

Perspectives

Community College
Leadership for the
21st Century

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Community College Appraisal

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As with any provider of products and services to be sold, the value proposition for community colleges depends on who's buying. Community colleges are confronted with a diverse collection of potential buyers with different needs and their own valuation of what the services are worth. The local community, businesses, state and federal governments, donors, and individual students are potential buyers and community colleges are uniquely poised to fulfill their needs.

Intrinsic in the name, community colleges serve to enrich the lives of citizens in their local communities. My aunt, a state senator from Minnesota, believes it is instructive that many campuses that are now "community colleges" started as "junior colleges." In Minnesota, the term "junior" was abandoned for "community" in 1973 for all such public institutions. That transition was symbolic in that it affirmed the local connection with residents, K-12 school districts, and businesses. By voting for a local college millage or by spending discretionary dollars at the college, community residents support a vibrant living space with potentially enlightened neighbors.

Our family went to see the touring performance of STOMP recently at the Kuss Auditorium at Clark State Community College's Performing Arts Center in Springfield, Ohio. Home to the Arts Council and the Symphony Orchestra, the auditorium has 1500 seats that were mostly filled by children for the performance. What an incredible resource for the community and Clark State's outreach to expose children, families, and local students to the arts. Colleges with extended education offerings serve residents with opportunities that span a lifetime. My kids at a young age were excited and a bit proud to "attend college" in a lively College for Kids program at Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City, Michigan. Instilling a love of learning in the youngest residents and the perception that college is cool in classes like "Bugs, Bugs, Bugs" and "Digging for Dinosaurs" is a way to build a pipeline of buyers into the future.

Local businesses buy direct professional development from colleges with organizational training offerings in areas of need such as designing effective workflow, continuous quality improvement processes, or employee skills. Community colleges provide value to local businesses by training a diverse and talented workforce in the skills and trades important to the local economy in ways that other institutions of higher education cannot.

Why should state and federal government buy, through direct subsidy and federal financial aid, community college products and services? Government cannot invest for the sake of investing. It must get a return. Foremost, the government's investment results in an educated citizenry that not only acquires tangible skills, but also explores the

liberal arts. It results in an enlightened populace that can exercise its obligations by thinking critically, communicating effectively, and considering diverse perspectives. Second, the government is buying access to higher education for some that may not otherwise be able to attend. Legislation for a free community college education has been proposed in over ten states since 2014. Skills attained at the college leads to employed workers that earn wages to spend on other goods and services, and pay taxes to the government. At the most basic level, the government expects loans to be repaid. While the loan default rate has been higher for community college students than for students from other higher education institutions, community college graduates owe far less than those from other sectors.

Donors' decision to "buy" can be emotional and much more altruistic and it only works when the values of the college match that of the donors. In their annual letter, Bill and Melinda Gates mention that philanthropy doesn't need a financial return, so it can do things that business and government cannot. At best the community college can facilitate what the donor-as-buyer is interested in, transforming lives.

What about the individual student as buyer? The unique differentials of community colleges capture individual buyers

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by meeting their needs. While students swirl among institutions, including multiple community colleges, community colleges are not always each other's primary competition. For many, the choice is not where to pursue education or training, but whether to go at all. Even so, just as individuals are unique in their needs, there is no one size fits all institution of higher education. I've seen students attend community colleges to fill some of the empty spaces of need like the mortar between the building blocks of one's life events.

Why do buyers choose the community college to fulfill an educational need? Maybe it's the convenient location since students are not always geographically mobile. Maybe it's just more affordable than the alternative. What other unique differentiation will add value for an individual student? Michelle Weise and Clayton Christensen (Hire Education, 2014), note that students' priorities are changing and that maybe they are being overserved by the "augmented, bundled services" that traditional baccalaureate (and higher) institutions provide. Students seeking a more specific, customizable, affordable program fulfill their needs at community colleges that have reduced required developmental

(continued on page 4)

Public confidence in higher education is waning. Policymakers and higher education leaders need to understand how the public views higher education if they hope to rebuild faith in higher education as a path to a better life.

