

Perspectives

Community College
Leadership for the
21st Century

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Public education systems must change so profoundly that only the disruptive force of entrepreneurs—who think beyond the current constraints and resources—can get us there.

– Kim Smith and
Julie Landry Petersen

Like it or not, entrepreneurship is very much a part of the fabric of American higher education. It is one of our industry's most enduring values...

– Todd S. Hunter

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The Community College as Entrepreneurial Catalyst

Dale Nesbary, Ph.D.

President, Muskegon Community College
Muskegon, Michigan

Introduction: The Changing Role of Community Colleges

While community colleges have existed more than a century, their role began to shift in the late 1940s from primarily serving as a transfer/junior college to that of supporting the greater community in addressing the need for highly skilled talent required by a 21st century economy. Community colleges remain a vehicle to transfer students to “senior” colleges and universities, but also provide an essential bridge to employment in local communities and beyond. As a result, community colleges are now major players in providing businesses with the talent they need to compete in local, regional, and national economies.

However, within the next decade, the United States will face a critical talent gap and the role of community colleges has recently gained national attention. The purpose of this paper is to illuminate the role of community colleges in entrepreneurship, including:

- ▲ The transformation of community colleges from a junior college role to a talent development vehicle
- ▲ How community colleges promote entrepreneurship in the classroom
- ▲ How community colleges promote entrepreneurship in the community
- ▲ How Muskegon Community College has encouraged entrepreneurship in the classroom and the community.

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The Modern Community College Movement

While the first community colleges were established early in the 20th century, the modern community college's origins began post World War II. In 1947, the President's Commission on Higher Education identified the need for a network of community colleges whose primary mission was to serve WWII veterans and an increasingly diverse population. These colleges were intended to be low cost and high quality institutions providing comprehensive education through an increasingly expansive curriculum. By the 1960s, hundreds of community colleges opened across America. They were much more than extensions of high schools or junior colleges providing transfer students to senior four year institutions. Rather, they also

provided technical training and partnered with local and regional businesses and organizations to meet the workforce and talent needs of a growing economy.

By the early 2000s, community colleges had firmly established their role in American higher education and began a transition from being known simply as institutions of opportunity for those students unable to gain entry to four year institutions, to a viable source of talent for the business community. Students in greater numbers began to enter the workforce directly from having completed their studies at the community college level. Community colleges had become a primary source of talent for business, manufacturing, healthcare, and the non-profit sectors. Foundations such as Lumina, Gates, Mott, Aspen, and Kresge, along with many state and federal grant-making agencies, began providing opportunities for community colleges to partner directly with local and regional employers to meet talent needs.

To address talent needs in the next decade, the Lumina (http://www.luminafoundation.org/goal_2025) and Gates (<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/What-We-Do/US-Program/Postsecondary-Success>) Foundations, the American Association of Community Colleges, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. Economic Development Administration and many others have identified the need to 1) upskill our workforce and 2) create a better match between our talent pool and employer needs. While this is no surprise, the role of community colleges in filling the talent gap through focused talent development has only recently gained national attention.

Regional talent supporting organizations have been created to ensure a viable talent base to meet future needs. One example of this is Talent 2025 in West Michigan, which connects four community colleges, nine universities, and over 70 businesses, all serving a 13 county region. The linkage of community colleges and the business community was driven largely by a growing understanding that community colleges are at the nexus of entrepreneurial activity locally and in their regions. Through academic programming and infrastructure activity, community colleges may help drive the growth and vibrancy of a community or region.

Entrepreneurism in the Classroom

Community colleges engage in entrepreneurship extensively, serving a broad array of students, local community growth, and business community needs. While nearly all
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EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

Given the financial constraints with which community colleges must contend today, many colleges are taking an entrepreneurial approach to achieve the support they need while also benefitting their local communities. Whether leading regional economic development to create jobs, fostering business success with multi-faceted services, or preparing a skilled workforce ahead of the curve, community college entrepreneurship can provide vital support for regional economic vitality. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below:

Holger Ekanger, M.S.A.

Director, WCE, Engineering & Advanced Technology
Macomb Community College
Warren, Michigan

Community colleges increasingly are challenged by greater accountability and transparency for student access, retention, and successful completion, while the traditional revenue sources to accomplish this great work are declining. Also, let's not forget the demands placed on restraining any tuition increases. College completion has grown increasingly important to long-term economic viability, but with greater accountability comes increased administrative costs.

For community colleges to survive and remain relevant, they must be nimble, flexible, innovative, customer-focused in an organizational structure that embraces innovation, and maintaining an entrepreneurial spirit in the face of rapid academic and organizational changes. Right!

There are endless examples of successful entrepreneurial approaches implemented with an external focus. We need to focus the same efforts internally and address systems, processes, and organizational structures to increase efficiencies, ultimately eliminating workarounds and reducing costs. While this is no attempt to be all inclusive, the following suggestions reflect my experience in workforce development.

