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ABSTRACT

This issue of State Education Leader titled "Public Policy and Community Colleges" focuses on issues of importance to community colleges. The highlighted articles in this issue discuss current legislation and reform that has impacted community colleges. In "Challenges Yet Unmet," Katherine Boswell discusses how state policy leaders look to community colleges to solve pressing policy challenges. In "Connecting the Poor to Jobs," David Jenkins and Joan Fitzgerald outline policy options that state policy makers can use to encourage community colleges connect their students with future jobs. Sarah Rubin and George Autry in "Rural Community Colleges: Catalysts for Economic Renewal" discuss how rural community colleges merit attention from policy makers, and in "Welfare Reform: Opportunity or Obstacle?" Michael Allen discusses the impact of welfare reform on the community college. Other articles include: (1) "Enhancing Faculty Productivity: A State Prospective" by James Palmer; (2) "Technology Planning: State and System Issues" by James R. Mingle and Sandra S. Ruppert; (3) "Fostering Student Retention and Success" by James Palmer; (4) "Shared Governance in Community Colleges" by Richard L. Alfred; and (5) "Improving Policy To Increase Transfer" by Tronie Rifkin. (LD)

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Public Policy and Community Colleges... Challenge Yet Unmet

Sherry Freeland Walker, Editor

State Education Leader
Volume 16 Number 2 Spring-Summer 1998

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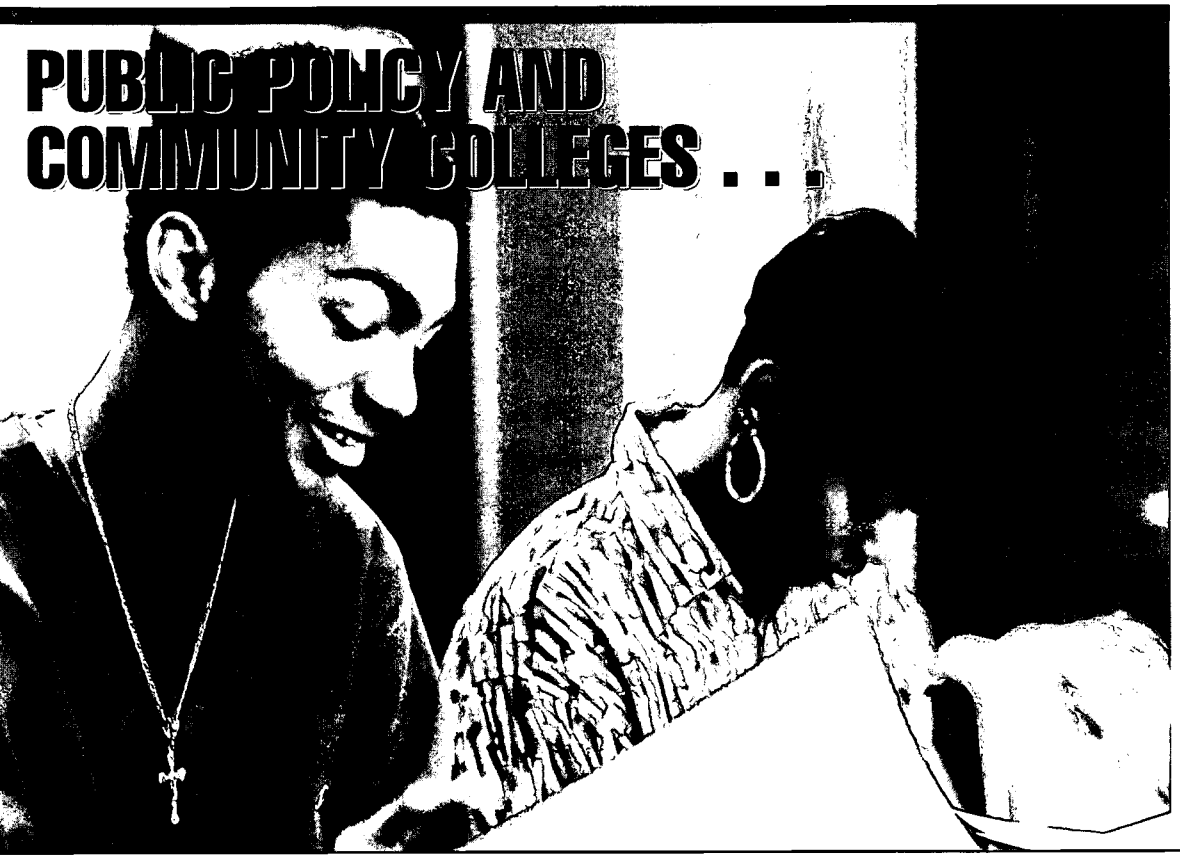

The mission of the Education Commission of the States (ECS) is to help state leaders develop and carry out policies that promote improved performance of the education system, as reflected in increased learning by all citizens.

by Katherine Boswell

CHALLENGES YET UNMET

Community colleges in the 1990s have emerged into the political limelight for a variety of reasons: the dramatic increase in the proportion of the undergraduate student population which these colleges serve; a track record of responsiveness and cost-effectiveness in addressing the needs of business and industry; their focus on the central functions of teaching and learning; and advocacy by a variety of respected people, including President Clinton, assorted Cabinet secretaries and a growing array of state-level leaders.

As usual, though, attention comes with a price. In this case, community colleges face escalating expectations, new demands upon already-limited capacity and increasing emphasis on accountability for return on the public's investment.

Increasingly, state policymakers are looking to community colleges for solutions to major policy challenges:

- To provide access to the increasing number of students seeking postsecondary education and to serve as the entry point for a majority of undergraduate students entering baccalaureate education
- To retrain displaced workers
- To play a leading role in contributing to state and community economic development efforts
- To serve as a key player in training those persons coming off state welfare rolls.

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- Information technology redefining many aspects of learning and research. Page 11.
- Smooth and efficient transfer of students and academic credits. Page 18

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Most policymakers have limited first-hand experience with two-year colleges, and there are few sources of timely, credible and objective information to which they can turn for help in making sound policy decisions about this sector of postsecondary education. As a result, there are a multitude of myths and misperceptions about community and technical college education, and state policymakers frequently overlook or underestimate the potential contribution these colleges can provide. The problem is exacerbated by the significant differences found among states on such core issues as institutional focus, funding and governance.

To address these issues, the Education Commission of the States (ECS), with funding from the Metropolitan Life Foundation, is undertaking an effort called the "Critical Roles for Community Colleges Project." In this project, ECS is analyzing state policies and regulations to determine how they have helped or hindered community colleges in developing and sustaining innovative approaches. We are examining what influence state community college governance structures have on innovation at the campus level. And, we are working with state and community college leaders to recommend policies that promote and support state-level discussion and action to improve these colleges.

One part of this project is a comprehensive policy handbook that will serve as a resource for state policymakers interested in community college issues. The handbook will include policy briefs on a range of critical community college issues facing state policymakers. To be released later this summer, it is designed in a three-ring binder format to serve as an ongoing resource to which other materials may be added.

This issue of *State Education Leader* excerpts some of those policy briefs. The briefs themselves contain additional information about background of each issue, a deeper discussion of policy issues and questions, and lists of resources and contacts.

For more information on the ECS community colleges project or on the *Handbook for Community College Policy*, contact ECS Project Manager Katherine Boswell at 303-299-3645 or kboswell@ecs.org.

