

# Perspectives

Community College  
Leadership for the  
21st Century

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*For community colleges, the question is how can mission statements best be used to move the institution forward in a climate of change and challenges?*

- Mark David Mrozinski

*Community colleges will require significant reorganization in the coming decades in order to be as effective going forward as they have been since their emergence...*

- Brian Pusser and John Levin

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## The Mission of the Community College: Relevant in 2015?

**Diane K. Troyer, Ph.D.**

*Educational Consultant*

*Leadership Coach for Achieving the Dream*

The mission of America's community colleges is focused on three areas of commitment: access, responsiveness to community need, and equity. The commitment to access is exemplified by the open admissions policies of community colleges and the multiple ways colleges remove financial, physical, and academic barriers to entry. That access has resulted in entry into higher education by first generation, low-income, minorities, dropouts, working adults, and others who lacked the financial, academic, time, or location means to participate in traditional higher education systems. Looking at multiple college mission statements as well as scholarly definitions, the essential core of agreement is that community colleges provide access to the education necessary for both a productive life for individuals and healthy and successful communities they serve. Access to higher education is essential to a democratic society and a strong middle class.

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***The challenge is not whether access, responsiveness, and equity should be the central focus of the community college mission, but rather whether colleges are fulfilling that mission.***

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The responsiveness to community is demonstrated by the comprehensive nature of community college programming and the multiple levels of educational needs. The range of programs and services of community colleges put colleges at the center of their communities by providing an engine for economic and community development. The range of offerings from short-term skills and adult basic education/ESL to high demand workforce programs and transfer programs fuels the development both of individuals and the community at large.

The equity component of the community college mission is seen in the commitment to provide the full range of support necessary to level the playing field for under-prepared students and create a pathway to preparation that will put them on track to meet their goals. This pathway can begin at the GED, adult basic education, ESL or developmental level and provide students with the skills necessary to succeed in higher education. The core principle is the removal of barriers that impede success regardless of what or why those barriers have occurred.

But that mission and all three of these components are being challenged. The challenge is not whether access, responsiveness, and equity should be the central focus of

the community college mission, but rather whether colleges are fulfilling that mission. In particular, are colleges delivering "meaningful" access as measured by student success and completion? The American Association of Community College report, "Reclaiming the American Dream," reiterates the commitment and success of the access-centered mission of the community college. But the report strongly challenges the impact of that access when high numbers of students fail to thrive and complete when they enter a community college.

Dr. Tom Bailey, Director of the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University and Vanessa Smith Morest provided an excellent analysis of these issues in their 2006 book, *Defending the Community Equity Agenda*. As they state, "It's not enough to get someone in the door".

So, how do we view of the mission of the community college in the year 2015? Is it still relevant in light the pressures and challenges faced by today's community colleges and their students? Can the mission remain comprehensive in light of the reduction in state resources? Can the open door be supported when faced with underprepared students in a performance-based funding system? What does meaningful access look like when national success data show significant gaps in outcomes across various populations? In answering the question of relevancy, this article takes a look at each of the 3 components and the challenges being faced in 2015.

The first area hinges on whether community colleges are providing not merely access, but meaningful access. This challenge centers on the increased diversity of student needs and the differences in outcomes for at-risk students. What is the impact of student diversity on how the college plans for and responds to student needs?

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***What does meaningful access look like when national success data show significant gaps in outcomes across various populations?***

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The answer lies in part in the shift in the percentage of the population that must seek postsecondary education because of demands of today's workplace. A report by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce stated that by 2020, 65% of jobs will require

*(continued on page 4)*

## EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

The brisk pace of change in the higher education arena is mandating a re-imagined vision for the community college. Stemming from the community college's close ties to the local community and its increasingly prominent role in national policy, it has become essential that the greater mission of the community college continues to transform much as it has for the past century. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below.

### Suzanne Jones, M.A.

Director, Academic Student Success Center  
Lindenwood University,  
Belleville, Illinois

The community college system has responded successfully to numerous changes and challenges throughout its history. Adaptation is a defining characteristic of this educational system. However, throughout the alterations and accommodations, community colleges have continued to reflect certain foundation principles that have made these colleges the unique institutions they have become today.

College support of providing an open admission policy, remediation/developmental education, workforce training, the first two years of a baccalaureate degree, and educational/training services to a particular geographic region have remained at the core of the community college mission. The preservation of these characteristics will be part of any conversation involving management decisions and/or future directions to be taken by community college leadership. However, as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, several other issues are emerging to confront and confound the community college system, and questions are being raised as to whether or not the changing landscape in post-secondary education will redefine the role and mission of the community college within the higher education environment.