- ▲ Leverage state, federal, and grant funding to build capacity and effectively scale up pilot initiatives to include most, if not all students, while embedding these into sustainable organizational practices.
- ▲ Simplify certificate and degree options. Provide prescriptive career pathways. Increase intrusive approaches in student success initiatives. Hold students accountable for course and degree completion.
- ▲ Eliminate barriers to quick course and program changes, ensuring content is always current and relevant, which requires faculty to engage regularly with their respective industry sector.
- ▲ Replace required seat time with performance-based outcomes, and strengthen the open entry - open exit delivery concept.
- ▲ Cross-train staff to respond quickly when needed for projects requiring immediate action.
- ▲ Increase faculty responsibilities to include engagement in all activities related to student success. Our non-bargaining unit full-time faculty work 40 hours a week which includes classroom teaching, curriculum development, recruitment, and employer engagement.
- ▲ Foster creative use of instructional resources. We have an embedded turn-key vendor integrated in activities paid if revenue is secured.
- ▲ Place greater demands on state economic, workforce funding policies to consolidate overlapping activities. Hold employers accountable to invest in creating talent pipelines – both short and long-term.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

What significant entrepreneurial approaches or opportunities do you see on the horizon for community colleges?

Elizabeth Orbits, M.A., LPC

Manager, Student Resource & Women's Center
Washtenaw Community College
Ann Arbor, Michigan

We are experiencing a revolution in higher education driven by major philanthropists, government funders, and the public agenda all demanding changes in purpose, cost, delivery, and outcomes. There is a call for innovation, experimentation, and an entrepreneurial mindset. Many of us like the thought of innovation but don't really want it.

Entrepreneurship isn't just the same things done differently, but creating new ways of learning and being. Otherwise, we become irrelevant.

Today, it is more important than ever for community colleges to look for and act upon innovative opportunities. We need to be intentional and recognize ways to act entrepreneurial if we are to survive, grow, and stay relevant in the 21st century. Often what appears to be innovation is actually just the beginning of real change because acting in an entrepreneurial way is really on-going.

To flourish, community colleges will need to stay competitive with the ever-expanding global knowledge production. We are in the time of what experts call "borderless education". This means all institutions will need to share their knowledge and partner in new ways. With this wider expansion of global knowledge from multiple sources, traditional pedagogy and learning are being questioned. This will demand different approaches to teaching like distance learning, MOOCs, and competency-based assessment.

Employers want different things too. Expectations for graduates have expanded to include critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and communication skillsets, all essential to compete successfully in today's global economy. Finally, community colleges will need to be intentional about innovating financial constraints. This means allowing institutions to behave in entrepreneurial ways, developing and using multiple revenue streams, including external partnerships with businesses and each other.

Characteristics of an entrepreneurial higher education institution include leadership and governance that share a common vision and culture. These institutions empower individuals within the organization to engage in innovative thinking, take risks, and embrace entrepreneurial pedagogy and knowledge-exchange across all stakeholders.

Community colleges need innovators who are not afraid to try new ways; to fail and try again. To develop an entrepreneurial mindset, we must be comfortable with failure, learn to embrace and accept that mistakes are part of the innovative process, and set a new direction that responds to rapid technological change. There is more risk in doing nothing.

Holger Ekanger is Director of Workforce & Continuing Education, Engineering & Advanced Technology at Macomb Community College in Warren, Michigan. He joined Macomb in 2001 after working for 7 years as a contract employee for Northern States Power Company in Minnesota and 5 years with Ivy Tech Community College in Columbus, Indiana. He is a graduate of the University of Minnesota and earned his M.S.A. from Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, Michigan.



Liz Orbits is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Michigan and manages the Student Resource & Women's Center and the International Student Center at Washtenaw Community College, Ann Arbor, Michigan. She has 10 years experience in academic advising, career counseling, and case management services in higher education. She earned M.A. degrees in both Educational Psychology and Community Counseling from Eastern Michigan University and is currently enrolled in the FSU DCCL program.



NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

Given the financial constraints with which community colleges must contend today, many colleges are taking an entrepreneurial approach to achieve the support they need while also benefitting their local communities. Whether leading regional economic development to create jobs, fostering business success with multi-faceted services, or preparing a skilled workforce ahead of the curve, community college entrepreneurship can provide vital support for regional economic vitality. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below:

“If you don’t ask...”

**Catherine B. Ahles,
MBA, APR, Fellow PRSA**

Senior Vice President, Premier Aircraft Sales
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

My mother was one of the greatest entrepreneurs I’ve known. Armed with a 10th grade education, she married before World War II, established a home while my dad fought the war, and raised four kids in the 1950’s and 60’s. Completely dedicated to children, she became deeply involved in Keeler Elementary School, where she was always looking for ways to augment good learning with good fun, and so the Keeler School Fun Fair was born.

