

## EVOLUTION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES, ROLES AND SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE AMERICAN SOCIETY

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### Abstract:

**Purpose:** This paper summarized the evolution of community colleges, roles and significant contributions to today's public colleges and universities and society as a whole. The formation of the community college as a junior college is an American invention which stems from 19th century social forces associated with industrialization and an increased emphasis on education. In the late 1800s as America was becoming more industrialized, there was a greater need for trained workers. Many business and community leaders considered the public schools to be the perfect place for the first 2 years of postsecondary education; or more particularly, semiprofessional and vocational training.

In light of the high attrition rates found at community colleges, some criticisms are valid to some extent but the importance and roles of community colleges cannot be overemphasized. It develops graduate with knowledge, technical knowhow, skills and disposition for professional carrier and provide opportunity for further studies.

**Findings:** Although many junior colleges were established apart from the existing public high schools, many were publicly supported and charged low or no tuition. As the community college adapts to meet core mission goals of market responsiveness and upward mobility, its attachment to local areas are important to the community. Retention rate are higher and reduced time to complete a degree in Allied Health, Business, Education and Technology. Played an important role in providing a means for upward social mobility among lower socio-economic groups by offering an affordable and accessible path to a four-year baccalaureate degree.

**Recommendation:** Continue to create a balance of student enrollment and retention that reflect the college's core mission by expanding students' technical knowhow beyond traditional class setting.

### KEYWORDS:

society , community , overemphasized , Allied Health.

### INTRODUCTION

An historical document that has significantly impacted American higher education was the 1862 passage of the Morrill Act. With its emphasis on agriculture and the mechanical arts, the Morrill Act of 1862, known as the Land Grant Act, expanded access to public higher education, teaching students previously had been excluded from higher education. The act was revised in 1890 and was known as the second Morrill Act. This act withheld funds from any state that refused admission to the land grant colleges based on race unless the states provided separate institutions for minorities. It expanded public higher education to include many blacks who previously were unable to attend college. This act has played a significant role in how higher education evolved and produced significant historical events in the

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development of the public community college which provided opportunities for both traditional and non-traditional students in the United States (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010).

#### PURPOSE AND IMPACT OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The junior college, which is now known as the community college, is considered a complex, exclusively American invention. The origins, evolution, and function of the community college in American higher education are as diverse as the states and communities in which they are located and the student populations that they serve. The confusion surrounding the purpose and social role of the community college is in fact directly related to its ambiguous beginnings (Diener, 1986). The purpose of this research is to examine the evolution of two-year colleges and their roles and significant contributions to American society. The suggestions of the University of Chicago's President Harper regarding two-year colleges will be used as a conceptual framework for this research. To fully understand today's two-year colleges, it is important to look back at the development and evolution of the community college system in the United States from the time of its conception. The emergence of the research university is linked to the influence of the German model of higher education. The German model with its emphasis on faculty specialization, scientific research, and scholarship had an appeal to many academics in America. The presidents of some of America's universities were influenced by and began advancing the ideologies associated with German universities (Cohen, 2010). In this light, Americans were highly impressed with the German model of higher education. Henry Tappan, the first president of the University of Michigan, during his inaugural speech in 1852, put forth the idea of separating the first 2 years of college. With his idea, he relegated the junior colleges to the high schools. Separating the first 2 years of college, therefore freed the university to allow faculty members properly and adequately prepared students to pursue the scholarly activities associated with higher levels of college work (Eells, 1931). As a result, some researchers have maintained the efforts of university administrators like Tappan and later, between 1869 and 1892, Foiwell, president of the University of Minnesota, E. James, president of the University of Illinois, and William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, created the momentum for the commencement of junior colleges. In 1892 following the reorganization of the University of Chicago, Harper separated the freshman and sophomore level work into what was called the "Academic College" and the junior- and senior-level work into the "University College." These designations did not persist, but in 1896 the designations "junior college" and "senior college" were assumed and did persist (Eells, 1931). William Harper was the first to use the term "junior college" referring to community college (Eells, 1931).

The community colleges have evolved significantly from the first "junior college" founded at Joliet, Illinois, in 1901 (Quigley and Bailey, 2003 and American Association of Community Colleges, 2010). Two-year institutions have historically been known as junior colleges and have their roots in California. Two-year institutions have historically been known as junior colleges because they were generally lower divisions of private universities. Junior colleges offered general education programs and university transfer programs. Over many years, the name "junior college" has evolved to become "community college" (Duran, 2010 and Jager, 2007). As Cohen and Brawer (2010) narrated in 1907, the California Legislature also saw an advantage to society in providing an education after high school but realized the work could not be carried out by existing colleges. California approved the state's high schools to offer what were known as "postgraduate courses of study" similar to the courses offered in just the first two years of university studies. With the help of Professor Alexis F. Lange, Dean of the University of California, Berkeley, the Junior College Act was passed in 1917. This act fostered expansion of the mission by adding trade studies such as mechanical and industrial arts, household economy, agriculture, and commerce in California. Today, the California Community College System is still the largest system in the United States and as a result often serves as a model for other state-wide systems (Jager, 2007). According to Cohen and Brawer, junior colleges were conceived as a way of providing access to postsecondary education for the masses while alleviating some of this pressure from the four-year schools that were already feeling weighed down with the responsibility of providing the required general education courses of the freshman and sophomore curriculum (Cohen and Brawer, 2010).