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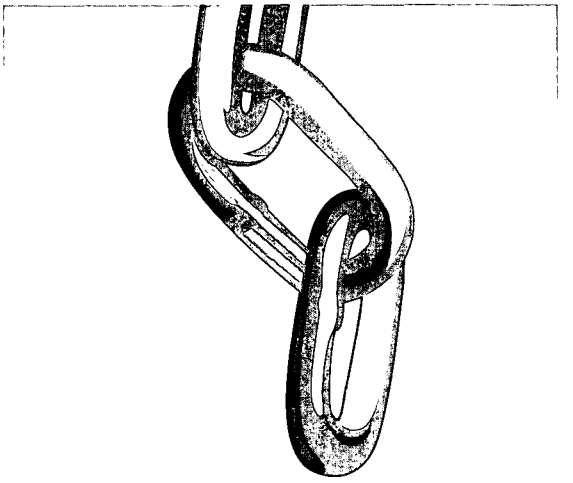
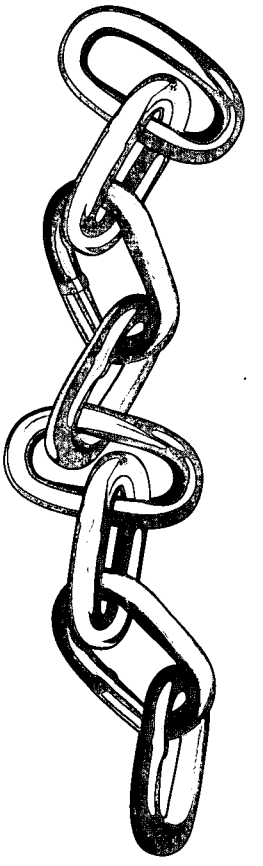
A 1995 study by the Women and Poverty Project in Washington, D.C., estimated that a single parent living with two school-age children in Sacramento, California, would need to earn $14.52 an hour (including health benefits) to be "self-sufficient." With few exceptions, jobs that pay such wages require at least some training beyond high school, even at the entry level.

Community colleges are well-positioned to provide the training necessary to connect poor youth and adults to well-paying jobs with a future. This potential stems from their growing role in two areas: providing the initial and continuing technical training critical for career-path employment, and serving the needs of large numbers of educationally and economically disadvantaged adults.



CONNECTING THE POOR TO GOOD JOBS



by Davis Jenkins and Joan Fitzgerald

Career-path employment

As postsecondary technical training has become the gateway to well-paying, career-path jobs in many fields, community college technical programs have become an integral part of school-to-work initiatives. In the best cases, community college faculty and high school teachers team up with industry advisors to revamp the high school curriculum so it provides the necessary foundation for initial postsecondary technical education.

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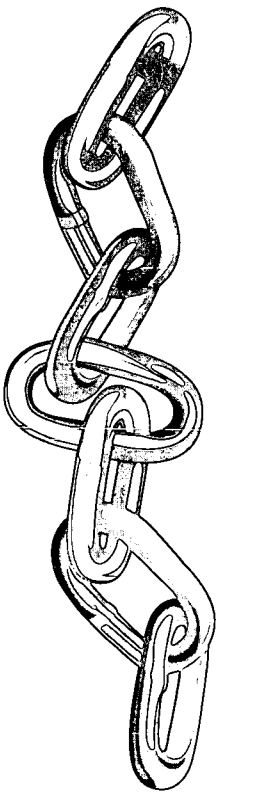
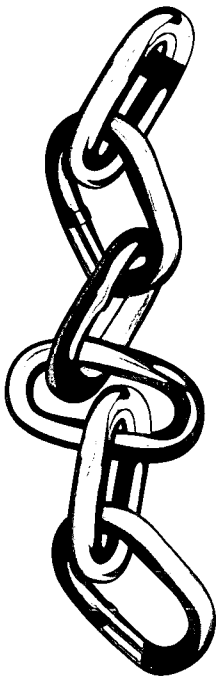
Policy options

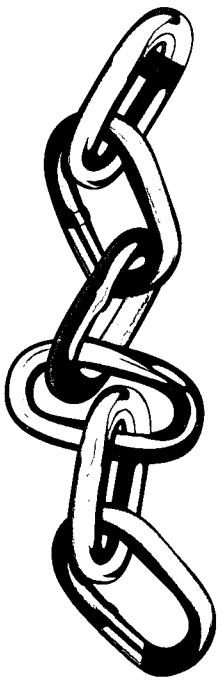
There are at least three strategies state policymakers can use to encourage community colleges to serve as an education pathway to good jobs.

- **Encourage colleges to make the necessary connections** between technical programs and employment, between learning in the classroom and learning at work, and between postsecondary technical programs and high school and adult literacy programs. State funds could be used to support demonstration projects that show the benefits of programs that improve access to college for economically and educationally disadvantaged students.
- **Consolidate job training funding for the poor.** This approach is being promoted by the federal government and implemented by most states in the "One-Stop Career Centers" or "One-Stops." The One-Stops combine under one administrative umbrella — and often under one roof — all of the agencies that provide support services needed to help the poor find jobs: public aid, unemployment insurance, employment service and job training. Money for job training is disbursed through "training vouchers" that allow the client to choose among training providers. Community colleges are typically partners in the One-Stops.
- **Provide incentives to serve the poor in mainstream technical education programs.** Several states have been experimenting with various approaches to performance-based funding. Florida's Performance-Based Training System ties funding of all postsecondary technical education to the employment outcomes these programs achieve. Special incentives are given to programs that lead to employment for "targeted" or disadvantaged populations, including welfare recipients, displaced workers and the disabled.





"Creating connections is the hallmark of community colleges that are effective in serving as a pathway for the poor to gainful employment."



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Serving disadvantaged adults

Community colleges have expanded programs for adult learners, including GED programs for adults seeking basic literacy, English-as-a-Second-Language programs for immigrants, and basic vocational training for displaced workers and other unemployed adults seeking entry-level employment in technical fields.

A growing number of forward-looking community colleges are linking adult literacy programs to vocational training. Some colleges offer "adult tech-prep bridge" programs designed to prepare educationally disadvantaged adults for postsecondary technical education and entry-level employment as technicians.

Creating connections is the hallmark of community colleges that are effective in serving as a pathway for the poor to gainful employment. These colleges connect high school and adult literacy programs, on the one hand, and occupational/technical programs that are linked in turn to employment. They seek to connect learning in the classroom and the learning demands of the workplace by using "contextual learning." Students learn academic skills by working on problems in teams in a way that mirrors the culture of the best workplaces.

Unfortunately, these connections are often not made. Too many community colleges have become two-tiered institutions, with large non-credit adult literacy and vocational programs enrolling the majority of economically and educationally disadvantaged students who enter community colleges and offering little opportunity to move into college-credit programs that lead to good jobs.

One challenge for policymakers is how to provide incentives for community colleges to make the connections necessary to address the employment needs of the poor. Another challenge is how to encourage community colleges to take greater responsibility for the employment outcomes of all of their students, including the disadvantaged, when community college funding is generally based on enrollment, with little accountability for the outcomes achieved.

Jenkins is a faculty fellow at the Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois in Chicago. Fitzgerald is an associate professor in the College of Urban Planning and a faculty fellow at the Great Cities Institute.□

San Diego Community College District's VESL Program

The San Diego Community College District has been a pioneer in the development of curricula for Vocational English-as-a-Second-Language (VESL). Once limited-English- speaking students attain basic proficiency in English, they typically want to find employment, but usually only qualify for low-skill, low-wage jobs. The VESL program encourages students to pursue vocational training that leads to better paying jobs.

VESL provides intermediate-level English-literacy students with English instruction combined with basic vocational training. This approach shortens the path to gainful employment by integrating basic-skills instruction with vocational training. The VESL program has raised reading scores from the 4th- to 8th-grade level in 10 months and has placed 90% of completers in more advanced vocational training.

Chicago's Adult Tech-Prep Bridge

Richard J. Daley College (one of Chicago's city colleges) and three community-based organizations have joined to recruit adults from high-poverty areas and train them for entry-level skilled manufacturing jobs and postsecondary technical education. The community organizations recruit local residents for the program, serve as sites for instruction and provide case management and placement assistance to program participants.

