

Perspectives

SUMMER 2015
www.ferris.edu/alliance
**Community College
Leadership for the
21st Century**

Community colleges have been governed by locally-elected boards throughout their history, reflecting the belief that the mission of the colleges is best preserved and strengthened by local oversight.

- Community College League of California

One key to effective governance is political legitimacy. In order to be governed well, a college must be directed by those who have the right to govern.

- Gary Davis

**Doctorate in
Community College
Leadership**

Empowering graduates to advance community colleges towards excellence and community responsiveness through exemplary leadership.


**FERRIS STATE
UNIVERSITY**

**ENROLLING NOW FOR
THE NEXT COHORT**

The 'Shifting Box Paradox' for Public Policy

Adriana Phelan, PhD

*Vice President,
Michigan Community College Association (MCCA)
Lansing, Michigan*

I often wonder if we are not living the reality of the boiling frog metaphor. Drop the frog into a pot of boiling water, and the smart fellow instantly jumps out to save himself. But throw the unsuspecting frog into cool water, he will contently swim, unaware that the water is being slowly heated over a long period. The frog eventually cooks because he is inattentive to the small, incremental changes in temperature and thus goes numb to the realities of the water he's swimming in until it's too late.

I was reflecting on this metaphor as Doug Estray, the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education at Michigan State University, delivered his acceptance speech for this year's Alumnus of the Year Award at the Michigan Community College Association (MCCA) Annual Conference. I was struck by his comments that the rapid pace of change is requiring institutions of higher education to not only help students "think outside the box," but in fact they have to help students realize that the box is rapidly changing, and students have to develop the skills and agility to continuously adapt. This brutal reality of our impatient, globalized, economically-interdependent, information-rich, and just-in-time existence is a challenge not just for students, but for all of higher education. Clearly, the frog can no longer afford to just swim unaware of the changing realities around him.

We need to identify regulations critical for protecting students, and what is superfluous and rightly should be eliminated.

But what are the implications of this relentless reality for public policy? How can state legislatures and Congress help moderate the ever-heating water and balance the need to support and strengthen higher institutions as they work to adapt and innovate, while also responding to the public's concerns about cost, transparency, student loans and defaults, and the need to hold institutions accountable for student success? Therein lies the 'Shifting Box Paradox' for public policy.

Congress is filled with dialogue centered on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. Senator Lamar Alexander, chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, has prioritized the reduction of red tape in the reauthorization. Although Vanderbilt University claims that it spent \$146 million complying with government regulations,ⁱ the intensifying

debate over whether to reduce federal government regulations requires a disciplined analysis of unnecessary institutional constraints. We need to identify regulations critical for protecting students, and what is superfluous and rightly should be eliminated. The solution, I believe is as Michelangelo once noted: "You just chip away everything that doesn't look like David."

[S]tate legislatures also attempt to balance economic pressures with the need for more flexibility and expanded accountability.

Congress also is exploring ways to make colleges have "skin-in-the-game" and share in the financial risk of the federal loans they provide students. Although the cost of attendance is the lowest at public 2-Year institutions and only 17 percent of community college students borrow,ⁱⁱ so called "risk-sharing" will be a significant policy priority for all of higher education with U.S. student loan debt now exceeding \$1 trillion and 40 million Americans having at least one outstanding student loan (up from 29 million in 2008; an increase of 84%).ⁱⁱⁱ

Quality assurance and a potential overhaul of accreditation are also concerns, with some interest in making it easier for innovative models of education to gain approval. Other priorities include simplifying the FASFA and potentially the reinstatement of summer Pell awards. Discussion has also centered on weighing new ways to hold colleges accountable for their students' success. Although President Obama's controversial ratings system proposal crumbled under pressure, a strong agenda remains for increased transparency and the need for better consumer information.

