

Perspectives

Community College Leadership for the 21st Century

FEBRUARY 2014

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Workforce Development in the "New Normal"

James Jacobs, Ph.D., President, Macomb Community College, Warren, Michigan

Community colleges are a distinctively American contribution to higher education. While invented a century ago, these "junior colleges" were defined in modern terms after World War II in response to the Truman Doctrine's call for developing post-secondary institutions that encourage adults to return to college. More than 70 percent of American community colleges were established between 1945 and 1970 and are still evolving today.

This evolution, however, has been based less on changes in the higher educational landscape than on the shifting and differing dynamics of the communities served. The result has been a striking diversity in how community colleges look. As different communities become more polarized due to income, sector concentration, population flows and other key characteristics, one can expect to see even greater variation between institutions as they evolve to match the context of their specific environments. However, the defining attributes of community colleges – flexibility and commitment to underprepared students – will remain a constant, as well as central to the future of the United States economy.

The Unequal Economy

Community colleges became vital contributors in developing and preserving a broad-based American middle class. As a result, they thrived from 1945-1970 as the U.S. middle class grew and prospered. However, during the past 30 years, due to a variety of factors including tax and budget policies, widespread emergence and application of technology, and internationally focused economic priorities, America's middle class has fragmented into subgroups. Additionally, there has been significant growth in the ranks of working poor. Amplifying the impact of these gradual trends was the Great Recession that began in 2008, the greatest economic downturn since 1932. It represented a slow "recovery" that has been characterized by little real job growth.

Community College Imperatives

Given today's challenging economic environment and the ongoing significance of community colleges in

connecting people to prosperity, institutions actively need to commit to three key responsibilities related to employment success.

Connect student success with employment. The majority of degree-credit students at community colleges believe their education will lead to a sustainable-wage job. This is especially true for students who are the first in the family to attend college. Many tend to think that a bachelor's degree is an automatic ticket to the middle class – which is no longer true. Within their pursuit of a four-year degree, students need to craft a strategy that connects their education with employment. This needs to be taken into account by the way institutions structure all their programs and activities – not just workforce or career and technical education. Programs should be simplified and developed with respect to career pathways, including those that lead to transfer to four-year degree programs. Too many community colleges

make the mistake of juxtaposing career and workforce development instead of interrelating programs.

Create coherent and robust career pathways. Part of the process of connecting students with employment is offering occupational programs that really link to sustainable wage jobs. Community colleges offer far too many programs that confuse students and that don't specifically lead to skill accumulation or employment. Recent student success research concludes that eliminating program clutter and providing clear, limited program choices that lead to identifiable career options improve student success. One of the reasons that community college nursing programs attract so many students willing to take on the difficult coursework and focus on completion is that there is a well-defined pathway articulated in the program, paired with a clear career outcome. In addition to pared-down program offerings, the career pathways approach requires more emphasis on foundation skills, work-based learning, and other program characteristics that take specialized expertise and resources to develop. Particularly in workforce programs, community colleges need to apply the insights of behavioral economics in enrollment, course selection, counseling

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~ James Jacobs

One of the most important values of the community college movement is responsiveness to the educational and training needs of local communities.

- George Boggs

There needs to be that continuous outreach and that awareness created with the business community about the roles that community colleges play in workforce training and economic development.

- Geraldo de los Santos

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EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

One prevailing attribute of the community college has been the ability to adapt quickly to the changing needs of its region. Whether helping prepare students to succeed in today's highly challenging careers or serving as valued partners with small and big businesses for the development of employee training programs, community colleges remain integral to the future economic success of the nation. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below.

Fiona Hert, Ed.D.

Dean, Grand Rapids Community College
Grand Rapids, Michigan

To meet the needs of our communities, community colleges and their staff and faculty should begin by understanding the strengths and resources of their institutions. To get started, several key questions should be asked:

- ▲ What are the current academic and occupational programs that can meet the needs of the region due to employer demand?
- ▲ Who are the faculty members with the expertise to work and train prospective students and thus our future workforce?
- ▲ Who are the key staff members within an institution who can support the programs, allocate appropriate space, and register students promptly without unnecessary delays, for example?
- ▲ What financial resources are available for equipment and supplies and how are they acquired quickly?
- ▲ What is the required college revenue or profit formula for each training or program?