This 16-week Tech-Prep Bridge program offers intensive instruction in workplace mathematics, applied physics and industrial computer applications. Students learn the fundamentals of blueprint reading, metrology (measurement) and machining through hands-on instruction in the college's manufacturing technology laboratory. Emphasis is placed on employment skills through a World of Manufacturing course.

Of the 45 graduates from the first two cycles of the program, all are currently employed, 36 have entry-level manufacturing jobs that include benefits, and 14 are enrolled in Daley's associate degree program in Manufacturing Technology.

by Michael Allen

Our nation's community colleges have played an increasingly important role over the last decade in providing education opportunities for welfare recipients and others at the low end of the income scale. In recent years, 48% of students from families at the bottom fourth in income have chosen public two-year colleges to begin their postsecondary education, compared with 27% who have selected public four-year institutions.

Many community colleges provide programs especially designed to overcome the education barriers faced by low-income students, such as General Education Degree classes, job-readiness classes and short-term vocational training. In many cases, community colleges work with local employers to provide training that matches workforce needs. The colleges also offer two-year associate degree programs in specific vocational fields, such as nursing, that enable graduates to secure well-paying jobs.

New welfare system

The enactment of welfare reform, however, is having a significant impact on the role community colleges play in educating welfare recipients. Under the new Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) system, welfare recipients are limited to five years of benefits during their lifetime and must work or be engaged in an allowable work-related activity within two years. Individual states may pare down these limits even further.

TANF also eliminated the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills program, which enabled many welfare recipients to enroll in more ambitious two- and four-year degree programs while receiving their welfare checks. Now, allowable postsecondary coursework is limited to 12 months of vocational education.

If community colleges and other institutions are to continue to serve the needs of the welfare population, they must find new approaches within the restrictions imposed by the new welfare law. Their efforts will not easily succeed, however, unless state and local policymakers create a supportive policy climate and tackle difficult policy issues.

The challenge

One of the fundamental implications of welfare reform for community colleges and other education providers is they no longer can rely on lengthy courses of study to prepare welfare recipients for the job market. Instead, they must deliver short-term programs. They also must be more accountable to their students and provide the opportunity for long-term employment.

The "work-first" orientation of welfare reform means community colleges and other education providers must shift much of their focus from pre-employment to post-employment programs. It also means that a four-year or two-year degree program is a much more remote prospect for most welfare recipients. Moreover, the open

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entry/open exit course approach that enables students to complete a course at their own pace may not work for many welfare recipients, who now have only a limited time to pursue their education.

In addition, community colleges must offer remedial programs and a level of emotional support foreign to traditional concepts of higher education. Indeed, some educators believe if faculty members are to serve welfare students effectively, they must do as much counseling and case management as actual teaching.

State policy options

For states, the fundamental issue is the extent to which they are willing to support and enhance education opportunities for welfare recipients, given the restrictions and requirements inherent in the federal legislation. A number of policy options arise, among them the following:

> "To educate welfare recipients and other low-income people successfully requires a serious financial commitment."

What kind of financial investment?

To educate welfare recipients and other low-income people successfully requires a serious financial commitment — a smaller student-to-faculty ratio and increased counseling and remedial services. To justify increased spending, some states give community colleges a prominent role in working with business and industry to promote economic development and create jobs. North Carolina directly credits its increase in new manufacturing plants to community college efforts to provide a steady supply of qualified graduates trained in the precise skills the manufacturers need.

Work first?

All states probably have decided by now either to maximize opportunities for pre-employment training and education or to take a work-first approach that emphasizes post-employment education opportunities. While the latter approach offers the greatest assurance that a state will meet its federally mandated work participation quota, the former approach can give individual recipients more opportunities to further their education.

Create diversion programs?

States have the option of creating "diversion programs" that bypass federal limitations on education activities by using state funds to support recipients who pursue educational tracks that do not meet federal guidelines. Few states, however, can afford to provide diversions for sustained education support, and it is difficult to craft a diversion program that accomplishes what a state wants and also observes federal guidelines.

What role for community colleges?

In some states, individual community colleges or the statewide community college system plays an integral role in the coordination of workforce development programs. In other states, community colleges simply have the opportunity to compete against other education providers for contracts to deliver services. States would do well to reassess the potential role of the community colleges, and other education providers, in meeting workforce development needs.

Increase educational affordability?

States can adopt policies that make training and education programs more affordable for the low-income population. For example, they can promote the ability of welfare recipients to accumulate savings accounts not counted in eligibility determinations for welfare benefits and specifically earmarked for expenditures such as education. States also could provide reduced community college tuition for welfare recipients, a graduated tuition structure, or tuition subsidies or other supports for students who pursue vocational education programs that serve state economic priorities.

Enhance the availability of education?

There are a number of possible ways to enhance access, including the establishment of community college satellite campuses in housing projects or neighborhoods with large welfare populations. Work-site classes are another possibility, as are telecourses and virtual classrooms. Distance learning, however, may not be appropriate for students with the limited education skills and low self-confidence characteristic of many welfare recipients.

Allen is a policy analyst for the Education Commission of the States.

ENHANCING FACULTY PRODUCTIVITY: A STATE PERSPECTIVE

by James Palmer

These trends suggest a need to rethink faculty work.

Community college faculties represent a significant state investment in education opportunity. It is largely through the faculty — those who have day-to-day contact with students — that state interests in community college systems are realized or thwarted.

Policymakers who would address faculty productivity in this broad sense walk a fine line between the legitimate exercise of authority and harmful micromanagement. Yet carefully developed guidelines or incentives focusing on the collective product of the community college professoriate statewide rather than the productivity of individual teachers can be developed.

Background

Because community college faculty members have few research obligations, their teaching workload is high compared to four-year colleges and universities, and they devote more of their time to teaching (see Table 1). But the nature of the college enterprise is changing and with it the assumption that individual teaching loads represent adequate measures of faculty work. There are at least three reasons for this:

- ☐ *The expansion of the community college into job training and economic development roles has placed a premium on rapid college responsiveness to a changing economy.*
- ☐ *Computer and communication technologies potentially allow large numbers of students to complete courses at home and within their own timeframes.* This may change the nature of faculty work and the number of faculty members needed per campus.
- ☐ *The privileged status faculty members enjoy as autonomous professionals who are free to act with strong tenure protections has become less sustainable.* Public demands for information on student outcomes increase pressure on the faculty to account for its work.

Faculty

Like other enterprises, community colleges increasingly have relied on a part-time workforce to maintain productivity while controlling costs and to bring real-world experience to the classroom. In fall 1993, part-timers made up approximately 65% of community college faculty members nationwide, compared to 34% of the faculty at public four-year colleges and universities.

Although state policies sometimes limit the ratio of part-time faculty that can be employed, research offers little evidence about the comparative teaching effectiveness of full-time and part-time faculty members. What can be said is that faculty hiring, training and evaluation are often less rigorous for part-timers than for full-timers, a factor that can be addressed by requiring part-time faculty members to have the same academic credentials as full-time members. At least three other policy options have been employed.

The growing use of part-timers raises an important question: What do state community college systems gain through full-time faculty that it cannot obtain from part-timers? The only ostensible difference is that the former generate more credit hours than the latter. More useful policies treat the full-time faculty as a statewide instructional resource that can be strategically employed to further state ends. Examples include the following:

- ☐ *Regulations that tie employment to program demand.*
- ☐ *Encouraging the use of distance-learning technologies as a means of sharing faculty expertise across institutions.*
- ☐ *Involving full-time faculty members in state education improvement initiatives.*

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"The nature of the college enterprise is changing and with it the assumption that individual teaching loads represent adequate measures of faculty work."