- Public Agenda

The need for leadership within our communities at this time is palpable... Academia can either step up to provide that model, or retreat into the 'bubble' so often described by its critics.

- Alison Byerly

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EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

The AACC asserts that community colleges are probably better understood and valued today than ever before. However, recent polls suggest that fewer people think that higher education is necessary for economic success, revealing a public disillusionment with higher education. As the case for needed resources is made at the state and national levels, it is critical that the value of community colleges is articulated clearly. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

Brendan Greaney, MEd

Coordinator of Academic Support Services
Clark State Community College
Springfield, Ohio

In an age in which there is so much noise competing for people's attention, trying to effectively communicate the value of community colleges can seem like a mountain too high to climb.

Since the great economic boom post World War II, people could get a good paying job without a college education. However, even though that pattern has shifted dramatically in the last few decades, there is still a common belief that a college education isn't necessary. I continue to hear this assertion regularly when discussing career options with students (that assertion more frequently comes from the parents).

However, regardless of this shift in the need for college, we are still having a problem getting the message out. According to a 2013 report by the Georgetown University Public Policy Institute, the largest job growth since the great recession has been for people with some form of higher education. In fact, according to the same report, people with some form of higher education are the only ones to have seen growth, while people with only a high school education or less have seen a decline in jobs. Furthermore, the 2013 Georgetown report predicts that by the year 2020, 65% of all jobs will require some form of postsecondary education.

[I]n today's market the community college is the most accessible option a person without economic means may have to obtain a higher education degree and an opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty.

Given these realities, in today's market the community college is the most accessible option a person without economic means may have to obtain a higher education degree and an opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty. One of the current critiques of higher education in today's society is the high cost. Community colleges offer the most cost effective option for many of our citizens. Community college leaders must find a way to communicate that our value added comes in the form of helping to lift people out of poverty, hence turning them into self-supporting active citizens who do not require government assistance to simply live their lives.

Advocating this message must come in the form of showing the data to our state and local political leaders. In an age in which our political leaders may be looking to make cuts to essential public support services, the community college may just provide the answer they need.

Reference

Carnevale, A., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (2013). Recovery: Job growth and education requirements through 2020 (Publication). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Public Policy Institute.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

How can college leaders best describe and communicate the "value added" of community colleges?

Laurie Kattuah-Snyder, MA

Associate Dean of Advising and Partnerships
Schoolcraft College
Livonia, Michigan

A community college often represents the first educational step for the financially challenged, for people busy with personal commitments, for first generation students, or for those seeking work-ready skills not aren't offered by traditional four-year col-

leges. Since the mission of the community college is fairly straightforward, its role easily understandable. And yet there appears to be a growing number of Americans who think higher education, including community colleges, does not provide a good return on their investment.

Competitive admissions, stories of unsafe campuses, unemployed graduates, and high tuition costs may be some factors fueling the disenchantment. Adding to this perception is the ever-increasing number of graduates with high student loan debt. People that believed education was going to bring economic success—when it ultimately did not—would naturally now believe that school was a waste of money and time.

Leaders must continuously communicate their successes and challenges, in transparent and accessible ways.

Community college leaders might want to consider improving the perception of their schools by describing their value-add to a wide group of stakeholders at multiple levels. One important and immediate step is embracing the "community" in community college by becoming more engaged with leaders from local and state organizations, both public and private, and explaining how they can benefit by being involved with the school. Tell stories and share information about innovative community college programming, mutual benefits of education-business partnerships, or how your successful graduates are pursuing their passions while contributing to local and state economies. We all have something to brag about. However, we need to organize our bragging points and get them out into the community.

Leaders must continuously communicate their successes and challenges, in transparent and accessible ways. Newsletters, websites, social media, and RSS feeds are excellent methods to communicate with the public and help them understand the goals, roles, and value-adds available at your school.

