



## The Future of Higher Education: A Conversation with Charlene Nunley

by Judith Sunderman

In 2005 [Dr. Charlene Nunley](#) was appointed to the [Commission on the Future of Higher Education](#), better known as the Spellings Commission. In this issue of *Update*, Dr. Nunley offers candid insights on the activities of the Commission and the final Spellings report, [A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education](#). The interview centers on four themes of the report: accessibility, accountability, affordability, and quality. Dr. Nunley retired at the end of January 2007 as President of [Montgomery College](#) in Rockville, Maryland where she had worked for 28 years. She intends to continue working as an advocate for community colleges.

**UPDATE:** You were one of only eighteen individuals appointed by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings to the Commission. What was your role as a member of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education?

**Dr. Nunley:** I was one of the only two sitting college presidents that served on the Spellings Commission, although there were several retired college presidents. I was the only community college person on the Commission. It is important to remember that we were all equal members bringing our perspectives together and trying to shape an agenda. In my role on the Commission, I felt it was extremely important to ensure that the interests of community colleges and community college students were represented. In addition, I wanted to make sure that the issue of increasing access to higher education for underserved populations was adequately addressed. Those two goals were in my mind as the Commission went forward.

**UPDATE:** What is your sense of the administration's perspective on the role of community college education in the U.S.?

**Dr. Nunley:** The Administration is supportive of community colleges. I think the members of the Commission are supportive of community colleges. Most people I talk to are positive about community colleges, even though they tend to forget we are in the higher education system. I am not saying that to be harsh, but the Commission had a tendency to focus on elite, selective, research universities. Those institutions are very important to higher education in America, but 46% of the students in my state begin their higher education in community colleges. Across the country around half of all students begin their higher education

**Editor's Note:** This issue of *UPDATE* focuses on the final report from the Spellings Commission. This initiative by the Secretary of Education was the Administration's first serious look at U.S. higher education. The final report of the Commission titled, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, addressed four major issues for undergraduate education: Accessibility, Accountability, Affordability, and Quality. This issue of *UPDATE* covers those themes and includes a compelling interview with Dr. Charlene Nunley, the only community college representative on the Commission.

This issue and back issues of *UPDATE* can be found on the web at: <http://occrled.uiuc.edu>.

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in community colleges. Still, community colleges seem to be a best kept secret. When we remind people about the community college role in higher education, the response is, “Oh yes, yes. We love the community colleges. You are doing a great job.” The business people on the Commission would say that over and over again. Then a conversation would follow about the amount of time faculty spend teaching versus the amount of time they spend doing research or something similar. I would have to remind them again that those rules don’t apply in community colleges. I think that the state director for community colleges in my own State of Maryland said it best, “When it comes to community colleges, they love us but will they give us the ring?” I really do think the public has good positive feelings about community colleges, but we tend to be the forgotten element in conversations about higher education.

**UPDATE:** Earlier, you mentioned that accessibility is a key issue for higher education. You have been a staunch advocate for the open access mission of community colleges, and you served on the Spellings Commission subcommittee for access. In an April 29, 2004 article in the *Wall Street Journal* you observed that community colleges in Maryland are “on the brink of a capacity crisis.” The AACCC echoed this concern recently observing that the *Spellings Report* “does not adequately address the role that state and local funding ... play in the health of community colleges.” Other higher education leaders have expressed similar views about the financial strain inherent in serving more students. For example, Douglas Bennett, President of Earlham College, expressed concern in a Sept. 1, 2007, article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* where he questioned the ability of colleges and universities to meet the needs of more students without government commitment for supplementary funding. What is your response to this concern? What do you consider the most significant hurdle relating to increasing access to community colleges?

**Dr. Nunley:** That is my only serious concern with the *Spellings Report*—the fact that it did not more strongly ask the States to raise public support for higher education to a higher priority in their funding decisions. There is some language in the report recommending states restore their historic commitment to higher education. That language wasn’t in the final draft until a few people like me, former Governor Jim Hunt from North Carolina, and some people at AACCC proposed language to acknowledge the importance of public support for higher education. I would have liked for that language to be stronger. This is particularly crucial for community colleges.