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The missing link

The public's best interest ultimately lies in policies that help transform the community college faculty from a group of individuals hired to teach courses to a professional collective that studies teaching, takes responsibility for student achievement and contributes its expertise to ongoing education reform. This ideally means that tenure and promotion should be tied to documented student learning.

Policy options might include the following:

- ☐ *Publicize best practices in the evaluation of teaching outcomes or subsidize conferences* that help faculty members understand ways of measuring and documenting student learning.
- ☐ *Facilitate specialized pedagogical training for faculty members seeking promotion to the highest ranks (such as full professor).* For example, promotion could be contingent on the completion of a graduate program focusing on the teaching of a discipline rather than on the discipline itself.
- ☐ *Facilitate a rigorous, nonuniversity-based certification program that will give visible recognition to exceptional community college teachers.*

Finance must be a final consideration. As long as state funding for community colleges remains tied to enrollment, a shift in emphasis from credit-hour production to instructional effectiveness is unlikely. Alternative arrangements that offer fiscal incentives for student outcomes (such as student job obtainment or successful baccalaureate degree completion for those who transfer to four-year colleges) may be needed.

Palmer is an associate professor of educational administration and foundations at Illinois State University. ☐

"The public's best interest ultimately lies in policies that help transform the community college faculty from a group of individuals hired to teach courses to a professional collective that studies teaching, takes responsibility for student achievement and contributes its expertise to ongoing education reform."

The Illinois Articulation Initiative

Faculty experience and talents can be tapped outside of the classroom, as Illinois' articulation initiative shows. Begun in 1993 by the Illinois Board of Higher Education and two other state organizations, it has involved hundreds of faculty members from both two- and four-year colleges in the development of model lower-division curricula, both for general education and for specific undergraduate majors.

A key assumption is that students will be able to transfer between colleges with minimal credit loss to the extent that faculties at those colleges have a common understanding of academic standards and degree requirements.

The first product, a lower-division general education module, was created in 1994. It defines the purpose of general education, specifies a 37-41 semester-hour sequence of courses in five areas (communications, mathematics, humanities and fine arts, social and behavioral sciences, and physical and life sciences) and delineates the competencies students are to demonstrate in each. Additional modules have been or are in the process of being developed, specifying the "courses essential for community and junior college students to complete prior to transferring to a particular major in order to be on par with others in that major."

Additional information on the Illinois Articulation Initiative can be obtained at www.itransfer.org.

Table 1

Workload Measures of Full-Time Faculty Members Teaching Undergraduate Courses Only in Various Types of Public Colleges and Universities, Fall 1992

Type of Public College or University	Number of Classes Taught (Average)	Total Number of Students Taught (Average)	Total Student Credit Hours Generated (Average)	Percent of Time Actually Spent Teaching (Average)
Public Two-Year Colleges	4.53	103	375	75%
Public Comprehensive Colleges	3.45	103	338	68%
Public Ph.D.-Granting Universities	3.03	102	333	64%
Public Research Universities	2.37	105	344	57%

Source: Fall 1992 National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty, U.S. Department of Education. Data were derived from the department's online data analysis system (www.pedar-das.org), February 9, 1998. Data apply only to full-time faculty members at public institutions who indicated that teaching was their primary responsibility in fall 1992 and who taught undergraduate courses only.

RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES: CATALYSTS FOR ECONOMIC RENEWAL

by Sarah Rubin and George Autry

Once a rural nation, the United States has become predominantly urban and suburban. In all but 13 states, a majority of the population now lives in metropolitan areas. But even in large, urbanized states, there remain many rural communities and rural people who merit policymakers' attention.

State policies and programs designed for the cities and suburbs often do not fit rural situations. For the sake of equity and the health of the overall state economy, rural communities need appropriate support for both education and economic development. Rural community colleges are uniquely positioned to provide both. Indeed, they are often the only institutions in rural areas that can lead both place-based economic development and people-based education and training.

Background

Two-thirds of American public two-year colleges are located in rural areas. While they share many characteristics with their urban and suburban counterparts, rural colleges face different challenges and are called upon to play unique roles in their communities.

Rural colleges are small. Nearly one-third of rural community colleges have fewer than 1,000 students, and two-thirds have enrollments below 2,500.

Rural service areas tend to be large, which makes for a high cost per student. In the West, rural colleges serve vast, sparsely populated areas. Some districts are larger than an entire New England state, with as few as 10 people per square mile.

Rural colleges have a big mission. Rural colleges are rooted in and important to the future of their communities. If states want healthy rural communities, they need to maintain viable rural community colleges.

Rural colleges are essential for two reasons. First, rural communities need institutions that work aggressively to increase access to education. Second, rural community colleges often are the only institutions in their communities with the stature, stability, resources and flexibility to provide leadership for economic development.

Funding issues

The first challenge for state policymakers is to help rural colleges thrive as strong, effective institutions. This calls for funding formulas that take into account their small size and high cost per student, and policies that enable rural colleges to achieve greater economies of scale through regional collaboration and distance education.

Ensure financial viability. The following general approaches can help maintain the viability of rural colleges.

- ☐ Provide all colleges with a "floor"of base funding to cover fixed administrative costs.
- ☐ Use a sliding reimbursement scale that funds instruction at small colleges at a higher rate per student than at large institutions, to compensate for their high administrative cost.
- ☐ In states where colleges rely on local tax districts, provide equalization grants to districts that have low assessed valuation per student.

Ensure that rural colleges can offer important, high-cost programs. One solution is for neighboring colleges to form consortia that offer high-cost, low-volume programs jointly. Other solutions involve state funding mechanisms, such as reimbursing high-cost curricula at higher rates or assisting colleges with purchase of equipment.

Enable rural colleges to use telecommunications affordably and effectively. States should enable rural community colleges to use telecommunications broadly to transmit advanced courses to rural high schools; provide professional development for teachers, nurses, business owners and others in rural communities; provide college classes to students in remote areas; import specialized instruction from other community colleges; and provide access to bachelor's and master's courses transmitted from distant universities.

Encourage economies of scale through regional collaboration. Neighboring community colleges can work together to offer joint programs and do joint purchasing, advertising and professional development. States can help by removing administrative barriers and providing incentives for collaboration.

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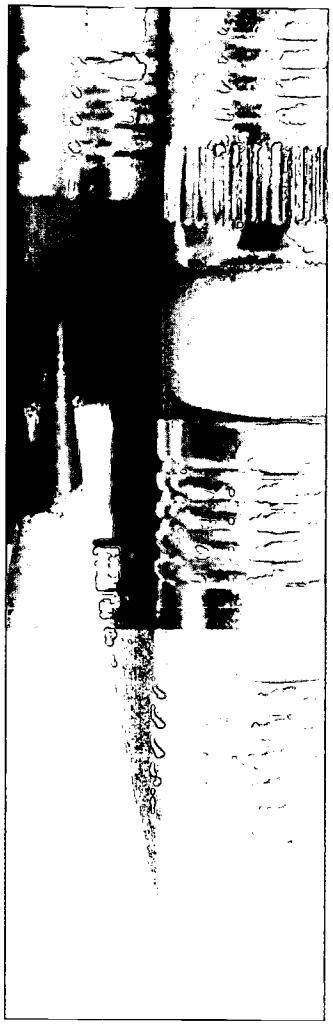
> "For the sake of equity and the health of the overall state economy, rural communities need appropriate support for both education and economic development."



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Vehicles for economic development

To maximize the economic development potential of their rural colleges, the first step for state policymakers is simply to recognize and validate these institutions' economic development mission.

