, who has just completed topical paper No. 70, The Decline of Transfer Education. In this paper which is available to you free of charge upon request, he notes that transfer was the original purpose of the community colleges and that it was quite successful. In 1929 80 percent of the students in California intended transferring to a senior institution. Between 1940 and 1960 the figure of those declaring transfer intent nationally hovered at around two-thirds of the student body. By the early 1970s the national figures showed that fewer than half the students intended transferring.

Illinois colleges reflect that decline in intent. According to ICCB figures, in 1968, 56 percent of the students declared transfer intent; in 1970, the figure had dropped to 44 percent; in 1974, it was 37 percent and in 1978, only 32 percent of the matriculants declared transfer intentions. It is important to note that these figures themselves may be high because students are faced with a forced choice in many states which places them in the position of choosing transfer studies. When they matriculate they are asked which occupational program they intend pursuing and if they have not made a firm occupational choice they are placed in the transfer category. This category thus includes students who may have no intention of transferring but who are taking courses only for personal interest or for exploration. It is important to note also that the total number of students intending to transfer is increasing but that [illegible] community college functions and categories of

students are increasing at a much more rapid rate.

How many students do transfer? The answer is that no one knows. The modes of counting transfer students vary so much from district to district and from state to state that the figures are very soft. Some colleges count all students for whom transcripts were requested by senior institutions; others do follow-up surveys of their own students; others depend on figures reported by senior institutions; while still others count students as transfers if they go to a university after having completed as few as one or two courses at the community college. Taking all the vagaries of data reported into account, it seems that around 4 - 5 percent of the community college population nationally transfer to a senior institution after completing 60 units or so. This percentage figure may seem low to you but when you consider the variety of current interest courses, courses for people who already have degrees, occupational and remedial courses, and community education activities, it is a wonder the figure is as high as it is.

During the 1980s this percentage figure will probably remain constant, possibly even increase, not because the numbers of students transferring from two-year to four-year institutions will increase but because the denominator, the total number of students enrolled in community colleges will probably decline. This decline will hit across the board. There will be increased competition from the universities for a shrinking pool of 18 year olds fresh out of high school. There will be a lower rate of college going by people in that age group. There will be more remedial studies as we find ourselves more in the position of teaching students who did not learn what they were supposed

to learn in the lower grades. The community college occupational education programs, their most successful efforts, will increase and there will be more one shot community education activities. All this blurring and blending would seem to point to an even greater decline in the number of students who transfer to senior institutions and so it might. But whether or not the four to five percent remains constant, it must be seen as a small part of the colleges total effort.

Can we accept the loss of the transfer function? Some transfer education will survive because the community colleges will continue to be used by the universities as a way of diverting marginal students from the universities' own freshmen classes in periods of high enrollment. But this use seems not to be a prominent feature of the 1980s. More likely the community colleges will retain the transfer function because in some rural areas the community college is the only post-secondary institution within reasonable commuting distance and there will always be a few students who cannot leave town to go to college. Probably the most important reason for maintaining the transfer function in the 1980s is that without it the community college loses its image as a college. And too many administrators and faculty members have struggled for too long to foster the image of the institution as a true collegiate enterprise. They would fight to maintain the transfer function if only a handful of these students transferred each year.

Understanding the transfer numbers is not made less difficult by the modes of record keeping exhibited by the two-year colleges. A student is

counted a transfer student if he or she is enrolled in a course that is labeled a transfer course. Some of the absurdity of that mode of record keeping can pointed up by viewing studio art classes that are listed as carrying transfer credit to the university but whose classes are populated almost exclusively by people who are taking advantage of the opportunity to paint under direction. And in areas where senior and junior colleges co-exist close by there will always be students who take courses at both institutions concurrently. This is a form of transfer function that must be considered apart from the linear pattern of a person enrolling in the community college, staying for two years, and then transferring to the university. The loss of which I speak will be the loss of that full-time student who matriculates for two-years and then goes on.

My second point is that of the importance of maintaining the educative function. There has been great expansion in quasi-educative activities in community colleges in the past ten years. I speak of programs and services variously labeled Adult and Continuing Education, Developmental Education, Community Education, and Community Services. Programs in these areas are designed for people called "new students," "non-traditional students," "adult learners," "the educationally handicapped," and "consumers." In the colleges' rush to serve this population with a variety of educational, quasi-educational, and non-educational activities, there is a danger of moving far away from principles of curriculum, away from the educative services that the colleges were formed to do.

In warning of the dangers of this rush away from educative activities I may be considered an educational traditionalist. I believe that people who study something are more likely to learn it. I believe that people who study something longer are more likely to learn more about it. And I believe that the prime method for teaching and encouraging study is something called a course. I believe that to qualify as a course, a sequence of events must be organized with verifiable beginning and ending points of understanding, with objectives, criterion tests, and specified activities in which students and instructors engage.

