

VIRTUAL LISTENING TOUR REPORT 2022

Snapshot of Resilience and Excellence



AMERICAN
ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNITY
COLLEGES

LEAD ADVOCATE ADVANCE

Contents

Introduction	3
Pandemic Impact on Enrollment	3
Notable Approaches to Address Enrollment Declines	4
Instructional Delivery	5
Faculty Development	6
Embedding Technology in Instruction	6
College Networks for Student Success	7
New and Expanded Programs	8
Academic.....	8
Workforce	8
The Green Economy.....	10
Education and Industry Partnerships and Programs.....	11
The Equity Agenda: Doing the Work	12
Organizational Equity	13
Equity Audit Best Practices	13
Professional Development in Equity.....	13
Centers and Instructional Resources for Equity.....	13
Relief for Students	14
Tuition, Fees, and Operating Hours	14
Textbooks	15
Use of Data.....	15
Student Support Services.....	16
Student Mental Health.....	16
Food and Housing.....	17
Recruitment	17
Programs with an Equity Focus	17
Financial Support.....	17
The Changing Landscape and Competition	19
Changing Landscape.....	19
Competition	20
Final Thoughts.....	20



Introduction

In 2011, the American Association of Community Colleges' (AACC) president and CEO and staff participated in a listening tour to hear about progress colleges were making toward the completion agenda, developmental education redesign, and their perceptions and thoughts about the Voluntary Framework for Accountability (VFA). Staff also learned about chief executive officer strategies for dealing with budget constraints and the big ideas that they had for the future of community colleges. This feedback shaped AACC priorities for several years.

In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic turned college operations upside down. Community college leaders adapted to the impacts of the pandemic by transitioning in-person instruction to virtual, instituting stringent sanitation practices for those that eventually returned to the in-person classroom, and managing a workforce that largely performed its duties from home. As the country got a better grasp on the pandemic and how to deal with it, the association determined the need to host a second set of listening tour meetings, virtually.

Between 2021 and 2022, staff engaged in discussions with college chief executive officers from 45 states about how their institutions were, and are, faring as a result of the pandemic and the new civil rights movement. We learned about the impact that the pandemic has had on student and employee mental health, on new and creative ways of delivering content, and most notably their equity and student success agendas. Out of these challenges have come great opportunities as colleges focus on re-envisioning and refining how their institutions are designed to ensure better alignment with how students engage in the learning process, the current and future economy, the jobs that it will require and needs of the communities that they serve.

Participating college CEOs were transparent, sharing both their successes and areas where there is still work to do. Information gathered from virtual listening tour participants is grouped into broad categories and includes the impact that the pandemic had on enrollment, the equity agenda, pandemic excellence and partnerships, and the changing landscape. Within each category, examples of new and notable evidence-based programs that have been developed and implemented by colleges are included. We could not include all of the great work that we learned about during the tour.

Information gleaned from participating CEOs is being used to inform the association as staff move forward to identify priorities for colleges and how AACC can support them. In addition, this document can be used by colleges as a way to evaluate the institution's activities and whether they can be refined or streamlined to mirror models highlighted in this document that are having positive impact on student success and student employment post completion.

Pandemic Impact on Enrollment

It is well known that community colleges have experienced declines in enrollment during the pandemic. The reasons that students have not returned, and potential students have not enrolled has been well documented by think tanks and research organizations. What we heard in the virtual listening tour meetings consistently tracks with the research. Small pockets of community colleges have flat enrollment or have experienced slight gains in enrollment. The majority of colleges have been dealing with single to double-digit enrollment declines.



AACC staff heard from college leaders that existing students did not return because they were in survival mode. In some cases, they live with extended families and have minors in the home that require their care. Multiple states cited food and housing insecurity as key drivers for student not returning or newly enrolling at the college. And one of the biggest drivers is around wireless and broadband access.

The increased competition from employers has also posed a barrier to recruiting students. For example, several fast food chains offered \$20 to \$25 per-hour as the starting salary for new employees. Individuals in crisis are not thinking in the long-term, rather they are in survival mode on a daily basis. In this case, a job earning immediate pay is more desirable than enrolling in college to earn a credential that might take two or more years. Colleges are competing with employers to demonstrate the return on investment for the extended time that will take if an individual commits to education. Years down the road, colleges are concerned that students who took the quick job will be locked into positions with no growth opportunities, and they will then have to enroll in higher education having lost critical time that could have prepared them for a career.

The pandemic has presented barriers for colleges that are trying to recruit new and recapture students who didn't return. Connecticut cited challenges in capturing adult learners. Arizona and Ohio highlighted the significant decrease in minority male students, which was more pronounced in fall 2020 than it is today. And one of the most interesting issues was mentioned in Michigan where there are a number of emerging professions that students don't have familiarity with, so it is difficult to recruit them into programs where jobs are projected.

Rural community colleges cited additional challenges resulting from the pandemic. For some states like Alabama, there is difficulty in creating a college-going mindset. Like the vast majority of colleges that engaged in the virtual listening tour, multiple states serving rural communities talked about access to broadband. Arizona leaders spoke to the need to attract companies to rural-serving communities. And there was significant discussion about the pandemic's impact on junior and senior years of high school, and how interrupting the rite of passage has led to a disconnect between those students and their pursuit of higher education.

Notable Approaches to Address Enrollment Declines

Dual enrollment is an important pipeline fueling enrollment for many colleges. Leaders discussed the lost senior year in high school due to the coronavirus pandemic, which resulted in a loss of students in dually enrolled and early college programs. Equity must be considered as an important component of dual enrollment programs. Several states shared that historically marginalized students who could benefit most from dual enrollment programs are the students who seldom take advantage of the opportunity. Students primarily from middle- and upper-class backgrounds are the benefactors and take dual enrollment programs, and upon graduation from high school matriculate to four-year universities.