Support workforce training in rural communities. With limited budgets, rural colleges struggle to maintain up-to-date computers and other equipment. The prevalence of small employers in rural areas makes it harder to fill classes. And in states where contract training must be self-supporting, it is difficult for rural colleges to generate the critical mass needed to maintain a training department. States can help in the following ways:

- ☐ Use community college districts as service areas for employment and training programs.
- ☐ Ensure that rural employers have access to high-quality training by providing colleges with base support for a business and industry liaison, or by encouraging small colleges to collaborate regionally in providing training.
- ☐ Design workforce training programs with the flexibility to accommodate rural circumstances.

Use rural colleges as agents for technology transfer and small business development. Community colleges can organize manufacturing networks and serve as a broker between firms and sources of specialized technical assistance. They can develop training programs tailored to key sectors in the local economy and can keep firms up-to-date on innovations that will improve their competitive position.

Nurture leadership for rural development. Perhaps the most important strategy for rural development is the nurturing of social capital. Rural colleges can bring together leaders from business, government, education, agriculture and community organizations to shape a shared agenda for economic development.

States can encourage collaboration between traditional economic development players and community colleges. For instance, community colleges can be used as regional outstations for state economic development staff, and community college representatives should be included in all economic development meetings.

Rubin is senior associate of MDC Inc. in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and Autry is president of MDC Inc. ☐

Western Connection of Community Colleges

The Western Connection of Community Colleges is a collaborative of three small colleges in the far western corner of North Carolina which joined to provide extensive program offerings that none of them could provide alone. They operate shared programs in nursing and law enforcement. Several vocational programs with steady but low demand rotate annually among the three campuses. At times, the three colleges have advertised their business and industry services jointly throughout the region, allowing firms to obtain specialized training services from whichever college is best equipped to help them.

Oregon Advanced Technology Consortium

Oregon's community colleges play a central role in industrial modernization. Through the Oregon Advanced Technology Consortium (OATC), a statewide collaborative of community colleges, the state funds staff at every college to develop training programs for manufacturing firms. In addition, OATC manages Oregon's federally funded manufacturing extension program, which places field engineers at community colleges. Staff serving rural areas help introduce new technology and improve productivity in value-added natural resource industries such as wood products or food processing.

TECHNOLOGY PLANNING: STATE AND SYSTEM ISSUES

by James R. Mingle and Sandra S. Ruppert

Developments in information technology (IT) — including more powerful computers, high-speed networks and modems, easier-to-use applications and richer content offered via the World Wide Web and the Internet — are dramatically redefining nearly every aspect of where, when and how learning and research takes place.

But, for most colleges and universities, access to the best that technology has to offer remains more a vision than a reality. Although technology use is on the rise, the majority of courses offered at public and private two- and four-year institutions do not yet make use of either e-mail or Internet or multimedia resources for instructional purposes, according to the most recent *Campus Computing* survey. The survey also reveals that community colleges, which remain heavily invested in instructional television, lag behind public four-year colleges and universities in the use of computing and Internet technology. And, across the board, planning for and strategically investing in educational technology represent significant challenges for most institutions.

Although determining the appropriate choices and uses for IT depends on the particular state context, there are five issues in which states will need to play a leadership role in fostering innovation and technological advances:

State goals and priorities

State policymakers' level of enthusiasm for the application of information technology to higher education systems is at an all-time high. Colleges and universities also are making their own substantial technology investments by reallocating existing funds, establishing student technology fees and seeking additional support through grants and business alliances. But, for the most part, both states and campuses have not used technology to restructure the organization or instructional process.

Among the basic questions state policymakers will want to ask about the role of IT in meeting statewide goals for higher education are these:

- ☐ Do states want to support the explosion of adult learning that will occur because of global digital networks or will these programs need to be self-supporting?
- ☐ Will states with growing minority populations see IT as relevant to access and learning goals that will increase minority success in higher education?
- ☐ Will a technology-based solution satisfy the demands for local economic development and access to facilities that drive much of public higher education policy?

Statewide networks

Several states have established networks and organizations to develop, contract and manage integrated telecommunications infrastructure and services. Participants often include state and local government agencies, public schools, libraries, universities and colleges, and community hospitals. For the most part, these networks are not state-owned, but consist of partnerships with private telecommunications companies. By aggregating demand, networks are able to provide services well below market rates and extend service to areas not served by private telecommunications companies or Internet service providers.

Among the critical questions often raised by policymakers about statewide networks are these:

- ☐ What is the difference between statewide networks and the Internet?
- ☐ Will statewide networks be replaced by developments in the private sector?
- ☐ Why do prices for services vary so much?

New organizational structures

Historically, new challenges to higher education have been met through the creation of new institutional types. The "virtual university" — still more a concept than a defined organizational type — is emerging as one response to the needs of "anytime, anyplace" education. The virtual university comes in a variety of forms:

- ☐ The "virtual" library — digital materials delivered to the desktop
- ☐ Electronic student services — online services such as admission, registration, bookstore, bursar and career services
- ☐ "Virtual" catalogs — student access to the electronic offerings of hundreds of colleges

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"Although technology use is on the rise, the majority of courses offered at public and private two- and four-year institutions do not yet make use of either e-mail or Internet or multimedia resources for instructional purposes."

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- ☐ Competency-based credentialers — means of obtaining a degree through alternative assessment arrangements
- ☐ Distance-learning degrees — degree programs available from traditional institutions, especially in an asynchronous (time-delayed) mode
- ☐ Curriculum development centers and other collaboratives — shared degree programs.

These developments challenge nearly every aspect of the state policy environment. Among the important policy questions to be addressed are these:

- ☐ What should the state's role be in "sponsoring" or supporting new organizational structures that may compete with existing institutions?
- ☐ How can states and systems leverage their size to gain economies of scale?
- ☐ What quality assurance methods will work best in a more open and global environment of educational providers?
- ☐ How can states support curriculum and faculty development to support the virtual university? How should the flow of dollars change to support the "receive-site" functions of community colleges?

"While the traditions of campus autonomy have often constrained joint program development, the competitive factors brought about by global learning networks may be enough to push institutions to collaborate out of economic necessity."

Cost effectiveness

One of the most frequently asked questions from policymakers regarding technology-based instruction, including distance learning, is: Will it save money over traditional modes of delivery? The answer depends on a variety of factors, but the following general conclusions can be drawn about the benefits and costs of technology-based instruction based on documented case studies compiled by the California State University System as well as other recent research efforts:

- ☐ The primary cost of traditional classroom instruction is the cost of the instructor.
- ☐ If technology is "bolted on" to existing course structures (e.g., a computer-tutorial supplement to a lecture/lab format), costs will rise.
- ☐ Technology-based instruction tends to require substantial start-up or fixed costs.
- ☐ Electronic courses offered to small numbers of students are usually more expensive than classroom instruction.
- ☐ Distance-learning programs that invest heavily in content development and expensive transmission media such as satellite delivery must make up these costs through large enrollments.
- ☐ Internet-based courses, which depend upon asynchronous interactions between students and faculty, can be less expensive than courses that depend upon live (real-time) interactions.
- ☐ Savings and benefits in technology-based instruction often accrue to the individual student in the form of convenience, expanded opportunity and reduced travel costs to a campus.
- ☐ Additional costs of technology-based instruction can be justified if there are demonstrable improvements in quality — e.g., in student performance and achievement — or if no traditional alternatives exist for providing access.

Financing and investment strategies

Approaches to financing technology acquisition are as diverse and varied as the states. They are also in considerable flux. In good budget years, legislators tag on "technology funds" to base budget appropriations. Seldom are these funds part of a comprehensive plan, nor is there much agreement as to the appropriate sources of revenue for different types of expenditures.