To some extent, state legislatures also attempt to balance economic pressures with the need for more flexibility and expanded accountability. Although many states have increased support for higher education to restore funding, states are still funding higher education below pre-recession levels.^{iv} The average state has cut higher education funding per student by 23 percent since the recession hit and it is alarming to note that Arizona took the draconian step of defunding (zeroing out) the Maricopa and Pima Community College Districts -- two of the largest in the state.^v Such action raises an important public policy question about whether higher education is a 'public good' or a 'private good.'

State legislatures increasingly are resorting to performance-based funding to achieve increased accountability and student success outcomes. More than two-thirds

(continued on page 4)

EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

Community college governance across the nation is difficult to conceptualize, chiefly due to the differing organizational and policy structures from state to state. An agile and effective governance structure is required to help colleges remain on the forefront of community needs. The AACCC posits that the pressure to improve institutional effectiveness and efficiency placed on governing boards will continue to increase, whether those boards are institutional or state-level, elected or appointed. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below:

Kris Walz, MS

Program Manager, One Door Initiative
Cuyahoga Community College
Cleveland, Ohio

Community college governance structures across the nation exemplify a changing dynamic today. Regardless of the type of structure, the recurring theme of institutional effectiveness and efficiency is directly associated with the college governing board. When considering the role of boards in relation to the college's accountability standards, three factors must be considered. The way board members engage individually, as members of the board team, and within the college community all will have a critical impact on accountability.

The individual role of the board member.

"Because responsibility for governance is shared, no single person or group can be held accountable for making all of the college's governance decisions" (Davis, 2015). As a result, individual contributions are very important. It is critical for board members to embrace education and be committed

to the cause. The ideal board member is one who has a personal link to the institution, demonstrates leadership abilities, and is connected to the community. This individual should embrace change and understand the ongoing student success and completion revolution. I predict that the selection of those on governing boards is going to evolve over time.

The role of the board. The board needs to be well-represented with dynamic team players, each committed to the board team and open to learning about the institution they are serving. Training and onboarding for new board members must be relevant and robust. It is generally understood that the role of a board member can be demanding and time-consuming. "Unfortunately, some trustees refuse to commit adequate time and energy to their role" (Davis, 2015). How effectively a board works together will have a direct impact on accountability standards.

The role of the board within the community. The board needs to be connected with the internal and external college community. It is critical for the internal community of faculty, staff, and administrators to know the board and its role, although this is not an invitation for the board to start engaging in daily operations. The external community needs to understand the importance of the institution and establish relevance. Transparency is essential in both arenas due to difficult conversations that will take place that require trust.

As I reflect on the accountability standards that have begun to evolve in Ohio, it is clear the board role constitutes an essential element for student success and completion. Expectations for the individual board member, the board team, and those community relationships maintained by the board all will have a direct impact on today's changing accountability standards.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

How do you see the role of community college Boards changing to meet today's various accountability standards?

The way board members engage individually, as members of the board team, and within the college community all will have a critical impact on accountability.

Whether a trustee is elected or appointed, partisan or nonpartisan, he/she should represent the constituency served by the community college district.

In most states, the constituency has a clearly defined geographical boundary. Granted, these lines are blurred when "free flow" applies. In California, "free flow" allows a student to take classes outside of their defined geographical boundary at in-district rates.

From a broad perspective, the constituency of the community college is identified as the

residents who live within the defined geographical boundaries. However, that presents a challenge when one considers how the trustee was elected/ appointed to the seat. The constituency could refer to the Governor, Mayor, County Board, financial contributors, state legislature, political party, those who voted for the trustee, the individual trustee, and more.

As we all know, each trustee, rogue or sincere, scorned or prominent, only has one vote when it comes to taking action in the best interest of the community college. In determining the best interest of the college, how does a trustee recognize the best interest and whether or not the best interest is making a difference for the constituency?

In reflecting on my experiences as a trustee and talking with trustees across the country, I favor a clear, comprehensive, and measurable civic engagement plan to guide and hold trustees accountable for the best interest of the community college. As a part of this plan, components should include input from students, citizens, alumni, community college staff, various employers in the constituency area, clergy, local school districts, economic and workforce development agencies, and local and regional government agencies.