Indiana instituted a dual enrollment accelerated program to assist students who are close to earning a credential. Montana patterned a dual enrollment program after the CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) program for its students. Louisiana has instituted a fast-forward program to increase the number of students who graduate from high school with an associate degree. It is no longer dual credit for the sake of credit, but dual credit with the purpose of earning credentials.

Montana Project 10. This program is patterned after the CUNY ASAP program. The program offers academic, social, and financial supports designed to help students succeed in college. Montana 10's components are financial supports (scholarships, textbook stipends, monthly incentive), academic momentum (full-time schedule, corequisite math and writing tutoring), and purpose and belonging (specialized advising, career development orientation, freshman seminar).

¹The National Student Clearinghouse has done significant analysis of the enrollment picture looking at fall 2019 – 2021 data.

Career Academies. Several colleges and state systems have implemented career academies. Iowa community colleges provide an opportunity for a group of students from different school systems to enroll in a specific set of courses associated with a designated career area. The career areas include precise career pathways, allow school districts to pool resources and instruction, and the programs have national credentialing where available and applicable.

Another career academy program that has been expanded or offered for adult learners is offered by Madisonville Community College. The MCC Accelerator program. This program focuses on working adults who want to return to college to get a degree. Classes have been placed into a five-week intense module format. The adult student comes to the college one night a week for two years and finishes a complete associate degree with embedded certificates.

Louisiana and Texas community colleges have been designated as Second Chance Pell participation sites for incarcerated adults. These colleges focus on services that launch participants effectively when they complete their prison sentence.

Instructional Delivery

To keep students moving on their educational pathway when the pandemic forced campuses to transition from in-person instruction to offering courses and programs virtually, states focused their efforts on creating different ways of delivering course content.

Prior to the pandemic, community colleges offered less than half of their courses through distance learning programs. Many faculty not teaching online prior to the pandemic were not equipped with the skills necessary to transition face-to-face programs to deliver them virtually. Community colleges had to rapidly upskill faculty teaching face-to-face programs through bootcamps and other professional development opportunities. Minnesota is one of the states where community colleges provided these bootcamps so that faculty could effectively teach online.

In addition to upskilling faculty, community colleges also integrated technology into the overall process for delivering instruction. Examples of delivering content virtually are outlined as follows.

Synchronous courses. Florida, Louisiana, and Vermont stressed the importance of synchronous courses in supporting student success during the pandemic. Synchronous learning refers to a learning event in which a group of students are engaging in learning at the same time.

Asynchronous programs. Numerous states touted asynchronous programs as a solution to broadband issues. Asynchronous online learning allows students to view instructional materials each week at any time they choose and does not include a live video lecture component.

HyFlex classrooms. New York invested in hybrid flexible, or HyFlex, course format, which allows an instructional approach that combines face-to-face and online learning. Each class session and learning activity is offered in-person, synchronously online, and asynchronously online. Students can decide how to participate.

Hybrid didactic. Montana and Wyoming leaders shared that the “flipped” model worked for them in serving students through the pandemic. The flipped model can be combined with hybrid learning in order to create the “flipped-hybrid” classroom. The flipped classroom refers to an educational model where the traditional practice of dedicating class time to direct instruction is inverted, so that students receive initial content instruction at home.

Faculty Development

Faculty development is a critical issue in community colleges in a rapidly changing educational environment. Like Minnesota, a Pennsylvania community college wrote in the college's academic master plan that faculty would be credentialed to teach online. The college realized the dream, which has consequently led to students and faculty expressing that there is no need to return to the same old normal.

At Vance-Granville Community College in North Carolina, faculty were strategically selected to participate in AQS training for online classes and micro-credentialing. For the first time in six years, the college moved the needle substantially on the online course success rate.

The Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) created the faculty gateways fellows program. This academy engages faculty in thinking about the importance of lighting the fire in the curriculum, so students are actively engaged in the classroom and in their chosen area of study and future career. Specific breakout tracks for faculty in four focus areas allow for networking and best practice sharing across TBR institutions. One of the participating institutions shared how faculty redesigned curriculum to make sure it was culturally relevant, which also led to a review of policies that may pose barriers for students.

Wisconsin created a center for instructional excellence, which is a core group of staff that help faculty navigate their learning activities, Blackboard learning shells, and all curriculum design and delivery methods. This becomes a 24/7 resource for faculty so that they can be supported in making whatever transitions that they need to make as a part of their courses.

Embedding Technology in Instruction

An intriguing question for AACC staff during these discussions focused on workforce education. These programs are primarily offered in a face-to-face format so that students gain hands-on experience in the program. College CEOs shared the challenges to providing workforce programs in a virtual or hybrid environment, as well as the opportunities that have arisen from some of the work that has been piloted by colleges.

California Community Colleges agree that most career education courses and programs should be delivered in-person due to the hands-on requirements for mastery. It was challenging to deliver and support these types of programs within the online and virtual learning environment entirely.

California experimented with virtual and augmented reality systems to supplement traditional instructional modalities to deliver career and technical education content. Officials learned through this process that the use of technology holds great promise for the near future. But it was noted that current costs, limitations in course materials, technological and connectivity barriers, and the continued need for face-to-face and hands-on instruction in some career and technical education (CTE) programs is not likely to enable scaling of this solution in the short term.