Among the policies and issues state policymakers should consider in developing a strategic plan for the financing and investment in information technology are these:

- ☐ **Source of funds.** The source of funds for technology purchases and applications are several: base budgets, revenues from tuition and product sales, productivity savings, student technology fees and earmarked funds from the legislature.
- ☐ **Pricing policies.** A market-driven higher education system for electronic delivery suggests that the price charged to students be set according to market factors. Unfortunately, this pure market approach may have serious shortcomings that will necessitate state intervention because individual consumer responses do not necessarily add up to state need.
- ☐ **Funding collaboration.** While the traditions of campus autonomy have often constrained joint program development, the competitive factors brought about by global learning networks may be enough to push institutions to collaborate out of economic necessity. States can reinforce this objective through changes in their program-approval criteria and by providing funds directly to new collaborative structures.

Mingle is executive director of the State Higher Education Executive Officers. Ruppert is director of Educational Systems Research.☐

The Status of Campus Technology Use

Instruction

- ☐ E-mail: 40% of courses at public four-year; 20% at community colleges
- ☐ Resources available on the Internet: 28% of courses at public four-year colleges; 18% at community colleges
- ☐ Some form of multimedia (voice, video or data) resources: 12% of courses at public four-year colleges; 15% at community colleges

Integrating technology

- ☐ 47% of public 4-year colleges and 38% of community colleges report some type of computer instruction or instructional technology (IT) competency requirement for all undergraduates.
- ☐ "Assisting faculty integrate IT into instruction" and "providing adequate user support" are the top IT challenges for both two- and four-year institutions.
- ☐ 20% of survey respondents identify "financing the replacement of aging hardware and software" as the most pressing IT issue.

Financing campus technology investments

- ☐ Charge mandatory user fees: 59% of public four-year colleges (avg. = $131); 34% of community colleges (avg. = $55)
- ☐ Majority (70%) of campuses continue to fund most of their equipment, network and software expenses with one-time budget allocations or special appropriations.
- ☐ Majority (52%) continue to operate without a strategic or an IT financial plan.

NOTE: Based on a mid-1997 survey of 605 public and private two- and four-year colleges and universities in the U.S.

Source: Kenneth C. Green, Campus Computing 1997. Encino, CA: Campus Computing, 1997.

Colorado Community College Online

In late 1997, the Colorado Community College and Occupational Education System announced the availability of Colorado Community College Online (CCC Online), a collaborative effort to deliver the degrees and certificates of the state's 13 community colleges via the Internet. Although other colleges have developed degrees that enable students to learn online, CCC Online is among the few in which every course required for a degree will be offered over the Internet. All CCC Online courses will be accredited and are expected to transfer to four-year colleges and universities in Colorado and other states. CCC Online will be a single-location site for students to earn an associate degree in business administration. The new degree program includes the following features:

Source: Colorado Community College and Occupational Education System @ http://www.cccoes.edu/. Lisa Guernsey, "Colorado Community Colleges Plan Degree to Be Offered Entirely Over the Internet," *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* (November 28, 1997).

FOSTERING STUDENT RETENTION AND SUCCESS

by James Palmer

All colleges and universities attempt to increase student retention and success. But this task is especially difficult at the community college, whose students often face adult responsibilities that impede academic progress and who attend for a variety of purposes that defy easy categorization.

In these circumstances, it is difficult to determine which students fulfill their education objectives and which do not. This problem is compounded by the community college's historical emphasis on access. Funding formulas tie state dollars to enrollments and focus administrator concern on filling classroom seats. As a result, community colleges can report much about the number of students served but relatively little about what happens to those students over time.

"This task is especially difficult at the community college, whose students often face adult responsibilities that impede academic progress and who attend for a variety of purposes that defy easy categorization."

Policy

Policymakers facing contemporary concerns for the return on investment in community college systems can employ several policy options that refocus attention on student retention and success. (See table for more information.)

Data requirements

One form of leverage states can use to promote student retention is the authority to collect data from colleges and report those data to the public. Data that measure enrollments, number of faculty employed or expenditures within a given fiscal year can be augmented with indicators of what happens to students over time.

Four caveats, however, should be kept in mind by those who would use information mandates as a means of focusing institutional attention on student retention and success. First, the cost of collecting persistence data is high. Second, indicators of student progress, such as persistence or transfer rates, are not absolute measures of institutional quality but rather a means of understanding the student experience over time. Third, fiscal rewards for positive student outcomes may lead colleges to favor the enrollment of more able students at the expense of higher-risk students. Finally, information on student outcomes over time should be matched by information on student educational intent. Many community college students have no intention of enrolling over an extended period of time.

Targeted funds

Programs that provide special services for targeted student populations offer another way for states to increase student retention. For example, New Jersey supports programs that recruit at-risk students and provide them with a variety of support services. Virginia authorized the community college board to establish an incentive scholarship fund for "second-year, full-time community college students who have a B average or better and who are enrolled in designated technical training programs that address Virginia's workforce training needs."

Program oversight

A third approach to dropout prevention and efficient degree completion lies in policies that foster efficient student progression through the curriculum. One option is to mandate basic-skills testing for entering students and to require remedial instruction for students with insufficient reading, writing or mathematics skills. A second policy option is to go beyond testing, requiring community colleges to provide students with adequate guidance and feedback as they pursue defined education ends. And a third option is to set enrollment priorities that help focus college efforts on targeted student groups rather than trying to meet the needs of all comers.

Palmer is an associate professor of educational administration and foundations at Illinois State University.

Table 1
Summary and Appraisal of Policy Options That May Increase Student Retention and Success

Forms of Policy Leverage	Policy Goals To Be Pursued	Policy Options in Pursuit of goal	Appraisal of the Policy Option	
			Potential Benefits	Potential Problems
Authority to request data and information from colleges	To strengthen college accountability for student progress and degree attainment	Require colleges to report key student progress indicators, such as semester-to-semester retention rates, graduation rates, rates of transfer to 4-year colleges, etc. Provide fiscal rewards to colleges that meet specified goals related to student progress as measured by these indicators	Provides needed information on what happens to students over time, not just on how many students are enrolled in any one term Refocuses administrative attention from enrollments to student outcomes, ties funding to performance	Data costly to collect and can easily be misinterpreted by public May lead colleges to favor enrollment of more able students at expense of higher-risk students
Authority to earmark funds for urgent state priorities	To assure students at risk of dropping out or who are receiving training needed for state's economy receive services that maximize their chances of academic success	Earmark funds that support special programs and incentives leading to increased retention of "at-risk" students Earmark funds that support special programs or incentives leading to increased retention of students receiving training in high-demand jobs within state	Targets money to those who need it most; addresses equity concerns for minorities and the poor Ties student retention efforts to state's economic development	May unwittingly shift responsibility for success of at-risk students from faculty at large to staff of special programs; also, programs that facilitate achievement of particular group of students may unwittingly have negative effects on progress of other students May de-emphasize colleges' nonvocational educational roles
Responsibility to oversee academic quality of college programs	To foster efficient student progression through curriculum by ensuring that (a) students avoid courses for which they are not prepared, (b) students have accurate information about courses they need to complete to graduate and (c) colleges can adequately meet student needs	Mandate basic-skills testing for new students and require remediation for students with insufficient reading, writing or mathematics skills Strengthen matriculation policies that guide and direct students, preventing them from wandering aimlessly through the curriculum Set priorities for which students may be enrolled	Prevents students from taking classes for which they are ill-prepared Helps emphasize that college programs constitute sequenced education experience for students, not just collection of courses Focuses college effort (in terms of both staff and resources) on defined student groups; prevents colleges from trying to be all things to	Testing programs are costly; racial or cultural biases in testing instruments may have negative impact on minorities May be inappropriate for area citizens taking courses on occasional basis to fulfill personal interests Limits degree to which area citizens may use community college as education resource

South Carolina's Developmental Education

DESRTS (Developmental Education Student Retention Tracking System) is a computerized tracking system used by the South Carolina State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education to assess the retention and graduation of technical college students who enter with inadequate basic skills.