Through a clear, comprehensive, and measurable civic engagement plan, it is possible that trustees could reduce personal bias and/or influence from special interests. One might consider the challenges facing community colleges, such as the increasing number of students entering remedial classes, the impact of the default rate on student loans, and the health care and pension costs for employees when formulating the civic engagement plan.

If accountability starts at the top, it is high time the constituency takes responsibility and ensures a clear, comprehensive, and measurable civic engagement plan to hold all members of the Board of Trustees accountable.

Edward Woods, III, MPA

Director of Learning and Leadership Experiences,
Michigan Society of Association Executives
East Lansing, Michigan

When considering the myriad governance structures at community colleges, the reoccurring issue of accountability continues to plague the discussion. Despite the plethora of studies and research, the fundamental question still prevails: who holds the trustees accountable at the community college in serving the needs of their constituency?

Kris Walz, MS, is the Program Manager for the One Door Initiative at Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, OH. Established in 2013 as presidential priority, the Initiative is focused on student success and completion. Kris also serves as an Adjunct Faculty member. She earned an MS in Community Health Education from the University of Wisconsin at Lacrosse and currently is pursuing her doctoral degree in the Ferris State DCCL program.



Edward Woods III, MPA is the director of Learning and Leadership Experiences at the Michigan Society of Association Executives, where his role is primary focused on improving education, leadership, and learning opportunities for MSAE members. He has served on the boards at Lake Michigan College in Benton Harbor, MI, and at Lansing Community College in Lansing, MI. He earned his MPA, and currently is pursuing his PhD, from Western Michigan University.



NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

Community college governance across the nation is difficult to conceptualize, chiefly due to the differing organizational and policy structures from state to state. An agile and effective governance structure is required to help colleges remain on the forefront of community needs. The AACC posits that the pressure to improve institutional effectiveness and efficiency placed on governing boards will continue to increase, whether those boards are institutional or state-level, elected or appointed. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below:

J. Noah Brown, MPP

President and CEO
Association of Community College Trustees
Washington, D.C.

The policy landscape around higher education and implications for governance changed forever in the autumn of 2006. Then-Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings's Commission on the Future of Higher Education completed its thorough and high-level study on higher education and determination of what must change if the nation were to continue to deliver on the promise of high quality, accessible, and affordable education. The product of the Spellings Commission, "A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education," issued a clarion call for improvement:

We urge the creation of a robust culture of accountability and transparency through higher education. Every one of our goals... will be more easily achieved if higher education institutions embrace and implement serious accountability measures.

The Washington, D.C. higher education community and the nation's higher education leaders sat up and took notice as never before. In the aftermath of the Commission's report release, state universities and land-grant colleges created the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), the first national, standardized attempt to collect and disseminate metrics on key measures of institutional performance. The private, nonprofit colleges and universities created the similar U-CAN system, providing high level consumer-friendly data designed to inform students and parents about the effectiveness and responsiveness of the sector to the goals of greater transparency and accountability.

The national community college associations, including the governance organization that I lead, Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), later created the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA), beginning in late 2009. Today, the VFA is being used by 161 members representing 39 states, including 152 college members, three centralized members, two consortia members, and four supporting members. Seven states participate as collectives through entities such as the City University of New York, Iowa Department of Education, Michigan Community College Association, and similarly associated bodies.

Concomitant with the accountability movement, states began to reassess and reenact performance-based funding measures, driven by new and changing accountability standards. Eighteen states now have performance-based funding policies for all of higher education, with an additional five states with measures applying solely to community colleges. While performance-based funding was the relative darling of legislatures and governors in the 1980s, today's variants come with real teeth and affect more of the state allocation to colleges and universities, subjecting institutions to more rigorous and consequential measures. Concerns about tuition inflation and concerns related to matching programs to gainful employment fueled renewed interest in higher education governance, and especially in the selection of community college boards.