Other innovation included virtual components added to existing face-to-face programs. In addition, some colleges focused on ways to build competency-based education programs.

Virtual Mechatronics and Robotics Program. Tennessee community colleges offer introductions to automation. Training opportunities are offered in robotics programming, robotics maintenance, material handling, equipment skills training, automated material, and network skills.

Computer Science AR/VR Program. A community college in Texas increased augmented reality (AR)/virtual reality (VR) mixed reality components in their workforce programs. Students can take almost 70% of their workforce curriculum virtually using AR and VR mixed reality.

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. The Certificate of Completion (CCL) in Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning offered by the Maricopa Community Colleges (Arizona) focuses on building machine learning models that can be used for predicting, making decisions, and enhancing human capabilities. The program provides the industry professional with the knowledge and skills used in a variety of fields using artificial intelligence (AI), including the information technology, automotive, healthcare, aerospace, industrial, and manufacturing industries. Program content includes an introduction to AI and machine learning, natural language processing, computer vision, and AI for business solutions and other applications. The curriculum also includes coursework in computer programming, math, and statistics.



College Networks for Student Success

Throughout the virtual listening tour, AACC staff heard about the importance of collaboration between community colleges, community colleges and business and industry, and community colleges and community-based organization. In particular, AACC staff learned about three interesting models.

Faculty Sharing. In Colorado, colleges have focused on sharing faculty through the use of technology. Rural community colleges are no longer limited to just the curriculum that is available in that area. Opportunities for colleges to offer more meaningful pathways for students has happened as a result of this agreement.

The Collaborative for Higher Education Shared Services (CHESS). CHESS was formed under the New Mexico Nonprofit Corporation Act and is designated a 501(c)(3) by the IRS. The president of each member institution serves as a director on the CHESS board. The colleges are the first in the nation to come together voluntarily to collaborate on a single, shared technology and data system, capitalizing on the power of shared resources and decision-making. CHESS provides a structure for independently governed colleges and universities to achieve the benefits of a system while maintaining locally elected or independent boards and their unique connection to their communities. CHESS colleges are designing enterprise resource planning and student information systems that will include student services, finance, human resources, payroll, and more. Since 2020, more than 100 employees from all of the colleges have been working to identify best practices and streamline business procedures.

Unmudl Network. Arizona, New York, New Mexico community colleges, and the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) came together to develop an Amazon-style approach to course offerings through Unmudl. Unmudl is a skills-to-jobs marketplace where working learners can access community college-supported skills training. Training is offered through a network of seven community colleges in a variety of online formats. This allows students to access the training they want, when and how they want it. In Arizona, GateWay Community College (on behalf of the Maricopa Community Colleges) and Pima Community College are founding college partners of Unmudl. Unmudl provides access to new markets of

potential students (aka “learners”) and allows students to seamlessly compare and contrast training programs in order to find those that best fit their location, schedule, and budget.

College/University Combined Bookstore. Ivy Tech Community College has a bridge program with Indiana University—Purdue University Columbus called the Columbus Learning Center. The center will include a combined bookstore for both institutions. Students can visit the center to learn about careers, and the educational options available to them, including Purdue Polytechnic, Indiana University – Purdue University Columbus, or Ivy Tech.

New and Expanded Programs

Community colleges have tweaked existing programs to adapt delivery to pandemic guidance. They also have created new programs to deal with emerging issues of mental health, integrated technology in programs, and apprenticeships.

Academic

Professional Addictions Counseling. Arizona offers the Certificate of Completion (CCL) in Professional Addictions Counseling program to provide addictions specific education to practicing behavioral health professionals. Courses focus on self-help groups, the recovery process, relapse factors, family dynamics, and the various medical, emergent, and intervention models. This program has also been designed to help professionals meet their educational requirements for state and/or national addiction certification, as well as gain continuing education credits.

Media and Performing Arts Program. The Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College program includes courses in theater, visual and digital arts, music, and public speaking, as well as a Live Entertainment Technology program focused on preparing individuals for employment in the entertainment industry.

Direct Entry Midwife. Southwest Wisconsin Technical College offers a two-year associate degree program that will train professional midwives who will qualify for certification and licensure in Wisconsin. Graduates of Direct Entry Midwife provide hands-on holistic care for women of childbearing years and partner with women and other collaborative healthcare partners throughout the childbearing process. The Midwifery Program provides access to classroom learning virtually. Note that all students enrolled in “lab” classes are required to be present on campus for two weeks per semester

Workforce

Many programs discussed during the virtual listening tour focus on emerging and current workforce needs. Programs may be offered due to very specific regional to national needs. Montana and Nebraska leaders spoke at length about meat processing and the ability to offer this program virtually. Salem Community College in New Jersey shared information about its Associate Degree in

Applied Science for Scientific Glass Technology. Graduates are in high demand, finding jobs making scientific glass apparatus for university laboratories and industrial and research production.

Other notable programs shared by colleges are listed as follows.

Airframe and Powerplant Program. WSU Tech (Kansas) offers an 18-month aircraft maintenance program that meets the requirements for students to take the exam for the Airframe and Powerplant (A&P) mechanic certificate from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). This certificate authorizes the holder to approve



aircraft that has undergone inspection or maintenance “for return to service.” The FAA approves this curriculum.

Advanced Manufacturing Precision Machining Program. Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College offers the Precision Manufacturing and Machining Technology program to prepare individuals to shape metal parts on machines such as lathes, grinders, drill presses, and milling machines. This program leads to an Associate of Applied Science Degree.