Mom decided that each kid should leave the fair with a “goodie bag”, but the school didn’t have the funds. So, day after day, week after week, she would cold-call every business in the neighborhood, asking for contributions to her 100 bags of goodies. The first year, the lunch-sized bags had a pencil and eraser. The second year, there was some candy, too. The third, toys appeared. By the sixth or seventh year, kids were leaving that fair with a treasure trove of crayons, notebooks, and the occasional T-shirt or classic beaded belt.

Her entrepreneurial secret? “If you don’t ask, you don’t get.”

Those words have guided me throughout my years in higher education and business. During his acceptance of the presidential nomination at the 1988 Republican National Convention, George H.W. Bush called “for a better America, for an endless enduring dream and a thousand points of light.” I remarked to our president that we were surely one of those thousand points of light – so why don’t we invite Bush to speak on our campus? While many scoffed at the idea (and some thought I was nuts), I was blessed with a president who also believed, “if you don’t ask, you don’t get.” So we did – and he came! Weeks later, we got a call from staff of Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis – could he provide the opposing viewpoint? And after that (not wanting the Dems to have the last word), President Reagan decided to visit. All told, we had more than 30,000 visitors and 400 members of the press corps on our campus that fall, thrusting Macomb Community College into the national spotlight and making us heroes in the community’s eyes...all because we asked.

For community colleges, the secret to leveraging “if you don’t ask, you don’t get” comes down to asking the right questions to uncover entrepreneurial opportunities.

More recently, my business has undertaken an entrepreneurial venture with some community colleges. Premier Aircraft Sales’ maintenance shop regularly removes engines from aircraft when owners upgrade. It costs a fortune to crate and ship them back to the manufacturer, who gives us cents for the scrap. Meanwhile, dozens of community colleges with aircraft maintenance programs purchase engines for student tear-down, but it’s hugely expensive to buy new. When our maintenance director wondered if the schools would buy our used engines, the

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answer was, “If you don’t ask, you don’t get.” A new line of business has now developed selling used engines to a variety of third parties, and the relationship we’ve established with the Aviation Technician Education Council (ATEC) has benefited both Premier and the schools involved.

For community colleges, the secret to leveraging “if you don’t ask, you don’t get” comes down to asking the right questions to uncover entrepreneurial opportunities. Some of those questions are:

- ▲ What are the emerging markets or industries, US and abroad, that will require workers with specialized skills?
- ▲ How can I identify the specific training needs required of employers in those markets and industries?
- ▲ With whom should we partner?
- ▲ What would partners be willing to invest resources in, whether funding, equipment, facilities, technology, or expertise?

There are numerous market forecasting resources for community colleges to tap; universities, government documents, industry association forecasts and reports in credible business publications, to name a few. Watching global trends is crucial. For example, China’s airspace – previously controlled by the military – was recently opened to private aviation. Chinese companies are building aircraft production plants, creating all sorts of training needs. Many US colleges offer flight training, air traffic control programs, engine, airframe, avionics technician, manufacturing, and process control programs. Creating relationships and partnerships with Chinese aviation concerns – which they are eager to do – will provide many entrepreneurial program initiatives in the next decade, I predict.

How does a community college jump on board with this and other emerging entrepreneurial opportunities? Do the research, identify emerging markets or industries, pinpoint the training needs, create relationships, conceptualize partnerships, and...just ask.

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Cathy Ahles’s 34-year career in higher education focused on public relations and marketing. As Vice President at Macomb Community College, she conducted three countywide ballot proposals, netting \$90 million to establish and operate the first University Center in the nation. She also served as faculty at Florida International and Nova Southeastern Universities, as well as in the Ferris State University DCCL Program. She is currently pursuing her lifelong passion for aviation as a partner in Premier Aircraft Sales, one of the largest aircraft dealerships in the US. She holds an MBA from Michigan State University.

QUICK TAKES
Highlights
from the Field

The Innovative and Entrepreneurial University by U.S. Dept. of Commerce

Innovation and entrepreneurship are key economic priorities for the U.S., helping American industry, higher education, and research institutes to develop the next generation of technologies and increase the number of high-growth American startups. The U.S. Department of Commerce discusses findings related to colleges across America engaged in a comprehensive set of programs to nurture innovation and entrepreneurship among their students, faculty, and communities with the goal of supporting industry and the regional economy.

Read more:

<http://bit.ly/1M41Pmw>

The Community College As Entrepreneur
by Kristine Condon

Given the increasingly visible role community colleges play in workforce training for a global society, this study posits that a more entrepreneurial vision is necessary to enhance community college revenues, most specifically related to noncredit workforce training partnerships with local business and industry. This study examines the entrepreneurial orientation of Illinois' noncredit workforce training partnerships, analyzes how partnerships are sustained and evaluated, and presents a workable model to guide college leaders.