The key resources and processes of each community college should be assessed to ensure preparedness for future community relationships and partnerships. Simultaneously, each college should assess the strengths of their region. Are there key sectors or industry clusters that are critical to the region? As a community college leader, it will be critical that relationships are built with sector representatives from various companies and organizations. Internally, the college should determine its industry experts and strategically connect with specific boards and industry organizations. No one person should be the sole expert.

The old adage of the importance of networking remains true. Each college would be well served to create a communication plan with both faculty and administration to ensure that information is being shared effectively and not sequestered by silos and administrative hierarchy.

Community colleges must work to be a part of a local community's value proposition. By answering these questions and thus developing a comprehensive strategy for industry engagement, a community college can positively impact its region and meet the future needs of its community.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

**How should
community colleges
best position
themselves for
the future to meet
local community
and workforce
development needs?**

Alicia Booker, M.S.A.

Vice-President, Community College of
Allegheny County, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Twenty-first century community colleges face a confluence of critical issues. Amidst declining revenue, increased completion demands, and the expectation of producing a highly skilled workforce, community colleges must work strategically to identify comprehensive, responsive approaches to the many challenges. With the demands of both an internal and external constituency, it is often challenging to determine which need to address first, but somehow America's community colleges have learned how to change, adapt, and grow.

"The phrase workforce development implies more than employment training in the narrow sense; it means substantial employer engagement, deep community connections, career advancement, human service supports, industry-driven education and training and the connective tissue of networks."
- Robert P. Giloth

Community colleges must be more than training institutions. If they are to remain competitive, they must be the connective tissue that serves as the catalysts for economic and workforce development. Colleges can achieve this feat through the adoption of strategies designed to help them solidify their position as skills development leaders, such as:

1. Integration of measurable workforce outcomes
2. Implementation of competency-based learning
3. Development of alternate completion pathways
4. Blurring the lines between credit and noncredit
5. Utilization of data-driven approaches
6. Implementation of demand-driven strategies
7. Development of industry partnerships
8. Regional-focused initiatives

One of the community college's greatest strengths lies in its ability to meet the needs of its respective community. It is that unique value position each college possesses that can yield dynamic best practices that may be replicated. One thing is certain: Community colleges will have to continue to push their boundaries to serve their communities in measurable ways; business and industry and their constituents will accept nothing less.

Dr. Fiona Hert serves as the Dean for the School of Workforce Development at Grand Rapids Community College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Previously, she administered Workforce Investment Act and AmeriCorps programs for a two-county district in Washington. Dr. Hert earned her M.S.W. at the University of Washington and her doctorate in Community College Leadership at Ferris State University.



Alicia Booker is Vice President of Workforce Development at the Community College of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh. With over 20 years of workforce development experience, she earned her M.S.A. in Human Resource Administration from Central Michigan University and is currently enrolled in the DCCL program at Ferris State University.



NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

One prevailing attribute of the community college has been the ability to adapt quickly to the changing needs of its region. Whether helping prepare students to succeed in today's highly challenging careers or serving as valued partners with small and big businesses for the development of employee training programs, community colleges remain integral to the future economic success of the nation. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; the answers appear below.

Andrew Meyer

Vice President, Workforce Development
League for Innovation in the Community College
Executive Director, Global Corporate College

In order to address this question, it is important to understand the various roles that community colleges have played in addressing workforce development needs. Indeed, America's community colleges have had a long tradition of providing programs and services for what are commonly referred to as the four workforce segments: emerging, transitional or dislocated, entrepreneurial, and incumbent.

Colleagues and I have defined the various segments in the following ways. The emerging workers are individuals who are preparing for initial full-time employment. Very often the emerging worker is the recent high school graduate who attends the community college to earn a credential that leads to employment. The transitional workforce represents individuals who may have been laid off and who come to the community college to update existing skills or to gain brand new skills to reenter employment. The entrepreneurial worker very often is the small business owner or operator. And finally, the incumbent worker is the person who currently is employed and may need additional training to keep his/her current job or to become eligible for career advancement.