Biotechnology Center of Excellence. Alamance Community College in North Carolina launched the Biotechnology Center of Excellence that includes biotechnology, histotechnology, medical laboratory technology as well as mechatronics, information technology, horticulture technology and culinary arts.

3D Construction Program. Yavapai Community College in Arizona created a 3D construction affordable housing program. The college is printing houses with 3D printers. The new class features an immersive hands-on training experience using disruptive technology in the construction industry. Students use state-of-the-art 3D printing equipment and learn new emerging technology in 3D concrete printing of houses to address the shortage of attainable homes; set up and operate a 3D house printing machine; new building codes associated with 3D concrete house printing; 3D blueprints; and learn basic 3D printer programming.



Construction and Mechanical Occupations (CAMO) Training Academy Program.

Jefferson College in Missouri offers the CAMO program. It is designed to provide participants with a quality pre-apprenticeship and occupational exploration experience leading to acceptance into a skilled apprenticeship program, enrollment in a career technical training program, and/or related employment. The program includes career assessment, work readiness assessment/instruction, OSHA safety training, job search skill training, career technical training, and work experience training.

Cannabis Curriculum. Illinois has rolled out cannabis curriculum that includes processing and testing lab analytics of cannabis to ensure students have a competitive cannabis and agriculture-based education upon completion. The students receive a basic certificate from City Colleges of Chicago and a “Career in Cannabis” certificate from the State of Illinois.

Other states are working toward cannabis curriculum, but have run into legal issues, in particular in cases where the state has not legalized the use of cannabis.

Drones Programs. Community colleges in Kansas acknowledge that across the U.S. and around the world, small, unmanned aircraft systems (sUAS; under 55 lbs.) are rapidly transforming businesses and industries. Unmanned aerial vehicles are already being implemented in agriculture, infrastructure, package delivery, EMS, law enforcement, wind turbine blade inspections, utility substation and power line inspections, wildlife monitoring and reporting, mining, pipeline inspection, and real estate, to name just a few. The program provides training for students



who want to become involved in an industry in its infancy. Cloud County Community College (CCCC) offers a one-year certificate and a two-year Associate of Applied Science degree program in sUAS.

Software Development. The Alamo Colleges District (Texas) offers a program that trains students in the principles and techniques used to develop software applications. Training focuses on various programming languages, software testing, database management, object-oriented programming/design, and information technology structures. The program provides students with hands-on experience developing software packages and web applications using the latest technologies in the computer industry. Awards are offered in the follow areas: Associate of Applied Science, Game Development - Specialization in Game Programming; Level 1 Certificate, Software Development; Occupational Skills Award, Java Programming; Occupational Skills Award, C++ Programming.

Workforce Bootcamps. Colorado offers bootcamps in specific professions to combat workforce shortages. Once students complete the program requirements, they are assisted in securing their first job by receiving services such as resume review, career coaching, and a career fair. The training also includes certification.

Mississippi Online Workforce College (MSOWC). MSOWC is a fully online, self-paced learning platform that is supported by the Mississippi Community Colleges and designed to help people gain work-ready skills. In addition, MSOWC will help employers deliver and track online pre-hire and professional development training for their organization. The Online Workforce College offers a huge library of workforce skills training and includes employability, health and safety, quality and continuous improvement, and technical competencies.

Workplace Readiness Program. The Arkansas Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) is a portable credential that confirms to employers that an individual possesses basic workplace skills in reading for information, applied mathematics, and locating information. The Arkansas CRC further verifies that the individual can handle skills required for 21st-century jobs.

POWER 5 program. Northwest Shoals Community College was the first college in Alabama to offer a competency-based HVAC apprenticeship program. It was designed to address the industry's immediate need for highly skilled, professionally trained HVAC technicians. The flexibility of the program gives students previously disconnected from post-secondary education an opportunity to start or continue their education while earning a livable wage. POWER 5 participating employers compensate apprentices according to the wage progression schedule that rewards students for demonstrating mastery of skills and competencies. Apprentices range from 18 to 60 years old.

The Green Economy

Since 2008-2009, the dialogue on sustainability and the green economy has been elevated to the highest levels. Colleges are still offering relevant programming that is designed in ways to minimize impact on the country's natural resources.

Illinois created a Green Economy Network so that colleges can work together to share their resources and their common experiences, as well as best practices to grow the green economy and sustainability programs in the state. Over the past couple of years, \$6 million has been distributed to community colleges to develop curriculum for programs in various areas of sustainability.

At the time of the virtual listening tour, Bristol Community College in Massachusetts was beginning training through the Global Wind Organization for accreditation training. As the college begins to install wind turbines, accreditation creates a pathway for a meaningful credential for students.

During the listening tour, AACC also spoke with colleges from North and South Dakota and learned about an energy program that includes six types of energy. The college offers wind, coal fired, hydro-electric, propane or natural gas, nuclear and turbine solar. They also train people who build and maintain energy production facilities.

And colleges like Clark State College are focusing their efforts on programs that allow individuals to work from home.

