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ABSTRACT

State-level governance of community colleges has become increasingly common in the United States, with governance decisions affecting budget appropriations, rules on how appropriations can be spent, and the missions that colleges must strive to fulfill. The most common elements of state-level community college mission statements over the past 100 years have been general education, college transfer, occupational programs, and non-credit continuing education programs, with community services and remedial education often included. State-level mission statements influence actual college practices by, first, communicating to local college leaders the mandates, desires, and prohibitions of the state and, second, by using the statements as guidelines for funding. These mission statements have changed considerably as competition for funds has increased. Specifically, occupational programs have gained in importance over transfer programs in state priorities, and funding and community services and non-job-related continuing education have long been supported only by user fees. Additionally, based on case studies of governance and funding in 10 states, economic and workforce development programs seem to have become the most important components in the eyes of state decision makers, surpassing transfer and community service. Contains 35 references. (BCY)

The Evolving Community College Mission in the Context of State Governance

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The original subtitle of this paper was "Is It Related to State Governance?" When I began to write it, I realized the entire paper could be presented in one word: "Yes". Then I realized the appropriate question to guide my paper was *"How* is the community college mission related to state governance?" I also changed "enduring" to "evolving", for reasons that will become obvious.

The word "governance" until recent years most often was applied in the higher education literature to apply to the ways faculty members, administrators and trustees made and carried out decisions of single-campus institutions. Since the dramatic expansion of colleges and universities immediately after the end of World War II, usage of the term governance has been extended to higher education policymaking and decision making at district and state levels as well. (McGinnis, 1997). Examples of state-level governance of community colleges abound, but I will provide just a few illustrations.

State-level governance of community colleges arguably began in the 1890s, when regulations of the state board of education and decisions of the state superintendent of public instruction were applied to the conduct of grades 13 and 14 of the California high schools. The state board and state superintendent derived their authority to govern grades 13 and 14 from statutes designed for public schools through grade 12, (Knoell, personal communication, 1998).

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The first time state-level governance affected the mission of community colleges also probably was in California, when, in 1907, the California General Assembly belatedly authorized high schools to provide grades 13 and 14 (Meyers, in Tollefson and Fountain, 1992). Now, in virtually every state, state-level governance decisions are made frequently by state legislatures and state governing or coordinating boards or commissions with jurisdiction over community colleges. Such decisions include the appropriations of money to community colleges for operational and capital expenditures, the rules specifying how those funds must be spent and accounted for, and the missions that community colleges must strive to fulfill. (Tollefson and Fountain, 1992; Tollefson, Fountain, Garrett and Ingram, 1998). State-level governance also influences local community college missions by myriad overt and subtle ways that state legislatures and state boards reward and punish institutions for the types of programs and services they provide to their stakeholders and for the perceived degrees of effectiveness and efficiency with which they are delivered. I will elaborate on this point later.

By various labels, the four most common elements of state-level community college mission statements during the past hundred years appear to have been general education, college transfer, occupational and non-credit continuing education programs. (Bogart, 1994; Cohen and Brawer, 1995). Some states (e.g., Nebraska and Maine) have never included college transfer programs per se, but many high-level associate-degree occupational programs are to some extent transferable to some or all state universities' baccalaureate programs in nearly every state. (Tollefson and Fountain, 1992; Tollefson, Fountain, Garrett and Ingram, 1998).

State-level community college mission statements have been adopted in several forms. One of the most common is a statutory statement of purpose promulgated by a state legislature. A second common form is an explicit mission statement adopted by the state board that governs or coordinates community colleges. Some states, such as North Carolina (Scott, in Tollefson and Fountain, 1992), have both. In such cases, the statutory mission statement is usually the more general of the two and the board-adopted statement is more specific, with more positive and negative qualifications.