Cohen and Brawer added that "publicly supported universities were given impetus by the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, which had been established in every state" (Cohen and Brawer, p. 4). Cohen (2010) narrated the university transformation era saw the greatest shifts in higher education that had ever occurred. The era experienced the largest growth in enrollment. According to Cohen "between 1870 and 1944 the number of colleges quintupled, and enrollments increased by several thousand percent" (p. 103). The growth happened because of population growth, but the main momentum was that both higher education and the secondary schools expanded their programs and attracted students who in earlier times would not have considered education beyond high school. However, not all the colleges shared the growth in size,

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prestige, programs and services. Several colleges remained too small to expand. Chicago's President Harper suggested that the weaker institutions drop the upper division and become junior colleges that prepared students for entry into the universities. By 1940, 15% institutions with 150 or fewer students in 1900 had become junior colleges. Additional forty percent had closed their doors or merged with other institutions. However, small liberal arts colleges survived and still remained part of the American educational scene (Cohen, 2010).

The community college, however, evolved from the junior college as result of President Harper's vision. In 1900, Harper envisioned the junior college a preparation for the last two years of university study. His idea was to expand the public high schools to include the numerous poor and faltering independent, small, liberal arts and denominational colleges in the Midwest. Harper was moved by the high schools of his day for their success in training students to take their place in an increasingly mechanized industrial work force and technological agrarian society. He therefore recommended that the high schools operate for six years, bringing a student up to the junior year in college. Harper thought the teachers in public high schools were better instructors than many of those in the small colleges. With the expansion of post-secondary education after World War II, there was general agreement that the community college ranks among the lower forms of higher education. He felt that the university should be preserved for the highest intellectual activities and that the first two years should be preparatory. The teaching of those basic preparatory courses was best left to this separate institution (Cohen, 2010).

The Truman Commission report, issued in 1947, changed the course of higher education in the United States from "merely being an instrument for producing an intellectual elite" to becoming "the means by which every citizen, youth, and adult, is enabled and encouraged" to pursue higher learning (President's Commission, 1947). World War II and the years immediately following the war brought significant changes to many facets of the nation's cultural identity, including educational patterns among Americans. President Truman's Commission on Higher Education, established in 1947, was instrumental in this process in that it called for the need for additional free, public two-year colleges to handle the expected enrollment surge in the coming decade. Prior to the war, less than ten percent of high school graduates pursued postsecondary education, but the Commission recognized the need for a more educated citizenry to meet the needs of the post-war economy (President's Commission, 1947).

Harper also envisioned a federation of small colleges, academies, and junior colleges that would be associated closely with one another and with the universities. His federation would comprise an American system of education similar to the European Lycee or Gymnasium. His idea was to keep the university as free as possible for original scholarship by temporarily confining to subordinate institutions those who needed instruction in the more rudimentary areas of higher education. He felt that the university should be preserved for the highest intellectual activities and that the first two years should be preparatory. The teaching of those basic preparatory courses was best left to this separate institution. The original inspiration for the community college, therefore, came from the desire to create a strong propaedeutic closely coordinated with the universities (Cohen, 2010). There was also debate within the junior college movement over where the junior college fell within the educational hierarchy. After much debate Walter Crosby Eells, who advocated for a 6-3-3-2 plan that placed the junior college outside of the high school structure won and presently influence years spent at the community colleges. Community colleges have remained a viable and flourishing institution (Kempner, 1990).

#### **The Current Effect of Community Colleges**

The number of traditional and non-traditional students attending college in the United States surpasses those students who attend colleges in other countries. Half of these students attend community colleges. The accessibility of community colleges is a triumph of the pluralism of American higher education that ought to be acknowledged (Salzman, 2002). In 2010, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) reported that forty five percent of all United States undergraduates attend community colleges, which are often regarded as institutions of opportunity for non-traditional students. According the latest report by AACC the headcount included 11.8 million students enrolled in Fall 2007; 6.8 million credit hours; 5 million noncredit. Among the 11.8 million students enrolled in Fall 2007, forty percent were enrolled fulltime while sixty percent were part time students. The significance of this sector of higher education grew enormously as its predominantly public character evolved from a much wider variety of origins. The defining conceptual frameworks of community colleges include: low tuition costs, open access, broad services, and convenient locations (Phillippe, 2000). These factors are pertinent to community college students and are the basis why community colleges are thriving. Community colleges often provide more pathways for those who desire an education (Quigley and Bailey, 2003). The importance and roles of community colleges cannot be overemphasized. Jaeger (2007) believes that

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focusing on decisions of first-year students at community colleges is critical given that almost half of all United States undergraduates attend community colleges and these students are often the most diverse and marginalized. Many business and community leaders considered the public schools to be the perfect place for the first 2 years of postsecondary education; or more particularly, semiprofessional and vocational training.