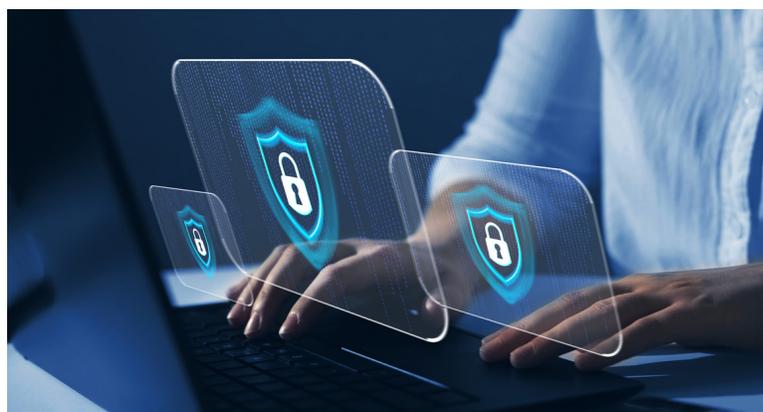
Education and Industry Partnerships and Programs

Community colleges across the 45-state listening tour touted the importance of partnerships to offer relevant training for current and future jobs. In addition to training in nursing and allied health and other fields that are consistently in high demand, colleges have managed to forge unique partnerships in highly technical fields, most notably in cybersecurity training, among other areas.

Google Career Certificates. Arizona and North Carolina community colleges launched Google Career Certificates as a short-term program. Some institutions offer the credentials as credit and others as non-credit. In Arizona, the programs are oversubscribed, with enrollment up more than 100%.

Cybersecurity Programs

NAVWAR Program. The Los Angeles Community Colleges partnered with NAVWAR, which is the civilian branch of the military. NAVWAR was having retention challenges with their engineers and wanted to diversify their workforce. NAVWAR worked with the system to identify community college students who would meet the requirements to go into pre-engineering or an engineering apprenticeship in their organization. NAVWAR pays the students between \$20 and \$25 per-hour through the completion of their bachelor's degrees in engineering or computer science.



Warfare Range. In Arizona, there is a partnership with Tech Data. Tech Data provides some of their leading security professionals through the cyber warfare range, which is housed on one of the Maricopa Community College campuses. Students get to experience the real world of cyber with trained professionals along with going onto the dark web with professional supervision.

Training Lab. In Idaho there was a successful connection between a community college and the training playground for Idaho National Lab, where America's secrets are protected. The Lab has provided a training environment for students using a secure operation center. In fall 2022, the college will be training students in the environment.

Scatter Tech. Ivy Tech Community College partnered with the Office of the Adjutant General for the State of Indiana to create a scatter tech urban training center. It is a range operation as a part of Camp Atterbury. The environment also includes a cyber farm, water treatment facility, and a cyber operation center. Students can receive a two-year cybersecurity degree in one year in the accelerated program. The program also includes three certificates that students can earn along the way.

Non-destructive Testing Program. Central Oregon Community College offers training in non-destructive testing to ensure product integrity and reliability; it is used in the aerospace, defense, oil and gas, and automotive sectors. The college has been able to secure equipment from corporate and industry partners to deliver the program.

The Equity Agenda: Doing the Work



Community colleges continue to advance the completion agenda. What has come out of implementation strategies to improve completion is the recognition that equity must be placed at the center of all discussions of improving student outcomes. For the equity agenda to take hold, it is important that the colleges' employees are culturally competent and embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Many colleges have begun their work at the administrative level creating professional development and resources for employees to undertake this difficult work. These resources include assessments of the

institution and its programs. Others have been mandated through legislation, like Washington, to submit plans for achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion.

To develop culturally competent employees, some community colleges access professional development for equity and social justice from organizations that specialize in this work. Others have used books from authors such as Ibram X. Kendi and Robin DiAngelo to engage in the difficult conversations around privilege and equity. And still others have focused on changing their operations to eliminate barriers to success by creating specialized tuitions and eliminating high-cost textbooks

Organizational Equity

Most of the college leaders who participated in the listening tour are tackling equity in a number of different ways. First, institutions are looking at operations through an equity lens. Also, they are attempting to ensure that they have culturally competent employees and they are engaging in equity activities to encourage open and honest discussion. Others have been looking at the student experience, notably the excessive cost of textbooks and they are trying to bring costs down. The sections that follow focus on ways that colleges are creating student-ready institutions.

Equity Audit Best Practices

Colleges shared how they are using assessments to advance their equity agenda. We have highlighted a few examples provided to us.

Equity Audit of Community College Programs. Arkansas and Massachusetts colleges have participated in equity audits of their services and programs, which resulted in identifying inequitable access, inclusivity, and success.

Equity Scorecard. Ohio created an equity scorecard to help identify barriers and potential solutions to equity for its colleges.

Equity Plans. In Washington, legislation passed mandating that, beginning on July 30, 2022, all community and technical colleges must submit on a biennial basis strategic plans to the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges for achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion of all races on their campuses. The plan must include a process for engaging stakeholders and opportunities for engaging marginalized students to form student-based organizations that permit mentoring. The state board must come up with a plan to diversify faculty.

Academic Excellence Team. Madison Area Technical College (MATC) is working with its academic excellence team and asking faculty to do a complete review of their curriculum related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. They are determining areas where there need to be changes in existing curriculum for equity.

Professional Development in Equity

Several colleges have designed and/or implemented programs to get active participation in the equity agenda. These programs include challenging individuals to participate in activities that will grow their understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion, including bringing experts to the college through face-to-face and virtual delivery to speak to employees. Colorado implemented equity training for all community college presidents. The community colleges also embedded equity into their search processes, job descriptions, and interviews.

21-Day Racial Equity Challenge. Pima Community College held a challenge, which involves daily activities that help participants gain a better understanding about equity, justice, and inclusion. Cuesta College in California also participated in the 21-Day Racial Equity & Social Justice Challenge.

Equity & Inclusion Week. Idaho hosted an equity and inclusion week for employees, which consisted of activities and guest speakers focusing on the different aspects of equity.