The quasi-educative activities that community colleges are fond of maintaining include recreational programs, events, shows, fairs to which the public is invited, courses that lack content and goals, the offering of credit for experience, brokering, and other activities that fall outside the definition of formal education. Why should we be concerned? This is more than a problem for the arcane curriculum specialist. The problem is that the quasi-educative activities coupled with the repeated calls for unlimited growth so that we can "meet the needs of the public" tend to reduce institutional credibility. A public agency must be legitimate in the eyes of its constituents. When the public loses faith in the institution it tends to withdraw its support. The community college must be a legitimate educational structure. In the eyes of the public it is a school and it should be doing what schools do.

We must strain the definition of education to fit within it many of the services that the community colleges purport to provide in their attempt to increase enrollments. One of the prime reasons for the low rate of transfer is the inflated overall enrollment figure. The percentage of students transferring is calculated simply by dividing the number who actually transfer by the total enrollment. The total enrollment, the denominator, has been severely inflated because community college leaders tend to count people participating in all sorts of quasi-educational activities. Quite understandably these people are counted because there are funds attached to the enrollment records of everyone who can be called a student. But it will be a long time before the public is convinced that education is something other than the process of learning, that courses with specific measurable beginning and ending points are other than the preferred way of packaging that process, that curriculum is other than a collective noun for a set of courses.

The third point of my remarks today is that we must reconcile the liberal arts with the realities of community college enrollments. The definition of the liberal arts has been broadened in recent years to encompass studies in history, sociology, philosophy, art, music, literature, scientific literacy, all the non-specialized studies in the humanities, sciences, and the arts. The term, "liberal arts," is often used interchangeably with liberal and general education. The distinction among those terms is blurred and indeed the meaning of the liberal arts is not clear. In practice the term is often used for transfer studies or studies other than occupational education.

The liberal arts have been found in community colleges from the beginning, a legacy from the curriculum found in the universities. In the early years, students who would transfer to universities would study the liberal arts. Thus the courses in the liberal arts tended to be equated with transfer education courses. Even now anyone asking to view the liberal arts courses on a community college campus would be shown course listings in transfer education.

The advocates of the liberal arts in community colleges are definitely on the defensive. The occupational educators suffered the sting of second class citizenship for many years. Now that they are in the ascendancy they are shunting aside the liberal arts as though they were frills unworthy of occupational students' attention. Similarly the advocates of remedial education often recommend using reading workbooks that have little connection with the liberal arts. They teach writing and job getting skills from the personal view, as though reflecting on the human condition through the liberal arts were too difficult, too esoteric, or too unuseful for the students who cannot read, write, and calculate well.

On the other hand the liberal arts advocates themselves are often preciously elitist. At a meeting recently I was confronted by an instructor of history in a community college who said, "I cannot teach history to anyone who cannot read at a twelfth grade level." My response was to tell him that he would either have to learn to teach history to students who could not read well, or he would find himself in an internecine struggle with his colleagues for the few literate students who would be attending community colleges in coming years.

Many of the liberal arts devotees have crumbled under the onslaught of poorly prepared students. At that same meeting I listened to three instructors describe a humanities course they had prepared and were offering at their own college. The content of the course seemed to be comprised exclusively of field trips to museums and to historical sites in the Maryland, Washington, and Virginia area. The course, which could be taken for credit or not for credit, tended to be a series of spectator events. When someone from the audience asked them how they evaluate student progress, they responded with derision, saying, "You mean like tests and quizzes? We never do any of that. We do ask the students if they liked the course and overwhelmingly they say they do." Unfortunately these instructors are representative of what has happened to many advocates of the humanities who have not been able to convert their courses from the traditional transfer courses that almost taught themselves to the well-prepared students. Instead of insisting that the students respond to what they are seeing or what the authors are trying to do they pandered to the pop psychology model of asking the students how they feel about what they are experiencing.

There is need for liberal arts in community colleges because other educational institutions have reduced emphasis on them. Further, the community college is the last formal education many students will experience. The major social issues of the times - energy use, population control, genetic engineering, enthanasia - can be addressed through the liberal arts. Older students often return to college seeking liberal arts courses that they missed or that supplement those they they had when they were enrolled at a younger age. The liberal arts are useful for helping people

learn how to learn, important in educating people for careers that will change repeatedly. The social changes of the latter part of the twentieth century - the broadened roles of the sexes, for example, and changes in people's concepts of work - can better be understood through the perspective of the liberal arts. There is an increased demand for more free education and the expanded tuition refund plans by employers are often directed toward studies other than those related to the work place itself. For all these reasons the liberal arts should be maintained in community colleges.