Finally, take advantage of your success stories. In my case, I'd have you sit down with me and talk about Kayla, Usha, John, and other students I've seen succeed at Schoolcraft College. A good education and hard work helped these wonderful young people to improve themselves and their economic status. They were all first-generation college students who didn't consider themselves college material. Not only did they complete an associate's degree, they transferred and earned bachelor's degree, too. Now they are working in their fields, buying homes, paying taxes, and seeing their hard work turn into economic success!

Brendan Greaney serves as the Coordinator of Academic Support Services at Clark State Community College in Springfield, Ohio. In this role, he assists with student placement testing, tutoring, academic skills workshops, new student orientations, and intake advising for students with disabilities. Brendan earned his Master of Education in higher education from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. Brendan is working toward his doctoral degree in the Ferris State University DCCL program.



Laurie Kattuah-Snyder is the Associate Dean of Advising and Partnerships at Schoolcraft College. She oversees departments that support academic advising, student veterans, F-1 international students, transfer partnerships, and early college. In addition to Schoolcraft College, Laurie has been a student advocate at private corporations and at a private university. Laurie earned her MA from the University of Michigan Dearborn and is currently working toward her doctorate in the Ferris State University DCCL program.



NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

The AACC asserts that community colleges are probably better understood and valued today than ever before. However, recent polls suggest that fewer people think that higher education is necessary for economic success, revealing a public disillusionment with higher education. As the case for needed resources is made at the state and national levels, it is critical that the value of community colleges is articulated clearly. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

The Value Added of Community Colleges: Multidimensional Diversity and Hubs of Innovation

Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, PhD

Associate Professor & HERI Director
Higher Education and Organizational Change Division
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Los Angeles, California

Community colleges add value to students, to our society, and to our postsecondary education system because they are the best representation of our diverse society. Every time I sit down and observe a classroom in a community college I see recent high school graduates, single parents, commuting students, returning veterans, racial/ethnic minorities, low and middle-income students, immigrant students, foreign students, academically prepared and unprepared students, part-time students, returning and new students, English learners, students with disabilities, students with various sexual orientations, all coming together to learn and to accomplish their academic and occupational goals. This multidimensional diversity (Deil-Amen, 2014) is, in my opinion, one of the biggest assets of community colleges.

Community colleges add value to students, to our society, and to our postsecondary education system because they are the best representation of our diverse society.

All community college students bring resources that can be utilized to enhance their learning. These varied resources – or funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992) as known in the academic literature – are embedded in who they are and in their everyday experiences at home, in college, in their communities, and in their jobs. We must stop treating this multidimensional diversity and funds of knowledge as resources and not as deficits. Indeed, many students are vulnerable (economically, academically, etc.) but that does not mean that they are incapable of learning. We must embrace this diversity and communicate to students (and to their families and communities) that they have valuable knowledge and they are capable of learning and succeeding academically and in life. We must utilize this diversity to improve the teaching and learning process in community colleges.

Community colleges add value to students, to our postsecondary education system, and to society because they can be hubs of innovation. For the last six years, I have witnessed extraordinary efforts from administrators, leaders, practitioners, and staff to try different approaches to tackle the biggest problems in this sector. For 3 years, we (me and my colleague Regina Deil-Amen) successfully conducted a national study to examine the potential of social media to enhance community college students' persistence and success. We collaborated with 9 community colleges around the country. We interviewed more than 350 students, faculty, leaders, and staff, and we examined thousands of interactions and posts on a social media platform. Our study found that social media can offer a window into students' college experiences, and it can help administrators, faculty, and staff to be more responsive to students' needs.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

How can college leaders best describe and communicate the "value added" of community colleges?

Currently, we are collaborating with more community colleges in Los Angeles, California. Our new study examines the role a text messaging platform can have in helping students navigate their financial aid process more effectively. We, again, are finding that colleges are willing to take risks, to innovate, and students are reaping the benefits. And while technology poses many challenges and is not the panacea, it can also bring possibilities to improve persistence and success rates in a more cost-effective way.