Read more:

<http://bit.ly/17Maknk>

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thoman13@ferris.edu



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The Community College as Entrepreneurial Catalyst

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community colleges maintain entrepreneurship programs, the following are examples of some recently initiated programs. In 2008, the American Association of Community Colleges established the Plus 50 Initiative, a project “to benchmark and showcase the most current and innovative programs at community colleges that engage learners age 50 and over.” Over the years, the program has given grants to workforce programs in 138 community colleges serving over 37,000 students age 50 and over. While many of the colleges focus on entrepreneurship, three have joined with SCORE, the Senior Core of Retired Executives, to support budding entrepreneurs (<http://plus50.aacc.nche.edu/aboutplus50/Pages/Partners.aspx>).

Here are examples of how Plus 50 has assisted in the development of entrepreneurship across the US:

- ▲ St. Louis Community College (MO) developed a six-week course called Plus 50 Entrepreneurs, leveraging innovative business curricula with Score’s vast knowledge of entrepreneurship and business;
- ▲ Luzerne County Community College (PA) uses SCORE mentors to connect its entrepreneurship students to a broad array of resources in starting and running their own businesses;
- ▲ Clark College (Vancouver, WA) offers a curriculum helping students launch a business as a second career.

Entrepreneurism in the Community

Finally, community colleges around the country, notably Clark State College (Springfield, OH), Kalamazoo Valley Community College (Kalamazoo, MI), and Tidewater College (VA) have all invested in their core communities, leading to economic growth in their local areas. Other colleges have partnered directly with businesses to support entrepreneurship. An example from September 2014 has Macomb Community College (MI) and JP Morgan Chase partnering to launch a \$2.7 million innovation fund in an effort to “stimulate economic development and job growth among promising Detroit-area entrepreneurs and next-stage companies with high growth potential.” The fund will provide grants of up to \$25,000 for start-up businesses and up to \$100,000 to help emerging companies toward larger-scale equity funds. The startup funds are grants and do not have to be repaid, while the larger grants must be matched and may need to be repaid.

Muskegon Community College: A Case Study

In 2009, the Muskegon Community College (MCC) Board of Trustees challenged the College to move in a new direction. This challenge was a core component of the interview process six years ago in their presidential search. The Board was clear in wanting the college to assume the role of a key player in the economic vitality of Muskegon and the West Michigan region. As education attainment is a key factor influencing regional economic vitality, MCC needed to take a lead role. From my perspective as President, the College needed to better “fit” or align itself to the community it serves to best assist the community in becoming more vital. My initial plan for the College addressed this need and the steps to accomplish this goal.

The College embarked upon a Master and Strategic Planning process and completed its 10 year

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reaccreditation review with the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges. These processes were critical in helping the college understand its role in the community and its place in higher education. It became clear that the college lacked a certain physical and programmatic infrastructure to move from being a good college to a great one and to have the ability to address talent needs in the area.

MCC’s success is the region’s success. Using Clark State, Kalamazoo, and Tidewater as examples, MCC developed its 2010-15 Strategic and Master Plan aligning its programming and infrastructure to the needs of the greater community. The attached MCC Case Study outlines our Building for the Future model of aligning the College with the community, as well as the changes which were necessary to create a foundation for success. The model comprises investments on campus and in the core Muskegon community and is already providing economic stimulus to the Muskegon area.

Summary

The role of community colleges has expanded since the late 1940s to assist the economy by collaborating with businesses and community stakeholders. This role expansion emphasizes the importance of ongoing Master and Strategic Planning processes, an institutional dedication to entrepreneurship, and the continuous collaboration and communication with all stakeholders locally, nationally, and globally. This brief paper gives a basic background of the issue and highlights the direction that many community colleges are choosing to address the talent needs for the future.

**READ THE
MUSKEGON COMMUNITY COLLEGE CASE STUDY IN
ENTREPRENEURSHIP HERE:
<http://bit.ly/1Ayyecl>**

Dr. Dale Nesbary has served as president of Muskegon Community College in Muskegon, Michigan, since 2009, where he drove enrollment growth, campus expansion, capital millage approval, academic program development, and the expansion of strategic partnerships with universities, school districts, businesses, and civic organizations. His previous positions include Vice President and Dean of Academic Affairs and Professor at Adrian College (MI), Director of the MPA program at Oakland University (MI), Fellow of the American Council on Education (San Diego, CA), and as a Director in the City of Boston and with the Boston Police Department. He earned his M.P.A. from Western Michigan University and his Ph.D. from Northeastern University. He is also a professional musician and performs regularly in the Muskegon area.