Latino Policy Forum. Colleges in Illinois participated in the Latino Policy Forum. The Latino Policy Forum's goal is to improve the lives and prosperity of the Latino community through advocacy and analysis.

Becoming an Anti-Racist College. Washington State community colleges hosted an event highlighting what it means to be an ally and advocate to marginalized individuals. The workshop covered the importance of affinity groups. The curriculum also addressed oppression and privilege.

Equity 2025: Cultural Competence Training. Equity 2025 is the name that Normandale Community College used referencing one of the goals in their strategic framework. The college has identified its "Big 3 Goals" and "7 Key Strategies." The first goal is to "achieve racial equity in educational outcomes by 2025" (established in 2020). One of the college's strategies includes "providing ongoing, comprehensive professional development opportunities for employees designed to advance understanding, skills, and leadership to achieve equity goals, and a culturally competent (equity-minded), service-oriented, and student-ready campus community." To assist the employees, the college has implemented and deployed work around Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP). This required, three-week training program compensates faculty for attending 15 hours of training and development focused in CRP. The college was awarded a grant to assist in this work.

Centers and Instructional Resources for Equity

Community colleges have created spaces for discussions focused on equity and social justice. Leaders of some colleges access resources from the Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Center to aid them in discussions around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Others created their own professional development for employees to get collegewide buy-in for their equity agendas.

Center for Equity & Social Justice. Delaware County Community College in Philadelphia created a center to contribute to dismantling systems of racism and social injustice within its community by providing ongoing



opportunities for meaningful dialogue that creates awareness, promotes education and understanding, and leads to transformative change, equity, and social justice for all people.

Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Center. Launched by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, several colleges have opened Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Centers. The focus of the centers is to create and distribute new complex and complete narratives that can influence people's perspectives, perceptions, and behaviors about one another, to heal a societal racial divide, and to embrace racial healing and uproot conscious and unconscious belief in a hierarchy of human value that limits access to education, employment, housing, and healthcare.

Relief for Students

One of the most important priorities for community colleges are its students. There are some basic institutional changes that colleges have implemented to create a more equitable environment for students. Inclusive or banded tuition has been implemented so that students are able to pay one amount for tuition and fees that covers textbooks.

Tuition, Fees, and Operating Hours

Dallas College has been on the forefront of the inclusive tuition movement. The college instituted a tuition structure that covers textbooks. Ivy Tech Community College in Indiana also implemented inclusive tuition, and also banded tuition which offers a fixed tuition for full-time students taking 12 credits or more.

Ivy Tech also has been moving toward learn anywhere as a direction for its operations. The concept allows students to make decisions from class to class, from session to session, how they want to attend and if they want to attend on campus, face-to-face or if they want to attend via Zoom. The model meets the students where they are on a day-to-day basis rather than dropping them into an entire eight week or 16 week semester, when their lives change from one moment to the next.

In California, some colleges have made the decision to eliminate traditional operating hours. Leaders acknowledged that support needs to be available to students when they need it to accommodate the consumer model of anytime anywhere access.

Textbooks



Textbook costs have continued to increase, but colleges are collaborating with third-party publishers and providers to provide open access content to support the learning process.

Project Z. Project Z, or "zero cost," was launched in Idaho to make it possible for students to earn an associate degree with zero, or extremely low, textbook costs. The Idaho Legislature and Governor Brad Little jumpstarted the program by investing \$1 million in Project Z.

Open Textbooks Project. In Utah, effective resources are available to provide Utah teachers, students, and parents with materials that support the Utah Core Standards,

instruction, and teaching. These resources, available online, are created by groups of content and teaching experts, including university faculty, district and school specialists, teachers, and the Utah State Board of Education staff

Use of Data

It is critically important that data is used by colleges to understand where they currently are in their equity work so that they can determine what they need to do to improve outcomes.

Diversity Metrics. Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) completes a diversity metric evaluation rubric to assess undergraduate enrollment, underrepresented minority and low-income student retention, as well as three-year graduation rate and degree conferral for each student category.

Path Forward Initiative. Metropolitan Community College in Nebraska created the Path Forward Initiative, which is an offshoot of the guided pathways initiative. The Path Forward project is designed to reshape college systems to improve student outcomes based on a deeper understanding of students' experiences. Initial data included extensive interviews with students and focus groups to learn about experiences, expectations, and needs. Results confirmed barriers that students face, including jobs, families, hunger, and transportation issues, etc.

The Path Forward Initiative challenges college staff to remove the barriers that are within their power to remove; lower the hurdles they can lower; and recalibrate systems so students who come to MCC seeking a degree can expect to earn their degree.

This is MCC's answer to guided pathways initiatives being discussed nationally. There are four pillars to be considered: Simplify educational pathways, help students get on a path, help students stay on a path, and ensure students are learning.

The Higher Learning Commission Academy and Programs are a part of the process, so that accreditation will be strengthened. The success will be measured with leading and lagging indicators, credit metrics, and persistence rates. The Path Forward Initiative is designed to align with board and institutional priorities.

Student Support Services

Colleges have implemented enhanced supports to assist students in completing their educational goals. For those who are unable to visit the college, institutions have created online orientations and advising. Others have implemented tiny homes projects or access for free breakfast for students.



Online Orientation. The Community College of Vermont offers new student orientation virtually. There are online orientation modules to help students get to know their classmates. Family orientation is both virtual and face-to-face and is designed for families to know more about the college.

Remote Academic Advising Center. In New York, the counseling department and academic advising center partnered on their outreach and found new and innovative ways to connect with students, mostly remote.