My assumption is that the future role of community colleges will reflect expanded missions rather than a replacement of existing missions. There are some elements within the historic missions that will need to be reexamined, e.g., the policy of open admission and the shifting view of the community college serving a local region to one in which it serves a national and international purpose. A focus on additional missions while preserving a link to its virtuous past will be no easy task. It will require vigilant, vigorous commitment from management teams, and leadership will need to view their way of doing things through a different lens.

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Meeting the demands for increased accountability, preparing a generation of students and workers in the global economy, securing adequate funding in an environment of shrinking resources, and maintaining connectivity to its history and tradition all represent barriers to sustaining the multiple missions that will need to be overcome to function successfully. Community colleges have been here before, and I have no doubt they will emerge with an augmented mission and a series of effective implementation strategies to meet the challenges ahead.

Suzanne Jones is the Director of the Academic Student Success Center and Retention at Lindenwood University-Belleville (IL). Previously, she served as the sole full-time Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor at Southwestern Illinois College-Red Bud, where she provided personal, academic, and career counseling, as well as serving as the Project Success Coordinator. She earned her M.A. in Professional Counseling from Lindenwood University and is enrolled in the Ferris State University DCCL program.



### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

***How do you interpret the mission of the community college in contemporary times?***

### Kathryn Mullins, Ed.D.

Executive Deputy to the President  
Grand Rapids Community College,  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Never before in the history of community colleges has there been such a national focus on, and recognition of, the important work of community colleges. As such, the reimagined vision for the community college is being shaped and mandated by external forces. Social, political, and economic pressures are

realities that have to be addressed and yet the mission of the community college, the democracy college, must stay true to its roots. The mission has to remain first and foremost that of open access.

Social, political, and economic pressures lead to greater accountability in higher education, particularly for the democracy college. These pressures have expanded the mission of community colleges and the focus today is on providing access that leads to completion. The access and completion mission, coupled with the remedial education needs and the changing demographics of the students we serve, demands that we do our work differently.

The number of students needing developmental education continues to grow and research has shown that these students are less likely to complete. Therefore, community colleges must scale up successful developmental education initiatives and integrate those initiatives into credit-bearing, general education courses for the completion mission to advance effectively. Colleges must forge strong partnerships with K-12 schools to work on addressing the remediation challenge before students step onto our campuses; this relationship is critical for the successful advancement of the access and completion mission.

Demographic studies show that future students will be much more diverse than the population we serve today. This new generation will include more low-income, first-generation, and minority students – particularly Hispanic students. This changing student demographic will dramatically impact community college campuses and will change the way we approach our work. The access and completion mission can only advance in this new environment with the understanding that student success happens when educational systems are designed to serve and support all students, beginning at the front door and following them every step of the way to that celebratory graduation stage.

For all that has changed in contemporary times, the mission of the community college must, at its core, remain the same; providing higher education access to all. However, it is imperative that access is coupled with completion, to remain relevant, sustainable, and the democracy college.

***[T]he reimagined vision for the community college is being shaped and mandated by external forces.***

Kathryn Mullins, Ed.D., serves as Executive Deputy to the President and Board Liaison at Grand Rapids Community College in Grand Rapids, MI. Kathy is a member of the President's Executive Team with a portfolio that includes community relations, public relations, and marketing. She earned bachelor and master's degrees from Baker College, her Ed. D. from Ferris State University's DCCL program, and has held faculty positions at GRCC and Ferris State University.



## NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

The brisk pace of change in the higher education arena is mandating a re-imagined vision for the community college. Stemming from the community college's close ties to the local community and its increasingly prominent role in national policy, it has become essential that the greater mission of the community college continues to transform much as it has for the past century. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below.

### Visioning for the 21st Century Community College: Sustained Disruption, Innovation, and Renewal

**Kenneth L. Ender, Ph.D.**

President, William Rainey Harper College  
Palatine, Illinois

Ah...such a challenging question the editors posed! The response demands an open mind and a taste for ambiguity; this reply will offer a little of both. First, let us consider the landscape of higher education in America today. No other era in the history of the American higher education system has witnessed so much widespread disruption. Today, the internet has virtually commoditized higher education and led to the proliferation of for-profit education providers, diverse delivery platforms, and the micro-credentialing of knowledge and skills completely independent of the Carnegie credit hour.