In my view, it is important that community colleges maintain their commitment to those programs and services targeting all four segments of the workforce. The degree to which colleges organize themselves around the programs and services that support the needs of the four workforce segments will determine how successful the colleges are in their workforce development efforts. In the past, providing workforce development programs and services at many colleges fell to the staff in the continuing education and workforce development units of the organization. Now, by embracing the comprehensive view of the U.S. workforce, all units of the college will play a vital role in meeting the needs of the local workforce.

Traditional credit programs are very attractive to the emerging worker. However, in order to offer programs that are current and that target skills gaps, colleges are going to need detailed information about their local labor markets. "Real time" data can provide colleges with information on job openings, future employment opportunities, and the specialized skills that employers are seeking. The college and employer interface needs to be strengthened in order to address the skills gaps and at the same time, maintain the currency of the curriculum and the corresponding credentials. It is important that colleges examine ways to build career pathways for their students. Some pathways may lead from non-credit programs and industry-recognized certifications to credit certificates and degrees.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

How should community colleges best position themselves for the future to meet local community and workforce development needs?

Community colleges should strive to meet the needs of all segments of the workforce.

- Andrew Meyer

The needs of the dislocated worker can be very similar to the emerging worker; however, this segment of the workforce is most interested in getting back to work. The dislocated worker is not interested in a traditional 15-week semester. Rather, accelerated programming leading to a credential for re-employment is critical. Colleges must demonstrate flexibility by offering credit and non-credit programs in accelerated formats that lead to a meaningful credential. The cycle of learning for the dislocated worker can be reduced when colleges embrace competency-based modules and self-paced opportunities for learners.

The entrepreneurial worker represents, in large part, the small business community and the backbone of the U.S. economy. Although community colleges have provided support to small business owners and operators through their traditional continuing education programs and small business development centers, increased opportunities to advance entrepreneurship should be developed. Many programs in entrepreneurship have been developed across the country. Colleges can position themselves to serve as a resource for those individuals who want to start their own businesses and for those existing workers who seek to sharpen their entrepreneurial skills further.

To meet the needs of an incumbent workforce, colleges must support and commit to a contract training structure that can be proactive and also operate in a more business-like manner to better serve local businesses. Historically,

the majority of contract training units at community colleges have been viewed as order-takers when local businesses complete their own needs analysis and solutions processes and the colleges offer off-the-shelf training programs. The optimum contract training unit should possess the ability to solve problems. The unit must acquire the core competencies to assess training needs and develop and deploy customized solutions.

In order to best serve the workforce, colleges need to rely on timely data for decision-making, new program delivery formats, new credentials that document skills development, and sustainable organizational structures.

Andrew L. Meyer currently serves as the vice president for workforce development at the League for Innovation in the Community College and as executive director of the Global Corporate College. Previously, Meyer was chief learning officer and the chief continuing education officer at Anne Arundel Community College for 23 years. He is a past president of the National Council for Continuing Education and Training (NCCET) and has received NCCET's National Leadership Award and its National Leadership Award for Exemplary Service.





QUICK TAKES
Highlights
from the Field

21st Century Skills and the Workplace by the Gallup Organization:

This study explores linkages between 21st century skills developed in the classroom with student academic aspirations and perceived quality of work later in life. Twenty-first century skills are defined as advanced skills that prepare and equip students for the challenges and demands of work in the 21st century. Issues include which 21st century skills provide the most support for future success in the workplace and the perceptions of recent graduates of whether students across varying education levels are developing the skills for today's globalized, technological, and knowledge-based environment.