In 2009, as the accountability movement gained momentum, President Obama and several leading philanthropic powerhouses including the

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

How do you see the role of community college Boards changing to meet today's various accountability standards?

Bill & Melinda Gates and Lumina foundations challenged higher education to double the number of adults with college degrees by 2020 or 2025. Thus, in addition to fostering greater transparency and accountability, community colleges in particular were asked to focus intensely on student success and completion. This last great sea change in policy focus was driven by the growing sense that community colleges, as well as all of higher education, had gotten off course and off mission relative to graduating and transferring students successfully.

The pressure on community college governance is enormous and is not likely to lessen anytime in the foreseeable future. In fact, the need to appoint and elect trustees with a clear-eyed commitment to student outcomes, greater stewardship over declining public resources, more emphasis on innovation, and use of big data and data analytics is growing more acute by the day. The challenge for all of us lies in the reality that community college governance is part and parcel of the American political landscape and tradition. For governance to work as it was intended, we need to focus intentionally on who gets appointed and elected to community college boards – whether those boards are local, district, or statewide.

For governance to work as it was intended, we need to focus intentionally on who gets appointed and elected to community college boards - whether those boards are local, district, or statewide.

The boards of today (and even more so tomorrow) need to be more entrepreneurial in their policy and mission-setting. They need to take more and better-informed risks and take positions that challenge the status quo and institutional culture. They need to become well-informed generalists, whose decisions are guided by data and adherence to holding presidents and institutions accountable for meeting their benchmarks and strategic priorities. This will not be easy in an enterprise that is largely human-centered and high-touch. But the responsibility to hold an enterprise in trust was not meant to be easy, nor taken lightly. Getting it right means all of us will prosper as never before.



Noah Brown has served as president and chief executive officer of the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) since 2005, and has worked for the association since 1996. He also serves on the faculty for the Doctorate in Community College Leadership program (DCCL) at Ferris State University in Michigan. He is the award-winning author of *First in the World: Community Colleges and America's Future* (2012) which won the 2013 Bellwether Book Award. Noah holds a Master of Public Policy degree from the University of Maryland, College Park and an Honorary Associate of Arts from Atlantic Cape Community College in New Jersey.

QUICK TAKES
Highlights
from the Field

Issues in Community College Governance

by Gary Davis

Gary Davis, former Director of the Illinois Community College Trustees Association, reviews and analyzes a number of pressing concerns associated with community college governance. While the author espouses his continuing high level of confidence in community college boards and the institutions that they govern, he addresses and analyzes the myriad challenges and criticisms faced by today's boards. Suggestions for improvement in governance systems are highlighted, with the goal of enhanced community college governance. Read the full article here:

<http://bit.ly/1N1LDH8>

Community College Systems Across the 50 States

by The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

This report highlights the differences in governance structures among the 50 state community college systems. Variations in the forms of local governance exist in some cases due to unique state evolution, resulting in some states with no local governing boards, some with locally elected boards, and others with appointed boards. Charts are provided to present detailed data on the patterns of state coordination and governance, as well as the funding structures of community colleges. Read the full article here:

<http://bit.ly/1TgG4af>

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



Published by the Alliance for Community College Excellence in Practice, Ferris State University, Doctorate in Community College Leadership Big Rapids, Michigan

The 'Shifting Box Paradox' for Public Policy

(continued from page 1)

of states are currently developing and/or implementing outcomes-based funding policies and a number of other states are interested.^{vi} Most models are still focused on distributing "new money" based on performance, but many states are conditioning institutions' base funding on outcomes.

Our reality demands the ambidextrous ability of leadership and boards to manage institutions effectively and efficiently, while also rapidly and continuously experimenting, innovating, and taking significant risks with new business models.