***A mission statement...must invite disruptive thinking, innovative ideas, and an institutional tolerance for risk and uncertainty.***

In today's "knowledge economy," it is hard to imagine leading a successful self- and family-sustaining life without the benefit of both a post-secondary credential and ongoing access to credentialing systems supporting a lifetime of work and advancement. The challenge for higher education is to provide access and insure completion at a scale never realized before, at a cost that promotes significant value. To offer this scale of credentials and to survive in this milieu, change must be viewed as inevitable, met with innovation, and regarded as a partner on the path to renewal. To look the other way risks higher education taking the same devastating path as common in our former "smoke stack" economy.

A mission statement guiding a community college in this environment must invite disruptive thinking, innovative ideas, and an institutional tolerance for risk and uncertainty. It should provide a direction, yet not a predefined path. It must recognize the important core values of access, affordability, and quality, while embracing and inviting diversity. Finally, it must promote collaboration, cooperation, and connectivity as our various educational systems come together to transform lives, the workforce, and our community/society. Such a mission encourages new approaches and institutional systems for public education never before imagined, in partnership with public k-12 systems and local, regional and national workforce systems, and employers.

What might emerge from the mission with the characteristics described above? Imagine a regional system of education that stitches together the resources of a university, community colleges, the local public school systems, and workforce systems so that together they deliver high value, low-cost certificates and degrees through a single networked system, utilizing multiple delivery methods. These credentials could be delivered locally so that they are tightly connected to employer needs, aligned with economic and workforce development initiatives, and anchored by an institution that provides research and analysis. This system informs investments in talent development and is aligned with

#### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

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regional and local workforce needs. Utilizing the combined resources of these institutions, multiple delivery platforms could be built and delivered – think face to face, digital, competency-based, and credit for prior learning. Some common principles would unite these institutions:

- ▲ Post-secondary readiness for all high school graduates is commonplace;
- ▲ All certificate and associate degree programs are open admissions and many provide pathways that begin in the secondary program;
- ▲ All associate degree holders are guaranteed access to the companion baccalaureate degrees in the system;
- ▲ Customized delivery systems are available to all learners, and credit for prior learning is commonplace;
- ▲ The system is affordable, enabling dependent students to pay tuition from summer or part/time earnings, while adult learners would access the continuum of credentials offered at a price point aligned with current community college pricing;
- ▲ Enrollment would be offered continuously, both virtually and in-person, for programs aligned with workforce needs or economic development initiatives;
- ▲ Data would be leveraged through information systems, analytical tools, and learning support systems, common across the system;
- ▲ Common student enrollment services would be available 24/7;
- ▲ All credentials would tie to essential workforce competencies: communication, critical thinking, technology literacy, writing, numeracy and problem solving – these behaviors and skills would be documented through general education programming throughout the system.

***Our challenge is to imagine the institutions and systems that will guarantee these outcomes and stake out a mission to assure we get there.***

The 21st century community college would promote a lifetime of learning tied to common general education outcomes and specific workforce requirements. It will be tightly connected and highly-leveraged, with accessible and affordable outcomes. It shall remain the clearest pathway to the American Dream. Our challenge is to imagine the institutions and systems that will guarantee these outcomes and stake out a mission to assure we get there.



Dr. Kenneth Ender is President of William Rainey Harper College, located outside of Chicago. Through partnerships and alliances, he has positioned Harper as a leading 21st-century community college. He previously served as President of Cumberland County College (N. J.) for eleven years and as Vice President for Academic Affairs at Richland Community College. He holds a Ph.D. from Virginia Commonwealth University, a master's degree from the University of Georgia, and serves on the Board of Directors of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC).



## QUICK TAKES Highlights from the Field

### **Community College Contributions,** by Christopher M. Mullin and Kent Phillippe

The authors point out that today's community college is an "intricate institution," offering pathways to credentials, degrees, and retraining opportunities. This article details the public and private benefits of the contemporary community college mission, while highlighting the overarching role of the community college in terms of its functions as a launching pad for academic progression, provider of timely knowledge and skills, and as a local resource for the communities which it serves. Read the complete study at: <http://bit.ly/1BKAty1>

### **The Dual Mission of Community Colleges,** by Daniel Seymour

Excerpted from his book, *Mission, Vision, and Values in the Community College*, Seymour discusses the strategic importance of the community college mission today and asserts, "Community colleges must re-imagine their purposes and practices in order to meet the demands of the future." A sharper focus upon the contemporary mission is critical, given the specific and substantive import paid to its role by regional accrediting agencies during institutional evaluation. Read the complete article at: <http://bit.ly/1DI0e1q>

To receive a copy of this publication, please send your email address to: [thoman13@ferris.edu](mailto:thoman13@ferris.edu)



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## The Mission of the Community College: Relevant in 2015?