In addition to the four most common statewide mission elements identified above, the provision of non-credit, mostly one-time, community services, including such diverse activities as lectures, concerts, plays, income tax preparation and child care, represents historically perhaps the fifth most common community college function authorized or mandated in state-level mission statements. Possibly just below or perhaps slightly above community service mission functions across the nation is that of remedial (or developmental) education intended to bring students up to the levels of high school graduates, particularly in English language skills and mathematics, thereby enabling them to succeed in college-level courses. A host of other mission functions are scattered throughout official documents of the 50 U.S. states. They include maximizing access; prohibiting discriminatory treatment of students on the basis of race, gender, religion or national origin; mandating affirmative action to remedy past discrimination, providing English as a second language to students with other first languages; and providing reasonable accommodation for students with physical or mental disabilities. (Tollefson and Fountain, 1992).

How *do* state-level mission statements influence programs and services at local community colleges? First, and most obviously, state mission statements officially communicate to local community college leaders the mandates, desires and, sometimes, the prohibitions of state legislatures (and/or state constitutions), state boards and state commissions. Local community college decisionmakers realize they can be rewarded for complying with the wishes of higher authorities or punished for failing to comply. Long before *strategic planning* and its component analyses of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and trends ("SWOTT analysis") were identified by those words and initials, many local community college leaders at least intuitively used similar concepts. The generic adages that "The person who pays the piper calls the tune," and the "Golden Rule: The one with the gold makes the rules", were well known. T. R. McConnell added another rule of behavior among higher education local campus officials that indicated those individuals were influenced in their professional decisions by *the law of anticipated reaction.*

A second way that state mission statements influence local campus decisions is that legislatures and state boards often use mission statements as guidelines for establishing funding priorities, both among and within institutions. Such state-level funding policies and decisions have discernible impacts on current programs and services and budget requests for subsequent years. Anyone in this room today doubtless could cite examples of the foregoing principles and extend them to examples of institutional behavioral change in response to state financial and performance audits. Your response to everything I've said so far is probably to yawn and murmur "So what?" Well, "what" consists of some observations—both those I can document and others that are more speculative—about nationwide patterns of statewide community college mission statements and local college responses to them. In the 1950s and 1960s, community colleges in many states were given so much incremental money by state legislatures and by the federal government that local presidents had difficulties determining how to spend it all. (Palmer, n.d.). When I was state director of community colleges in New Jersey in 1969-71, we submitted in each of two years a one-line supplemental budget request to the general assembly to fund larger-than-anticipated enrollment increases. The legislature fully funded both without requesting any narrative justification or documentation of either current-year or prior-year community college enrollments. Several newly founded New Jersey community colleges declined to apply for certainto–be-awarded federal Higher Education Facilities Act grants in amounts totaling millions of dollars to build complete new campuses. When I asked their presidents why they did not apply for the federal money, they replied that they could get all they needed from the state sooner than they could have obtained the federal grants.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, some of the bloom began to disappear from the community college rose, in the eyes of legislators in many states. A combination of economic downturns, more competition for state dollars by prisons and social services agencies, and taxpayer revolts, combined in some states with key legislators' perceptions that many community colleges were wasting taxpayers' money on substandard educational programs and unnecessary continuing education courses in cake-baking and belly dancing, led, in my opinion, to the dawning of the age of accountability for American community colleges. (Tollefson, Adkins and Buysse, 1980).

Documentable recent trends in state-level community college mission statements include the following:

1. College transfer programs leading to associate in arts (A.A.) and, in some states, associate in science (A.S.), associate in fine arts (A.F.A.), as well as other associate degrees (Tollefson, 1978), continue to represent one of the top two mission elements nationwide, in terms of frequency of mention and widespread statements about their importance as a means to achieve social equity by maximizing access to bachelor's and advanced degrees. (Breneman and Nelson, 1980; Callan and Finney, 1997; Eaton, 1994; Brint and Karabel, 1989).
2. Occupational programs, leading most commonly to associate in applied science degrees (Tollefson, 1978), have gained on college transfer programs in terms of

legislative funding priorities and legislative and state-board level statements. California remains an exception to this rule (Knoell, 1998).

3. Non-degree credit continuing education has in many states bifurcated into occupationally related and recreational categories. Continuing education for recreational and other non job-related purposes is still authorized, but in many states must be largely or wholly supported by student tuition and fees. (Breneman and Nelson, 1980). Continuing education to prepare students for entry-level or higher jobs, and sometimes to enhance current job performance, is climbing rapidly to rival or perhaps surpass college transfer and occupational degree programs in many states.