Community colleges add value to students, to our postsecondary education system, and to society because they can be hubs of innovation.

At HERI (Higher Education Research Institute), the Institute that I lead, we are making sure community colleges know that our mission – to inform educational policy and promote institutional improvement through an increased understanding of higher education and its impact on college students – includes all college students and all institution types, not just some. We are collaborating closely with community college administrators to design survey instruments and research tools that will help them make better and more informed decisions regarding how to support students, particularly as they transition to college and during their first year in college. Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, we are also trying different technology solutions to combat low persistence and success rates.

In addition, since we strongly believe that the teaching and learning process is vital to revolutionize community colleges' mission, we are working with faculty to offer professional development opportunities. The goal is to offer faculty a space to talk about what it means to teach in multidimensional diversity contexts and how to utilize students' funds of knowledge in classrooms. We are also disseminating the results of these efforts in various outlets, including academic journals, books, opinion pieces, blogs, etc. And, most importantly, HERI is committed to helping all college students succeed academically, professionally, and in life.

To end, my personal mission is to combat deficit thinking in relation to community colleges and its students. Community colleges are not the cheap and low quality option for marginalized, underrepresented, and unprepared students. Community colleges are multidimensionally diverse institutions that are educating the majority of undergraduate students in the U.S. and because of the richness and benefits they bring to millions of students in this country, they deserve more attention, more resources, and more respect.

Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, PhD, is Associate Professor of Education and Director of the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California Los Angeles. As Director of HERI, she oversees the nation's largest study of new college students, "The American Freshman." She looks forward to expanding the scholarship on community colleges, which have been less recognized in educational research. Dr. Rios-Aguilar has studied all levels of education, from Pre-K through graduate school and transition to the labor market, and she underscores the importance of community colleges for historically marginalized groups of students. She holds a PhD in Educational Theory and Policy and her MS in School Administration, both awarded from the University of Rochester.



QUICK TAKES
Highlights
from the Field

2017 Survey of College and University Presidents

by Inside Higher Ed

Just released, this survey of college and university presidents presents findings of the presidents' perceptions related to the key issues facing higher educational institutions today. Included are questions of whether the presidents believe that Americans have an accurate view of the purposes of higher education and whether leaders are concerned that attention focused on such issues as student debt and racial protests are painting a distorted picture of what is really occurring in higher education.

Access this work here:
<http://bit.ly/2mCAJNp>

2017 and Community Colleges

by the AACC

Given the vast leadership turnover at all levels of the federal government, the AACC recognizes that there are many unknowns for higher education policymaking. This document outlines some of the major national issues facing community colleges and asks if their purpose primarily is one of educating and training the workforce or for broader, non-economic goals. Community college presidents might examine how their efforts at providing economic opportunity, social mobility, and inclusiveness are viewed by the public.

Access this work here:
<http://bit.ly/2ngmmkQ>



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Community College Appraisal (continued from page 1)

courses, and offer “stackable credentials.” Students not yet out of high school have a choice to begin college early with a proliferation of dual enrolled, early college programs, seeded by government funding.

Theodore Levitt, professor and Harvard Business Review editor, championed the notion that buyers buy to get a job done. Some individual students buy because the outcome they seek is a job, with an employer of their choice. While community colleges are positioned or pigeonholed as primarily vocation training providers, they are really at the nexus between applied skill-based training and exploration in the liberal arts.

Community colleges serve the gateway function for students to a liberal arts baccalaureate institution, though it’s not always been a completely smooth process. Even states with state-wide education systems have had to resolve the transferability issue, such as in Ohio, with the Ohio Transfer Module. In Michigan, without a state-wide education system, the Michigan Transfer Agreement addresses some transferability issues. Tim Nelson, President at Northwestern Michigan College, often counsels that to compete, community colleges need to behave as if they were part of a state-wide system.