Two groups of first-time students are tracked over a five-year period: (1) students who score high enough on assessment tests to take college-level courses but who need some developmental classes and (2) students who need prerequisite assistance before enrolling in college-level classes. Comparisons are made between students who complete required remedial coursework and students who do not.

SHARED GOVERNANCE IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by Richard L. Alfred

"Community colleges must play a pivotal role in contributing to state and local economies and in helping citizens and communities adjust to social change."

Shared governance is one of the most widely discussed and misunderstood topics in postsecondary education today. In its simplest form, shared governance can be defined as "collegial decisionmaking" or the process for distributing authority, power and influence for academic decisions among campus constituencies. Campus constituencies may include, but are not limited to, the board of trustees, faculty, students, staff, administrators, the faculty senate and unions.

Shared governance is an important issue for policymakers because it is one of several factors shaping how community colleges respond to state and local needs. Institutions can respond quickly or slowly depending on how they are organized to make decisions. Those persons committed to shared governance may not be able to respond as rapidly as those who are not because of the expectation for extensive consultation and shared responsibility that comes with collective decisionmaking. The issue is not one of responsiveness — all colleges will eventually respond to identified needs — but rather one of speed and flexibility. How quickly will they respond?

Perspectives on shared governance

Until recently, organizations of all kinds, including community colleges, determined priorities from inside. Now, community colleges must play a pivotal role in contributing to state and local economies and in helping citizens and communities adjust to social change. To accomplish this, they will need to organize differently around concepts such as speed, customer service and design teams which involve continuous assessment.

Most institutions find this difficult. While community colleges have changed significantly in response to the expressed needs of employers, lawmakers and other interest groups, change is a slow and time-consuming process that is embraced by some and resisted by others. It is in this context of pressures and counterpressures associated with change that shared governance in community colleges must be considered.

Policy implications

Is shared governance a help or a hindrance for community colleges in an environment of changing student needs, aggressive competitors, advancing technology and divided opinion on campuses? Here are some issues affecting the answer:

Time and efficiency. Shared governance is a difficult, lengthy and time-consuming process. The increased number of participants required to ensure that every group is represented can make decisionmaking a laborious process. Administrators must become teachers, exercising great patience and giving participants time to discover and develop. Individuals and groups who formerly did not share in decisionmaking must spend time and energy learning new skills and knowledge and must acquire a view or perspective broader than their department. Teaching and service may become secondary priorities as individuals devote more time to shared governance. All of this may hamper efficiency as decisionmaking slows to accommodate new participants.

To improve efficiency in decisionmaking, leaders and policymakers may want to consider fast-track procedures for certain types of decisions or to allow decisions to be made without consultation in circumstances.

Quality of decisions. It is unclear as to whether the quality of decisions (as defined by outcomes and cost) is improved or diminished under shared governance. On the one hand, better decisions might result from a range of opinions and perspectives brought to bear on a specific issue. On the other hand, parties holding divergent opinions may compromise the quality of a decision by settling for an outcome that satisfies everyone, but does little to advance the institution.

Motivation and commitment. Does staff commitment and morale improve under shared governance? Do faculty and staff perform better? The answers to these questions are not known, but people seem to invest more of themselves in organizations that provide opportunities for involvement in decisionmaking. Countering this effect, however, are staff descriptions of frustration and conflict associated with contentious parties in decisionmaking, slow progress and negligible gains in performance. An important question to ask would be: Under what conditions does "involvement" seem to work and not work in decisionmaking?

Continued from previous page

Organizational effectiveness. A critical issue that leaders and policymakers need to consider is the impact of shared governance on organizational effectiveness. Does faculty and staff involvement in decisionmaking help the institution respond to changes in the market? Does it encourage innovation in programs, services and delivery systems? Does it improve student learning outcomes? The relationship between shared governance and organizational performance is perhaps the single most important issue in shared governance requiring consideration by policymakers.

Conclusion

Shared governance is a good concept in the abstract, but a clear definition of its parameters, a clear institutional direction and leadership training for faculty and staff are required if it is to be implemented with positive results. If parties are unclear about who is doing what and who has responsibility and authority for the decisions that must be made within a shared governance framework, decisionmaking can become a nightmare.

The challenge of shared governance is for different parties to identify specific areas of responsibility before decisions are made and action taken. To guide development of an effective college, administrators must work collaboratively with faculty, staff, senates and unions in an environment where the scope of responsibility and authority of each constituent group is clearly understood by the stakeholders of the institution.

Alfred is a professor of higher education for the Community College Consortium at the University of Michigan's Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education.☐

Advantages of Shared Governance

- ☐ Fosters a sense of empowerment
- ☐ Promotes greater "buy-in" to decisions
- ☐ Encourages staff to accept responsibility for decisions
- ☐ Results in improved morale and an improved college environment
- ☐ Increases the breadth of understanding related to issues
- ☐ Improves communication by involving more people in the decision process
- ☐ Fosters divergent points of view
- ☐ Improves the likelihood that the college will move forward in responding to critical issues.

Disadvantages of shared governance

- ☐ Slows decisionmaking because so many people are involved
- ☐ Hampers effective management because it requires numerous iterations of the same information to achieve consensus
- ☐ Limits efficiency because it lengthens the time required to complete critical processes
- ☐ Diminishes the quality of decisions by soliciting opinions from those who may not be qualified to speak to the issues
- ☐ Slows progress in institutional development because faculty are not available during certain periods
- ☐ Adds to administrators' responsibility while reducing their authority
- ☐ May make teaching and learning a secondary responsibility
- ☐ Takes administrators away from strategic responsibilities, such as implementing new programs and services
- ☐ Disguises self-serving agendas and political maneuvering
- ☐ Has sometimes resulted in an unfavorable amount of power, control and advantage to faculty
- ☐ Leads to role confusion in decisionmaking
- ☐ Encourages polarization and adversarial relations between faculty, staff and administrators.

IMPROVING POLICY TO INCREASE STUDENT TRANSFER

by Tronie Rifkin

"The average age [of community college students] is 32 and includes increasing numbers of low-income, low-ability students — a non-traditional, higher-risk group of students than found at most four-year colleges."

Community colleges have multiple missions. One of the oldest is to provide college freshman- and sophomore-level education to students ultimately seeking bachelor's degrees. The success of this mission depends upon the smooth and efficient transfer of students and their academic credits to and from two- and four-year colleges and universities.

Despite a number of articulation policies aimed at helping community college students transfer to four-year institutions, many students either do not pursue a bachelor's degree, or they experience major problems in the process. Given the social and economic advantages of smooth transfer to individuals and states, improving articulation policy and practice is a matter of significant public interest.

Background

Of today's six million community college students enrolled for credit, 25% are minority, 58% are women and 65% are enrolled part-time, combining their studies with full- or part-time jobs. The average age is 32 and includes increasing numbers of low-income, low-ability students — a nontraditional, higher-risk group of students than found at most four-year colleges. Many students are testing themselves in the less-risky environment of a community college, often after prior education experiences that were less than satisfactory. Many are place-bound by family, job or other commitments and have no other postsecondary options.

Of this group, the question of how many want to attend a four-year institution is difficult to answer. Approximately half of all students who enter postsecondary institutions begin their studies in community colleges, and 20-29% of those students transfer to four-year colleges, a percentage many criticize as too low. Research suggests that students who initially enroll at community colleges are less likely to complete the bachelor's degree than students who begin their studies at four-year colleges.

More recent studies suggest that once community college students successfully transfer to a four-year institution, they graduate at the same rate as students who begin at four-year colleges and attain job status and earnings equal to students who started at and graduated from four-year institutions. These findings seem to indicate that the problems which prevent successful completion of the bachelor's degree usually arise prior to transfer or during the transfer process.