Opportunity Bus. Arkansas Northeastern College (ANC) offers the Opportunity Bus which provides transportation to and from Arkansas Northeastern College for ANC students. The service is free but requires advance registration and weekly determination of satisfactory progress by advisors. The college partners with faith-based communities that also serve as recruiters.

Success Coaches. Several North Carolina community colleges provide Success Coaches to address students' individual needs and identify appropriate resources. Success Coaches work with students on self-advocacy,

goal clarification, motivation, mindfulness, time management, study skills, reading comprehension, and help them create personal plans for academic success. Key to their work is a student-centered approach which builds independence and accountability and encourages students to fully engage with all of the learning opportunities offered by the colleges.

Transfer Platform. The State of Maryland developed legislation to create a Transfer Platform. Each two-year college and four-year university receiving state funds must participate in the transfer platform. The goal is to make the transfer process between two-year and four-year institutions easier for students.

Family Economic Security Program. Connecticut offers a grant-funded program that provides students with academic, career, financial, and personal support. Wraparound services are offered to support students through certificate and/or degree completion. Benefits for participating students include one-on-one coaching (financial, academic, and career), cultural enrichment activities, professional development workshops, on-campus family events, early course registration, scholarships, and networking skills.

Student Mental Health

On-Campus Health Center. Caldwell Community College in North Carolina partnered with a federally funded health center and was able to put a fully functioning health clinic on the campus. The clinic provides general healthcare as well as mental healthcare, which has been a game changer for students going through the pandemic. The clinic also has helped with food insecurity. The clinic is staffed by a nurse practitioner and a medical assistant during the day, with additional resources available as needed.

On-Call Counseling. In New Mexico, an on-call counselor is available, ensuring students have access to mental health professionals. The college is also establishing a student health center where the mental health counselors will be housed so that mental health can be destigmatized. The college had requested earmark funding to support this effort.

Food and Housing

CV4 Family Residences. Jackson College in Michigan has created a living and learning community called CV4 Family Residences. These new residences are designed to welcome students with families to live on the college campus. The residences are open to single students with dependent children; legally married students with dependent children; and domestic partners with dependent children. Students must be enrolled full-time in the fall, spring, and summer semesters, and they must participate in tutoring and success coaching in addition to classes.



Dormitories for All. Ivy Tech Community College, through its AirPark College campus, has partnered with a third-party to create a dorm on the AirPark property that any of the students at any of the institutions can use.

Eagle Breakfast. Ozark Technical Community College in Missouri provided free breakfast for all students regardless of financial need. The college found that students who took advantage of the program received better grades on midterm and final exams. About 89% of Eagle Breakfast participants finished their spring classes, compared to 83% who did not participate in the program.

Recruitment

Success Navigators for Nontraditional Students. In Arkansas, one community college focuses on non-traditional recruitment by going to barbershops, salons, public service agencies, and walking the streets in low-income neighborhoods, taking the message of opportunity to individuals. Arkansas also provides recruiters in high schools.

The Little River Institute. The grant-funded Little River Institute was created to serve as a center of tutoring, mentoring, and support for Indigenous students at Montana State University-Northern, as well as a source of culturally responsive professional development for MSU-Northern faculty and staff. As part of the NASNTI grant, the Little River Institute is developing an open educational resource repository to showcase culturally responsive content, modules, and teaching strategies developed by MSU-Northern faculty

Programs with an Equity Focus

Policing has been a hot topic in the last couple of years. Community colleges responsible for training police for the communities that they serve are working very hard to ensure that racial sensitivity and de-escalation are a part of the curriculum in addition to recruiting more diversity into the ranks. Other colleges also are focused on programs in high-demand occupations and the ways that they can diversify the pool of workers for those professions.

Black Men in K-12 Teaching Pipeline (Sirtify). Normandale Community College developed the program to recruit and help prepare Black men to be K-12 teachers. Sirtify offers academic, career, and personal support to persons who identify as Black, African American, and African men with a goal of becoming licensed K-12 teachers. Support includes helping students successfully transfer into four-year, bachelor's degree-granting institutions after they finish two full-time years at Normandale or the part-time equivalent in academic credits. Students in Sirtify receive annual scholarships of up to \$10,000 covering all tuition, fees, books, and supplies, plus a contribution toward cost of living, funded by donors to the Normandale Community College Foundation and other sources.

Honors Program. Mississippi Community Colleges have created honors programs that offer the following perks: Priority registration every semester; Small class size with individualized instruction; Special recognition at graduation and on transcripts; Travel opportunities both domestic and abroad; Leadership opportunities in Mississippi State Honors Council; Community service and outreach opportunities.

OneMSU Network. The OneMSU Network is a partnership between Gallatin College MSU in Bozeman, City College at MSU Billings, and Great Falls College MSU. By joining the OneMSU Network, students can take prerequisites locally at the nearest OneMSU Network college; take classes remotely from a degree program; and enroll in labs, clinicals, or other hands-on training at sites throughout the state.



Financial Support

State governments are beginning to hone in on the importance of equity and programs that address labor shortages. Interesting grant-based programs that colleges shared with AACC include promise programs, learn-and-earn, and apprenticeships.

Indy Achieves. This Indiana program provides enrollment coaches to help students navigate the college process. The Gap Promise Scholarship covers the remaining need for tuition, books, and fees, and student success coaches support the student's first term in college.

Career Scholarship – Pell for Workforce. Nebraska created a workforce Pell demonstration grant using funds allocated through the Department of Economic Development. The initiative was being tested at the time of the listening tour. Early indicators show that enrollment is increasing, in particular in relation to the short-term training attached to the stipends.