For those who are concerned with maintaining the liberal arts some good news may be shared. Several well-integrated science and humanities courses have been developed in community colleges, some for export. "The Art of Being Human", developed at Miami-Dade Community College, is a textbook and video-tape package that can be installed as an interdisciplinary humanities course in any community college. Others of this type are also on the market. Individual instructors have prepared imaginative courses for scientific literacy and for writing using the classics as bases. Philosophical concerns are being explored through modified philosophy courses using humanities divisions of many community colleges. The point is that the liberal arts can and are being taught in the community colleges. They need not be considered solely the archaic lecture-textbook transfer course that was and is the legacy of the university.

Several new organizations are being formed to bring people together who are interested in sharing ideas in the liberal arts. The Community College

Humanities Association had its inaugural meeting in fall 1979 and is soliciting memberships now. This is a group made up predominantly of faculty members teaching in humanities-related disciplines. An institutional association, The League for the Humanities, is being formed. It will accept memberships from colleges where sufficient numbers of liberal arts instructors are willing to work with a college leader in promoting those studies in their institutions.

Help is also on the way from among the major foundations and federal agencies. The National Endowment for the Humanities especially has directed its attention toward the community colleges in recent years. This year several summer seminars especially for community college instructors are being offered and the Endowment's education division has been running grants to community colleges for special humanities program development. The Endowment has also sponsored several studies of the state of the humanities in community colleges nationwide and is currently underwriting a project titled, "Revitalizing the Humanities in Washington Community Colleges." Similarly the National Science Foundation has fostered numerous community college programs through its Science Education Directorate.

Those who are concerned about the liberal arts in community colleges must take several steps.

- First, they must recognize that if the liberal arts remain tied to transfer education exclusively, both will be severely diminished. There will not be enough traditional students preparing to transfer to senior institutions to maintain a viable liberal arts program in the community colleges.

- Second, the community college liberal arts credit programs must be centered on interdisciplinary humanities, interdisciplinary sciences, and interdisciplinary social sciences. In coming years the market for the specialized transfer credit courses will be even smaller than it is now.
- Third, the specialized liberal arts courses should be offered as non-credit options for adults and as short courses, workshops, and forums. Some pioneering work in this area has been done in the courses by newspaper and the community forums series sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and coordinated through the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges.
- Fourth, each humanities instructor must strive to place portions of the liberal arts in occupational programs. Oakton has done a course in medical ethics that combines elements of philosophy directed particularly toward practitioners in health fields. Numerous other portions of courses and indeed entire courses like that could be built.
- Fifth, we must resist segregating the remedial students away from the liberal arts just at a time in their lives when the liberal arts could be most important to them. Better revise the liberal arts courses so that the poorly prepared students can derive something of value from them than to maintain the courses exclusively in the transfer programs and keep the remedial students away from them entirely.

The 1980s will see several continuations of the trends away from transfer

education and those who would maintain the community colleges' place in higher education must work to integrate truly educative studies in the arts and sciences in a fashion that will fit the students who will be attending the colleges. The on-campus student population in community colleges will drop in the 1980s as the university competition for freshmen, the declining college age group, and other trends take effect. One force to watch for is state refusal to pay repeatedly for the same instruction. I speak here of the basic education or literacy training that students are supposed to have gained in the lower schools. There is some question about the continuation of these types of studies in post-secondary education. High school competency tests for college eligibility are being tried in several states and adult education in the basics is being perceived as more a function of the lower schools. And there is also some question about state reimbursement for courses in which people who already have degrees enroll for recreational or hobby purposes. Although the courses may be carried on the books as transfer courses, the fact that no one in them transfers will soon be recognized as evidence that the courses should be placed in a pay-as-you-go form. This may limit enrollment severely.

Will the on-campus students be replaced by students studying on their own and taking courses through television or newspaper? Perhaps, but don't bet on it. The college experience has many dimensions. Learning is a shared enterprise. The self-directed students who can maintain their own pace while learning difficult material are rarer than we think. When advocates of lifelong learning point to the many learning activities in which people

engage they are not pointing to the forms of learning that have traditionally taken place behind college walls.

You at Oakton College have built the foundation of an institution that is well-placed to move into the 1980s and beyond. You have the cluster or program faculty groups which mean that interdisciplinary activities are more likely to develop. You have the seeds of defined outcomes as represented in your course directory which suggests that a push toward specific objectives could yet be launched again. And you have the leadership of people who are sincerely concerned with education in its finest reaches. Strive to be what you can be and I will see you again in 1990.

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