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postsecondary education compared to "28% in 1973." This shift requires a high percentage of the population to seek and obtain some college preparation regardless of their background. The large numbers of first generation and underprepared students coming to community colleges are driven by the realities that they cannot have a productive life with a family-supporting wage without a college education.

Related to the increase in underprepared students is their level of preparation when enrolling in a community college and the likely outcome. In most colleges, high numbers (even the majority) of new students are assessed as lacking reading, writing or math skills necessary to succeed in college-level work. We know from the groundbreaking work of the Community College Research Center, that those placing in the lowest levels of developmental math have an extremely low (7 to 10%) chance of ever succeeding in college-level math. Even though the majority of new students are placed in remedial or basic skills classes, most colleges do not treat underprepared students as a primary and essential component of their mission.

Community colleges have done an excellent job providing access to higher education through open door admissions and comprehensive offerings. But that access has little meaning if the system to prepare at-risk and first generation students results in a failure to move to credit courses, lack of progress toward their goal, and low retention. Without a clear and effective system to prepare at-risk, first generation students, the open door cannot claim to be providing meaningful access.

As colleges have responded to local needs, the range of services, programs, and partnerships has developed to include the full spectrum of educational and community development. Comprehensiveness is at the heart of the college's ability to serve both the whole student and the whole community. But as resources shrink, the "battle" for primacy and balance heightens: workforce versus transfer, credit versus non-credit, instruction versus student services, applied baccalaureate versus associate degree, and college-level versus developmental or basic skills. The important question is whether each piece of the comprehensive mission is being executed well, adding value to the student and/or community, and producing a positive outcome in terms of jobs, economic development, successful transfer, increased baccalaureate attainment, enrollment in credit by basic skills or developmental students, etc. Comprehensiveness should be defined by community and student need and the quality of outcomes of each component. At the core of support for the comprehensive mission is a set of clear data-driven goals for outcomes for each component and regular, transparent evaluation of those expectations to determine both areas of strength and gaps in performance that call for strong support to improve impact.

The third challenge to the mission of the community college centers on equity and the implications of the growing emphasis on outcomes and the Completion Agenda. Certainly the stakes have risen dramatically in states with performance-based funding. This emphasis on outcomes will only increase as resources further tighten and the scorecard shifts away from enrollment as the measure of success. In fact, for many years the rapid growth in many

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community colleges actually masked high attrition and the failure to thrive for low income and first generation students.

With the increase in attention on completion and the ability to disaggregate results for groups of students, we can now see gaps in the completion agenda for those students who are first generation, low income or under-prepared. Achieving the Dream and national research has shown the power of disaggregation of data. When success rates are disaggregated by race and sex, we find the gaps are often significant with disproportionate number of poor and minority students facing an uphill battle to complete remediation, progress, and complete. This is the flip side to the commitment to access discussed earlier. This equity gap remains a fundamental challenge to mission fulfillment in the community college.

All three of these components of the mission of the community college are now impacted by the "culture of completion" with credential attainment as the primary focus of accountability for colleges. This shift in attention is beginning to change behaviors within institutions and has resulted in significant increase in research on programs, processes, and approaches that result in higher completion. Aside from changing what and how we measure success, colleges are addressing both access and equity through a more intentional student experience including requirements for at-risk and under-prepared students.

The question of relevancy of the community college mission and its focus on access, responsiveness and equity, is grounded not in what the mission is, but whether colleges are successfully delivering on that mission. The shifts we see in 2015 are not shifts around those areas of commitment, but a new emphasis on outcomes and evidence of meaningful access, effective response to critical community needs, and equity in student progression and completion.

Dr. Troyer is an educational consultant specializing on access and completion in public community colleges, is a Leadership Coach for Achieving the Dream, and has served as a Senior Program Officer at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. As the founding president of Lone Star College-CyFair, in Cypress, Texas, the first college to be developed in the 21st Century, she was responsible for the vision, planning, design, construction, program development, hiring, and community partnerships.



Dr. Troyer serves on the board of the American Association of Community Colleges, as President of the National Council of Workforce Education, and as Chairman of the Community College Research Center President's Advisory Board (CCRC, Columbia University Teachers College). She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin, where she has been honored as a distinguished graduate. She currently serves on the Advisory Board for the Ferris State University's Doctorate in Community College Leadership.