Colorado Partnership for Education and Rural Revitalization. The Colorado Attorney General provided grants up to \$5 million to Trinidad State College and Lamar Community College to develop skilled trades programs that will address labor shortages and increase the availability of viable and affordable housing in several counties. The programs will have in-class and experiential learning, during which students will complete remodels and new construction of blighted properties that community colleges have acquired or purchased.

Governor’s STEM/CTE Scholarship. In New Hampshire, eligible high school students taking dual or concurrent credit courses through early college programs can take up to two STEM/CTE courses per academic year for free.

Futures for Frontliners Initiative. Futures for Frontliners is a state scholarship program for Michiganders without college degrees who worked in essential industries during the state COVID-19 shutdown in spring 2020 (April 1 - June 30). This scholarship provides these frontline workers with tuition-free access to local community colleges to pursue an associate degree or a skills certificate, either full-time or part-time while they work.

Nebraska Career Scholarships. Nebraska Career Scholarships Program is a collaboration between the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED), Nebraska community colleges, and Nebraska private nonprofit postsecondary institutions. This program provides scholarships to students pursuing degrees in programs of study leading to high-wage, high-skill, and high-demand careers such as engineering, healthcare, and IT.

Build Dakota Scholarship Fund. A \$25 million gift from philanthropist T. Denny Sanford and a matching contribution from the South Dakota Future Fund combined to create the Build Dakota Scholarship program. The initial \$50 million provided more than 1,900 students with the opportunity to graduate debt-free and enter the workforce in South Dakota. In 2020, an additional \$20 million was invested to keep the program running and supporting students for another five years. The scholarship supports tuition, fees, books, and other required program expenses in eligible technical college programs.

Learn and Earn Program. Learn and Earn is offered in West Virginia and connects employers with students through colleges, allowing students to take technical courses while gaining paid work experiences. The student pay is shared by the company and the college, and students receive at least \$10 per hour to work in the field they are studying in. The program consists of one-year or two-year degree programs. Students receive a co-op experience that must pay no less than \$10/hour. Employers gain a highly qualified employee and a future skilled labor pool while students earn valuable on-the-job training while attending school. The program uses a 50/50 employer and college matching reimbursement.



Governor’s Investment in Vocational Education (GIVE). The GIVE initiative invests \$25 million in competitively awarded community grants that will fund regional partnerships between high schools, industry, and Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs) to build new work-based learning/apprenticeship programs, market-driven dual-credit opportunities, and the expansion of industry-informed career and technical education offerings.

Southern Oregon Health Occupations. The Southern Oregon Health Occupations Poverty Elimination (SOHOPE) grant is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The program was designed to bridge the gap between the healthcare industry's need for well-trained workers and individuals with barriers to education, including a lack of money for tuition and books. Participants have completed healthcare-focused occupational trainings that enable meaningful employment, higher wages, and a pathway to greater career accomplishments in the Rogue Valley and beyond.

Workforce Equity Initiative. The Workforce Equity Initiative (WEI) is a statewide grant program in Illinois focused on expanding training opportunities for minority students in at-risk communities. WEI funding allows colleges to remove barriers to student success, which may include free tuition, childcare, transportation, and educational supplies. This transformative initiative also assists colleges with implementing new approaches to serve the targeted population. Funds are used to develop new student services, in-demand training programs, outreach efforts, and community partners..



The Changing Landscape and Competition

Changing Landscape

Throughout the country, community college leaders expressed their concerns about the changing landscape for community colleges. Impacts include increased cybersecurity threats to colleges. Experts predict that it is not an “if” but a “when” each of their institutions will be attacked, which leads to discussions of readiness to deal with ransom attacks.

Another issue of importance is that accreditation has not caught up with the need to be nimble. New programs offered in non-traditional ways have received pushback from regional accreditors even though colleges have to remain adaptable, flexible, and nimble in preparing workers for the current and future jobs that will exist. Additionally, important programs are not Pell eligible, which poses a problem for equity agendas.

The pandemic also has caused many community colleges across the country to look at space utilization and their institution's structures. COVID-19 showed that some courses, and programs can be offered virtually and the work provided to the college by employees, in some cases, can be done remotely. So, is all of the space needed on the campus or can it be repurposed to fulfill other functions? The “new” operational model discussions are also compounded by students now wanting to engage with education when they want to with content delivery happening in a variety of ways. This further complicates decisions that must be made by colleges with limited capacity to offer important courses face-to-face or virtually or through synchronous learning opportunities.



Competition

Currently, community colleges are seeing increased competition from four-year universities as well as business and industry that has chosen to develop and market its own credentials. College leaders offering baccalaureate degrees understand how four-year universities feel about two-year colleges offering this credential. However, they qualify their offering the degree by the fact that in many cases they have received permission to offer credentials in high-demand occupations only. Since the pandemic began, universities have been aggressive in offering associate degrees and workforce development programs, which community colleges would argue is the mission of community college.

Secondly, competition is increasing from the private sector. Companies such as Google and Amazon Web Services (AWS) have created their own curriculum but have not yet mastered comprehensive delivery. In order for colleges to remain competitive when faced with this competition, some institutions have found it beneficial to work with the company and embed the curriculum within its own offerings.

Final Thoughts

AACC offers special thanks for all of the leaders who participated in the virtual listening tour meetings. The resources and insights from the cities and states that we engaged with have been useful to the organization in planning for the upcoming year.

Unfortunately, we were not able to provide a write-up of every program that we were made aware of during the meetings. We tried to capture as much as we could to highlight and provide you with a snapshot of the resilience and excellence in innovation that has taken place during the COVID-19 pandemic.