Read the complete article at: <http://bit.ly/1eLHix>

Strengthening Community Colleges' Influence on Economic Mobility, by D. Furchtgott-Roth, L. Jacobson, and C. Mokhe:

A study supported by the Pew Foundation is focused upon the critical role played by the nation's community colleges in boosting the upward economic mobility of students. Findings indicate that not only can community colleges boost earnings for all graduates, in actuality the increase can be much higher in certain field of study. Further, although postsecondary education is influenced by high school GPA, even those students with low high school GPAs can significantly increase their earnings by pursuing high-return fields of study. Read the complete article at: <http://bit.ly/1aXKX2D>

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and placement to eliminate student intimidation and to create a clear roadmap to navigate our institutions. Making sure that our internal complexity doesn't impede student success is critical.

Function as talent mangers. Developing the career pathway is critical, but so is closing the deal. Community colleges must not only provide courses and programs to prepare students for employment, but they also need to serve as champions of their students with employers. Unfortunate characteristics of today's local labor markets include the lack of standards, a common definition of occupations, or even commonly accepted hiring practices. As a result, students and employers often experience great difficulty connecting. And when they do connect, there is often a lack of clarity regarding the qualifications the students do possess. This is particularly true for small and medium-size businesses, who provide the bulk of employment opportunities for community college students. While large businesses typically have sophisticated human resource functions and access to specialized employment services firms to validate their hiring process and employment candidates, smaller employers do not have access to these resources. This leads to an important role for community colleges. They must validate the skills of the students through direct ties with employers, assuring them that our students have the skills they need. It means establishing the credibility of our programs and the institution to employers. And it may also mean recognizing that many non-credit programs and industry-driven credentials are significant as an entrée to some jobs and often, workplace advancement. Community colleges should be able to integrate these options within their workforce develop programs through combinations of credit and non-credit education.

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Successful community college leadership is heavily dependent on creating an ensemble approach, effectively tapping the strengths of the college's senior leadership.

~ James Jacobs

The New Normal

Today's workforce development programs need to be backed by three key institutional attributes to be successful:

Risk Assessment. One of the new key elements in strategic management for community colleges is risk assessment. Trying new processes, projects, and ways to do things means risking time, resources, and energies. With every opportunity come costs that need to be weighed against potential benefit. So, evaluating risk, including resource costs and the impact of unintended consequences, becomes an important part of the planning process. This needs to be embedded not only within the institution, but be understood by students as well. They should see their choices are based on risks in the labor market.

Leadership. It is the president's responsibility to empower college staff to take ownership of institutional initiatives, set direction with a clear vision and objectives, and provide support and appropriate resources as necessary. In this role as visionary and coach, it is important that the president help foster institutional understanding that the sands are constantly shifting, that ongoing adjustment to operations and programming is the new normal, that staff have the responsibility and power to actively play a role in how the college serves the community, and that success is measured on incremental and continuous achievement. Infusing this understanding throughout the college is important to employee morale, which also has a direct correlation to institutional effectiveness.

Consistently telling our story. We do not change our strategic priorities – there is no flavor of the day. It is important to tell our story – and the same story – over and over again, reinforcing our overarching vision. It means reaching the community through the news media and other communications outreach tools, actively engaging in community relations to reach thought leaders and gatekeepers, and consistently communicating with staff. This not only creates greater understanding with external constituents, but it also helps staff members see where the college is headed and how they can support the efforts.

Despite the growth of multiple missions among American community colleges, the public overwhelmingly distinguishes them in the educational spectrum as the colleges whose programs get people jobs. We need to keep this foremost in mind as we respond to the needs of students and employers.

James Jacobs specializes in the areas of workforce skills and technology, economic development, worker retraining, and community college workforce development. He earned his Ph.D. from Princeton University and currently serves as President of Macomb Community College in Warren, Michigan. Prior to his appointment, he served as director for MCC's Center for Workforce Development and Policy and as Associate Director of the Community College Research Center (CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University.

Dr. Jacobs is a past president of the National Council for Workforce Education, a member of the Manufacturing Extension Partnership Advisory Board of the National Institute of Standards and Technology and the National Assessment of Career and Technical Education, and the Community College Advisory Panel to the Educational Testing Service in Princeton New Jersey. Jacobs is currently serving on the Governor's Talent Investment Board, and is an advisor to the Ferris State University Doctorate in Community College Leadership program.