4. Community services long since have become supported almost entirely by user fees. (Wattenbarger and Mercer, 1988).

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain exact amounts spent in each instructional category, either nationally or within a given state, because neither state nor IPEDS (the federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) reporting requirements break the categories out identifiably. The fastest growing category in IPEDS data during the all-inclusive period of IPEDS reporting from 1988 to 1994 is “other". This "other" category includes, among several types of funding sources, grants and contracts from federal and state agencies, as well as from philanthropic and private-sector organizations. Federal and state welfare-to-work funds, in some cases, federal Job Training and Partnerships (JTPA) funds, and corporate fees for customized workforce training of current and prospective employees, all are lumped into the "other" category.

The revitalized occupationally related continuing education component of state-level community college missions has been redesignated in many states as *workforce development, economic development,* or both. (Tollefson, Fountain, Garrett and Ingram, 1998).

More speculatively, two other recent trends seem apparent regarding state-level community college mission elements and their effects on individual community colleges. They are described as follows:

1. Economic development and/or workforce development have surpassed community service in importance. Economic development, based upon my observations, includes workforce development, but is broader. Economic development includes noninstructional consultative and other services, such as "business incubators", to attract business and industrial organizations to the service area of a single community college, a regional consortium of community colleges, or an entire state. It includes both credit and non-credit courses and programs. Economic workforce development may be partly funded by welfare-to-work contracts, and it frequently involves contracts and other formal organizational ties with state and federal agencies for labor, commerce, and human services, as well as with agencies specifically designated as responsible for workforce and/or economic development. (Tollefson, Fountain, Garrett and Ingram, 1998).
2. Despite a respected body of community college literature that contends the college transfer function is the most component in the community college mission (Zwerling, 1976; Brint and Karabel, 1989; Eaton, 1994), in the eyes of governors and state legislators with the power of the purse, *economic development and/or*

workforce development has eclipsed the college transfer function as the most important state-level mission component.

3. The provision of college transfer programs that are perceived by state lawmakers as *effective and financially efficient* helps to assure level funding, perhaps adjusted upward by the rate of inflation, but does not result in noticeable funding increases. When college transfer programs are perceived as *ineffective* or *inefficient,* the offering of such programs may result *in declining state general fund appropriations.* Perceptions of ineffectiveness or inefficiency of college transfer programs are caused by complaints from students and/or hard data indicating that community college transfer courses do not apply to baccalaureate programs of state universities, that community college transfer student dropout rates are too high, or, conversely, that retention and graduation rates are too low.

Some evidence to support the two foregoing hypotheses exists in the form of case studies on state-level governance and funding of community colleges. The ten case-study states are: California, Colorado, Florida, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey, Oregon, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin. My primary sources for those ten state case studies were federal IPEDS data for the years 1988 through 1994, annual *Almanac* issues of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* from 1992 through 1997, chapters for the 1998 edition of our book on state systems of community colleges written by state community college directors or their designees, manuscripts of articles on nine northeastern state systems of community colleges for a forthcoming issue of the *Community College Journal of Research and Practice,* and telephone interviews with community college state directors and other knowledgeable observers in those states. Data from those ten case studies show that the community colleges had the greatest rate of increase in state legislative appropriations from 1988 to 1994, for operational support, at 109%. Perhaps not coincidentally, Oregon has developed a nationally recognized, well-coordinated, effective and efficient community college workforce development and economic development thrusts. Other state community college systems with very impressive combinations of increases in state appropriations and widely acclaimed workforce and economic development programs were Colorado (with a six-year increase of 58%), Washington (51%), Texas (44%), Wisconsin (40%), Florida (28%), and Nebraska (20%), (IPEDS, 1988-94). Of course, we know that state economic cycles and the desires of governors and key legislators can have a greater effect on state appropriations than all other factors combined. My hope is that someone in this room today will conduct a nationwide, multi-year study to verify, refute, or qualify my conclusions and hypothetical inferences.

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