Improving articulation and increasing transfer is a complex task unlikely to be resolved by state initiatives alone. The quality of interaction among state government and the various education sectors within each state is critical to the articulation and transfer process, as are the following issues.

Collaboration. Researchers who have examined effective articulation and transfer practices emphasize the importance of faculty support for, and involvement in, the development of articulation agreements. Faculty from two- and four-year institutions must learn to work together constructively on these and other issues, such as curriculum development. Collaboration also can extend in the opposite direction — between K-12 and postsecondary faculty.

Articulation agreements. The Illinois Articulation Initiative is one of the most recent state efforts to improve articulation (see page 8). Launched in 1993, it sought to create a statewide General Education Core Curriculum. Students who take this package of coursework are assured

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their credits will satisfy both the general education and major requirements at the institution to which they transfer.

Curriculum reform. A recent study found community colleges whose curricula included a broad range of liberal arts offerings had higher transfer rates than colleges with weaker offerings. Ensuring that occupational-technical programs at community colleges include a significant amount of high-quality general education coursework may be key to making them more acceptable for transfer.

Student support services. Collaborative efforts and articulation agreements have little effect unless prospective transfer students have access to high-quality information, academic advising, counseling and other support services. Well-established community college transfer centers — in states such as California and Illinois — provide a comprehensive and coordinated range of services to students, including information on transfer opportunities and assistance in dealing with the admissions process of four-year institutions.

Technical support and research. Effective transfer programs benefit from a well-developed technical infrastructure that includes statewide student information and tracking systems, articulation databases and research on transfer. The most effective programs have all three and are often found in states where higher education is closely coordinated at the state level, such as Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Texas and Washington. Establishing information systems and collecting data on transfer are complicated by the lack of agreed-upon methods for measuring transfer, making it difficult to establish valid benchmarks and reliably measure progress toward institutional, system and state goals.

Financial incentives. Performance funding related to transfer has been suggested and, to some degree, implemented in a number of states. Examples include awarding additional money to two-year institutions whose students transfer at a high rate, and/or to four-year institutions that accept a high number of transfers.

Such schemes are attractive but can be problematic. Many current performance-funding systems have technical problems related to equity, methodology and the degree of impact on institutional budgets. As performance-funding systems evolve and become more technically sophisticated, many of these problems may be resolved, but at this time institutional financial incentives for transfer remain a promising, but still imperfect, practice.

Policy recommendations

To be effective, articulation policies and practices must involve a network of constituents from the state to the university to the community college to the high school. State directives, though necessary and important, may be limited in their effect and difficult to carry out, whereas state-encouraged and -supported actions instituted at the system, and particularly the institutional level, may prove more effective overall.

Streamline articulation. Recognize and publicly acknowledge community colleges as equal partners with four-year institutions in developing and implementing articulation and transfer initiatives. Implement an articulation system whereby students who have met a set of requirements can transfer to and from any two- and four-year institutions in the state with or without an associate's degree.

Promote collaboration. Encourage ongoing collaboration between two- and four-year institutions as well as between community colleges and high schools. Provide financial incentives for development of collaborative strategies that promote transfer, such as programs that identify and encourage low-income, minority, part-time and re-entry students to pursue a baccalaureate degree.

Foster curriculum development. Call upon faculty at both two- and four-year institutions to take primary responsibility for curriculum development. Require regional institutions to establish subject-area curriculum committees composed of both community college and four-year college faculty. Include occupational-technical faculty in curriculum development discussions.

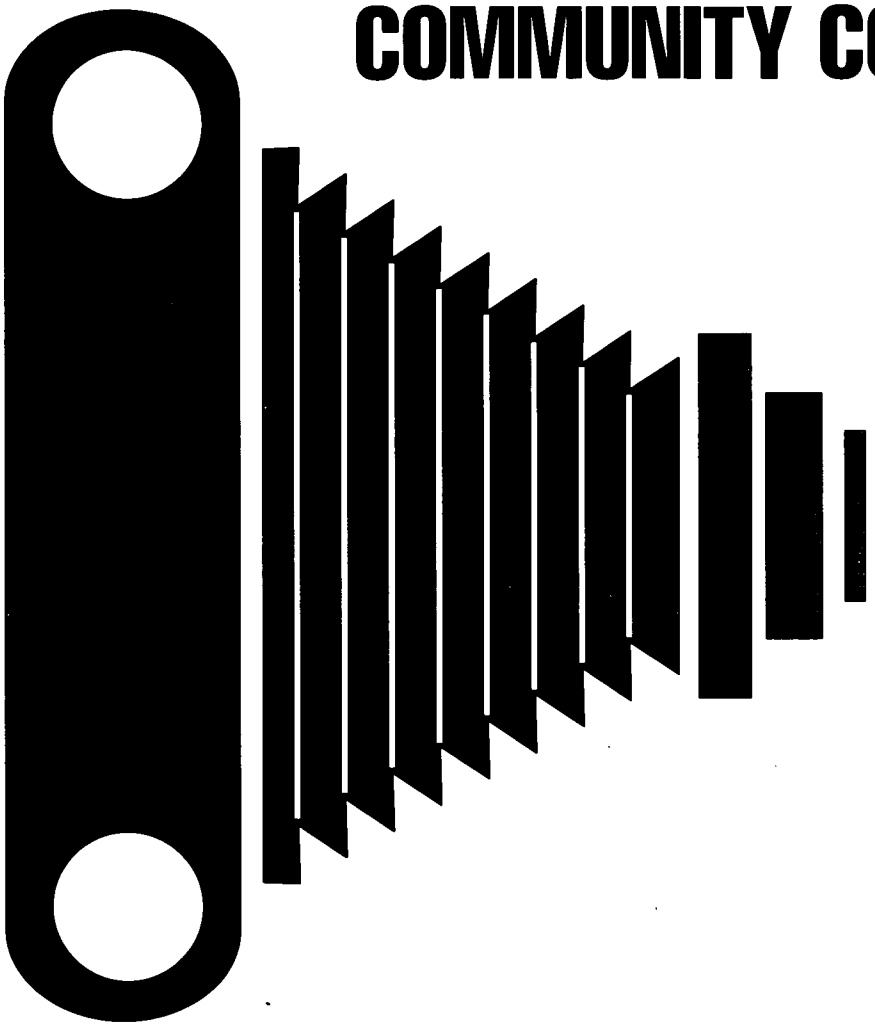
Bolster student support services. Make arrangements for students to receive financial aid to attend four-year institutions. Allocate funds to maintain transfer centers at both two- and four-year colleges that provide counseling, student advising and mentoring, as well as information on transfer opportunities.

Build technical support. Provide funding to establish an integrated technical infrastructure that can support student information systems, articulation and transfer data from both two- and four-year institutions in the state.

Provide for research and evaluation. Provide funding to carry out research and evaluation on the effectiveness of transfer and articulation. Based on reliable research, establish reasonable transfer goals.

Rifkin is associate director of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges at the University of California, Los Angeles.□

COMMUNITY COLLEGE SNAPSHOT



- 10.6 million students — 45% of all U.S. undergraduates and more than half of all freshmen and sophomores — are enrolled in American community and technical colleges (half for credit).
- The 1,581 two-year community and technical colleges make up 40% of U.S. institutions of higher education.
- Community and technical colleges serve students of all ages, ethnic groups and backgrounds. Some 48% of racial/ethnic minority students attend a community college, as do more than 50% of students with a disability. The average age of the student population is 32; 58% are women and 65% are enrolled parttime.
- The average cost of community college tuition and fees is $1,492 a year, compared to $2,821 at public four-year institutions and $12,264 at independent four-year institutions.
- Community colleges provide training for seven of the top 10 "hot jobs for the next century" identified by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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