Table 1 presents information regarding the representation of community college students among undergraduates in the fall 2012. In summary, the ethnic section showed all U.S. undergraduates were 45% while first-time freshmen were 45%. Overall the Hispanics had greater percentage of 56% and black 49%. Asian/pacific islander were 44% while Native American were 42%.

**Table 1**

| Representation of Community College Students Among Undergraduates In the Fall 2012 |             |
|--|-------------|
| Students who were Undergraduate Segment  | Percentages |
| All U.S. Undergraduates  | 45%         |
| First-time Freshmen  | 45%         |
| Hispanic   | 56%         |
| Black  | 49%         |
| Asian/Pacific Islander   | 44%         |
| Native American  | 42%         |

Sources: 2013 Community College Fact Sheet.

Table 2 represents other significant demographics. The data indicated there were a disproportionate number of First Generation to Attend College which had 40% over Single Parents 16%. Non-U.S. Citizens had 7% while Students with Disabilities 12% and Veterans were only 3%.

**Table 2**

| Other significant demographics     |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| First Generation to Attend College | 40% |
| Single Parents                     | 16% |
| Non-U.S. Citizens                  | 7%  |
| Veterans                           | 3%  |
| Students with Disabilities         | 12% |

Sources: 2013 Community College Fact Sheet.

In table 3, there were 1132 community colleges in 2012. Among the community colleges more than 87% (986) of the community colleges were public while both Independent and tribal account for 3% (115).

**Table 3**

| Number and Type of Colleges |       |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Public                      | 986   |
| Independent                 | 115   |
| Tribal                      | 31    |
| Total                       | 1,132 |

Sources: 2013 Community College Fact Sheet.

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Table 4 represent the total number of Degrees and Certificates Awarded in 2010 to 2011). Out of the 1,163,960 (734,154) were Associate degrees, 36.91% (429,676) were Certificates. Only 0.0041% (48) were Bachelor's degrees issued by public while 0.007% (82) awarded by independent colleges.

**Table 4**

| Degrees and Certificates Awarded (2010–2011) |         |
|--|---------|
| Associate degrees—734,154                    | 734,154 |
| certificates—429,676                         | 429,676 |
| Bachelor's degrees— by public                | 48      |
| Bachelor's degrees—awarded by independent    | 82      |

Sources: 2013 Community College Fact Sheet.

The data summarized institutional and characteristics of community college. Data were arranged according to students who were Undergraduate Segment. First-time Freshmen, Hispanic, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American. Retention rate are higher among minority and helps to reduce time to complete a degree. Other were First Generation to Attend College, Single Parents, Non-U.S. Citizens, Veterans, and Students with Disabilities. The degrees and certificate offered by Public, Independent and Tribal colleges were identified. The data related to the institutional environment within which the stated purpose of this paper works. Community colleges adapts to meet core mission goals of market responsiveness and upward mobility. Played an important role in providing a means for upward social mobility among lower socio-economic groups by offering an affordable and accessible path to a four-year baccalaureate degree.

David Levinson, author of *The Community College*, is one of the critics regarding the community college. He contended that many students who otherwise would attend a four-year school to obtain a baccalaureate degree are enticed to the community colleges by their affordability and are thus sidetracked in their pursuit of obtaining a four-year degree (Levinson, 2007). In light of the high attrition rates found at community colleges, these criticisms are valid to some extent but the importance and roles of community colleges cannot be overemphasized.

The American community college has played an important role in providing a means for upward social mobility among lower socio-economic groups by offering an affordable and accessible path to a four-year baccalaureate degree. Over the years, it has evolved from its original conception as a “junior” college to the community college of today, which employs a multipurpose model and serves a diverse student population with varied expectations (Carnevale, 2009).