The community college in my aunt’s Minnesota congressional district has particularly strong chemistry and history departments. However, she notes that “earning an [Associate of Arts] degree has not been an automatic admission ticket to a four-year, in part because the course syllabi were not identical, even when a course had the same title. Students who earned an AA in forestry management could not transfer their credits because the community college course had a different unit in the syllabus. If a student were admitted to a four-year, the course would have to be repeated. Recently, credit transferability became an even hotter topic and course descriptions have become more regularized between the community college and the four-years. As such, the value of the community college in student experience, independent of location near their homes, really escalated.”

While community colleges, especially in the current political climate, continually are striving to articulate their value proposition, it is most critical to do so without using a bunch of higher education jargon. Many of the hallmarks of community colleges are in a language that is not understandable to the buyers. Expressions such as open access, distance learning, stackable credentials, affordability, lifelong learning, workforce training, and transformational experience, need translation into terms of benefit to the buyer. When the statement of value is crystal clear, buyers won’t have to read between the lines or make tenuous linkages to the outcomes they want to achieve.

Individual student buyers not only look for outcomes, they are just as interested in the quality of the journey. Core to the value-add of community colleges are faculty members themselves. Students at Northwestern Michigan College repeatedly said on satisfaction surveys that their “wow” moment – the aspect of their experience that most exceeded their expectations – was their relationships with faculty members. At community colleges, research is not necessarily part of a faculty member’s vitae, even with a doctorate. Faculty members’ primary responsibility is to teach, not to publish or to train researchers, even though relationship-building between students and faculty members can be challenging at community colleges that serve a high proportion of commuter students or employ a high proportion of part time faculty members.

As a student with experience in every higher education sector, my brother is an example of a buyer who uses the community college as the mortar between the other

building blocks of his life events. His take on the differences reflects the outcome he was trying to achieve. “I found my time in community college courses just as valuable as any of my traditional college courses, if not more so, as many of the students seemed more motivated in comparison to my traditional college courses. The main problem was that it was generally harder to get ahold of professors outside of class since everyone is commuting and the times that you’re able to meet with professors is more limited. You’re not likely to get to know your professors as well (though if you go to a large university that uses Teaching Assistants in the lectures there’s no difference) and with most of the professors often being there a couple of years (if that), it can be difficult to use them as references afterward.”

How can community colleges prove they are successful to state and federal government “buyers” when 50% of the students are not coming to the college to complete a degree but rather for a gateway to a baccalaureate institution, or for a reference for the next stage of life? State government funding formulas are designed to buy associate degrees, but community colleges do not have a large inventory of associate-degreed graduates, nor is graduation rate enough to show all that community colleges do.

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However, one area where the values of all buyers converge is in the desire and the need for success. Upon returning from the annual Achieving the Dream conference where 2300 people were focused on improving student success, Jan Lyddon, Achieving the Dream coach and consultant, surmised, “I’m optimistic that community colleges are some of the most innovative institutions in America...They’re strongly invested in understanding their data and using the insights to design and implement comprehensive approaches to address student success.” Community colleges are in a unique position to add value for multiple buyers. In the current climate, they will continue to be asked to express that value in all the ways that their buyers see benefit.



Darby Hiller, PhD, is the Assistant Provost for Academic Affairs and Institutional Research at Wittenberg University. Dr. Hiller holds a PhD from the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee and a Master’s degree from Troy State University – European Region in International Relations, which she earned in Germany while stationed with the US Air Force. After earning her doctorate, her penchant for quantitative research methods landed her in a new Institutional Research office at Northwestern Michigan College, Traverse City, Michigan in 2002. She served NMC as Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness, directing college planning, assessment, and accreditation processes and in 2015, she was appointed Assistant Provost for Academic Affairs and Institutional Research at Wittenberg University (OH). Dr. Hiller is a current faculty member for the DCCL program at Ferris State University and has taught Quantitative Research Methods and Strategic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness. She has also taught research methods courses for Western Michigan University, and international politics and applied social research methods courses for Ferris State University.