In Michigan, legislators and the Governor have made community colleges a priority, and even in the toughest of economic times, rewarded colleges with small increases in appropriations. The community college funding formula, currently under review by a taskforce, has for over a decade included performance-based components for new revenue. Tying funding to student outcomes is a concept with inherent political appeal; the same is true for tuition control policies. The community college appropriations bill in Michigan has been free of tuition restraint language, while universities have seen new increases to funding contingent on tuition restraint. These policies might make sense from a political standpoint, but state caps on tuition may be counterproductive. Research has shown that states with tuition caps experience higher tuition growth than states with no caps.^{vii} Missing from the debate on tuition restraint, particularly related to community colleges as they embrace access with significant pressures to increase student success, is a sober discussion on the cost of quality.

So what can be done to lower the temperature and help institutions (and by extension, students) better position themselves to solve the Shifting Box Paradox? Our reality demands the ambidextrous ability of leadership and boards to manage institutions effectively and efficiently, while also rapidly and continuously experimenting, innovating, and taking significant risks with new business models.

With no higher education coordinating authority in Michigan and locally-elected boards of trustees, the decentralized governance structure allows community colleges significant autonomy. To support the institutions, the MCCA has been working with its 28 member colleges to build and cultivate a network-centric organizational model. The core is focused on legislative and public advocacy, working to reduce the ever-heating waters, and to provide institutions with much-needed flexibility. Bee-hived around the core are centers of excellence, each with a different business model and entrepreneurial approach to supporting institutions with collective action and innovation in online learning, global ventures, student success initiatives, and workforce development.

Beyond awareness and collaboration with like-minded organizations, our changed reality suggests the necessity

of embracing the accelerating pace of change rather than shunning it. Clearly, the competitive pressures from the commoditization of education and a demanding public require that we seriously address the complex ways in which public policy is contributing to the relentless heating waters. The Shifting Box Paradox is not something to be solved at once, but rather it is a challenge that is here to stay and will require disciplined, thoughtful, data-informed decision making, persistent tenacity, and both critical and creative thinking. Let's save the frog from a slow and unsuspecting boil.

References:

- i. Marcus, J. (2015, July 16). The \$150 Million Question: What Does Federal Regulation Really Cost Colleges? *Washington Monthly*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/college_guide/blog/the_150_million_questionwhat_d.php?page=all
- ii. Juskiewicz, J. (2014, April). Community College Students and Federal Student Financial Aid: A Primer. *American Association of Community Colleges*. Retrieved from http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Publications/Reports/Documents/CCStudents_A_Primer.pdf
- iii. Blake, E. (2014, September 10). 40 million Americans now have student loan debt. *CNN Money*. Retrieved from <http://money.cnn.com/2014/09/10/pf/college/student-loans/>
- iv. Mitchell, M., Palacios, V., & Leachman, M. (2014, May). States Are Still Funding Higher Education Below Pre-Recession Levels. *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbpp.org/research/states-are-still-funding-higher-education-below-pre-recession-levels>
- v. Smith, A. (2015, March 12). Zeroed Out in Arizona. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/03/12/arizona-unprecedented-defunding-community-colleges>
- vi. Snyder, M. (2015). Driving Better Outcomes: Typology and Principles to Inform Outcomes-Based Funding Models. *HCM Strategists*. Retrieved from <http://hcmstrategists.com/drivingoutcomes/wp-content/themes/hcm/pdf/Driving%20Outcomes.pdf>
- vii. Barrett, B., & Palmer, I. (2015, July 24). New Research on How States can Control Tuition Growth. *New America*. Retrieved from <http://www.edcentral.org/states-control-tuition-growth/>

Clearly, the competitive pressures from the commoditization of education and a demanding public require that we seriously address the complex ways in which public policy is contributing to the relentless heating waters.

Dr. Adriana Phelan is the Vice President at the Michigan Community College Association (MCCA), where she works with the presidents and trustees of the 28 community colleges to help advance a collective public policy agenda, with a special focus on economic and workforce development. Adriana came to the MCCA from the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW) as a Senior Policy Associate, and has also served as a lecturer at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. Adriana has a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration/Public Policy from the University of Michigan, a B.A. in Philosophy from Alma College, and had the privilege of growing up in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