Carnevale and his colleagues aptly sum up the state of the modern community college system: As the community college adapts to meet core mission goals of market responsiveness and upward mobility, its attachment to localism and open admissions comes into conflict. The simultaneous growth of the noncredit shadow curriculum, the postsecondary system, and the bachelor's degree is dawning as “the age of and” in community colleges. Today, community colleges still hold the collegiate function central to their mission. They enroll traditional students seeking the first years of a baccalaureate degree, transfer students such as nursing students seeking knowledge in the basic life sciences, reverse transfer students (who begin at a university and later choose to continue at a community college), and part-time casual students who are enrolled for personal rather than degree-completion reasons. Collegiate courses may involve core courses or distribution requirements in general education, articulated technical programs in the sciences and mathematics, dual-credit programs in high schools where talented juniors and seniors can earn college credits, and alternative delivery programs such as evening and weekend courses, televised courses, and courses delivered over the Internet (Carnevale, Strohl and Smith, 2009).

Current community colleges target the most diverse student body in history. It is diversity in every respect: age, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, and degree of disability. Community colleges are made up of the following distribution: forty-seven percent comprise first-generation college students, fifty three percent Hispanic students, forty five percent Black students, fifty two percent Native American students, and forty five percent Asian/Pacific Islander students. Although the average age of community college students is 28, forty six percent of them are age 21 or younger (NCES, 2007).

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### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

The American community college has in the past played an important role in providing a means for upward social mobility among lower socio-economic groups by offering an affordable and accessible path to a four year baccalaureate degree. Carnevale and his colleagues aptly sum up the state of the modern community college system as

“American community colleges are much like the nation that invented them. They offer an open door to opportunity to all who would come, are innovative and agile in meeting economic and workplace needs, and provide value and service to individuals and communities. Little wonder that they are increasingly emulated around the world and have become the largest and fastest-growing segment of U.S. higher education” (Carnevale, et al. 2010, p. 1).

As the community college adapts to meet core mission goals of market responsiveness and upward mobility, its attachment to local areas and open admissions comes into conflict. The simultaneous growth of the noncredit shadow curriculum, the postsecondary system, and the bachelor's degree is dawning as “the age of and” in community colleges: they must strive to be loyal to democratic and meritocratic values, to be both global and locally responsive, to be internally coherent and externally responsive (AACC, 2010).

Connecting with students at an early age through dual-enrollment programs or other community outreach programs is an effective method of introducing the college system to students who otherwise may not consider higher education to be within their reach. Community colleges should continue to aggressively promote these types of programs within the high schools, particularly in school districts that enroll a higher percentage of underprivileged students. However, the onus cannot be placed only on the community college.

Currently, with the country experiencing an economic downturn, the community college is undergoing a modern renaissance, with enrollments surging and more students including those who likely would not have considered the school only a few years earlier looking to the community college as a practical means of gaining access to higher education. The resurgence in the popularity of the schools is an exciting time for community colleges. Sufficient funding however will likely remain a perpetual concern for the schools, both in terms of available financial aid for students and institutional budgetary needs (AACC, 2010).

### IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE ROLE

It is suggested that by studying the history of the school's development and evolution, policymakers and administrators have the opportunity to learn from past experience the strategies that may be best applied to meet the needs of tomorrow's community college students. Such an historical perspective is needed to understand the underlying purpose and mission of community colleges and the role they have played in providing an alternate pathway to the middle class so that all constituents are best served. The implications for a future role looks great for community colleges as both businessmen and politicians are supporting community college missions. Recently, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced a major postsecondary success initiative. The foundation is focused on ensuring that postsecondary education results in a degree or a certificate with genuine economic value. The foundation has set an ambitious goal to double the number of young people who earn a postsecondary degree or certificate with value in the marketplace by the time they reach age 26 (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2009).

President Obama has been playing a great significantly role in promoting the community college. In April 2010, six national community college organizations representing trustees, administrators, faculty, and students signed a call to action to commit member institutions to match President Obama's 2020 goal (AACC, 2010). The organizations are currently seeking funding to develop cohesive and integrated strategies to move ahead, although challenges presented by the current economic climate could very well inhibit early progress. In the face of a surge of enrollment pressure, states have cut funding to public higher education, including community colleges. Due to the success of American community colleges there has been an increasing international interest in the American community college model. Junior and community colleges have been a part of U.S. higher education since the university transformation era but community colleges have traditionally had a low profile and have received little attention in national media. Nowadays, community colleges are receiving significant attention, not only in the United States but also internationally. In other countries, they are seen as vehicles to improve skills and to expand educational opportunities for under privileges (Jill, 2009).

The President Obama Administration is counting on community colleges to educate more students more cheaply. Expert maintained that their rapidly rising enrollments will bring stronger students

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to academic programs and greater possibilities for vocational ones, including new three or four-year programs (Geiger, 2010). However, the challenge for community colleges will be to improve their poor record for transfer to baccalaureate degree programs and to develop healthy sub-baccalaureate credentials. Resources and execution could be limiting factors in accomplishing these tasks, but successful or not, the community college sector seems destined to accommodate a larger share of postsecondary enrollments Allied Health, Business, Education and Technology (Geiger, 2010).

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