I spoke at an emerging issues forum at North Carolina State University [recently]. Some of the speakers at that forum supported the concept of raising tuition levels and letting people who can afford to attend college pay the higher price while subsidizing students with the most need. I am not enamored of that concept although I understand why universities may feel it is appropriate. If American universities prefer that approach, then I think community colleges need to reinvest in the access mission. The reason why community colleges need to focus on

affordability is that so many of the students who begin in community colleges are first generation college students. These students don’t understand the difference between sticker price and discounted price. They don’t understand how to navigate the complexities of the financial aid system. Tuition is the decisive factor in whether they will attend.

Demographically, the fastest growing segments of the population are those with historically lower college going rates. These groups tend to begin their education in community colleges. This is why I believe the capacity to serve our students is going to become more challenging. These groups need to be served by higher education. The [Educational Testing Service \(ETS\)](#) just released a new publication called *The Perfect Storm*. This publication addresses converging forces that will shape the future of America. The population that will replace retiring baby boomers will be largely from groups that have had historically lower college going rates. In order to avoid an economic crisis, we need to educate a broader base of people. America’s community colleges have to be front and center in that challenge. That’s why I say access is the number one issue for the future of higher education in America. If you look at that report from ETS I think it will lead you to the same conclusion.

**UPDATE:** What advice does the Spellings Commission report offer to community colleges about keeping open access a top priority?

**Dr. Nunley:** The importance of need based financial aid has to be carried to our state legislatures, our local governments, and our communities. As the Spellings Commission looked at data it became very apparent that the financial aid system in America is serving the rich better than it is serving the poor and the middle class.

We need to carry the message that distance education will help relieve the strain on facilities at community colleges, but it is not the whole answer. The students that we will serve in the future have less family preparation for higher education, more family challenges, and more economic challenges. Those students need classroom environments. They need programs that address their challenges. We need capital investment in community colleges just to keep the doors open. We need classrooms, laboratories, and support centers. We need counselors, advisors, and mentors. The truth of the matter is that the rate of progression through higher education is not good enough. We’ve got to improve it. We’ve got to make our case strongly.

Finally, I would say that we need to convince individuals and businesses to support us. Community colleges are relatively new into the fund raising game. Montgomery College has been doing it rather well for the past seven or eight years. We have a very compelling case to make to donors about the impact they can make in lives with relatively small levels of investment. So, we need to carry our message forward and let others know how important community colleges are to the future of America.

**UPDATE:** What ideas stand out in your mind about the Spellings Commission perspective on accountability and community college education?

**Dr. Nunley:** Some of the Commission had intense feelings that higher education is not accountable enough. Those feelings were much stronger than I expected. The fact that tuition is going up rapidly drives the desire for more transparency in higher education. Families, businesses, and others are seriously questioning the return on investment in higher education. I am in a state where we have a Unit Records Tracking System for students from 2- year and 4-year public colleges. I am surprised by how reticent some in the higher education community are about trying to track our students. I'm involved with [Achieving the Dream](#) which is funded by the Lumina Foundation and others. This initiative is tackling ways to pull more students through the system. The participating colleges are using a tracking system to get a better sense of student progress. I am so encouraged and proud of the community colleges involved in the *Achieving the Dream* initiative because they are not running and hiding from the data. The information doesn't paint a pretty picture. These institutions are facing the difficult issues, putting data together, proposing solutions, and evaluating their effectiveness. This is what accountability means to me. It means using a much more evidence-based approach to determine our successes.

I would rather not see this driven from outside of education. I would much rather see it driven by the institutions. I would rather see it driven by processes like accreditation. I really do believe that good databases are important. In my home state we have a tracking system, but it only tracks full time students in public colleges and universities in Maryland. My college, Montgomery College, only gets credit in our performance accountability report for the students who have been full time and transfer to public colleges or universities in-state. At Montgomery College, we gathered data using the Federal Student Loan Clearinghouse and discovered that we transfer students to 46 states and to a number of private colleges in Maryland. When those data are counted our success rates for transfer go up by about one-third.

As a college president, that information is helpful. But, it doesn't allow me to determine how student performance at my institution affects performance at a transfer institution. I can't determine how income level might relate to college progress. These are things we need to know to be better at doing our jobs in higher education. I felt good about the recommendations on accountability in the *Spellings Report*. I am very pleased that the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, and the American Association of Community Colleges are all undertaking efforts to define what should be measured, and what information would enhance the effectiveness of each kind of institution. If institutions take a serious look at these measures, governmental agencies will be less tempted to do it for us. Some leaders in higher education have made very

appropriate responses to this issue. I am really hopeful that we can come together on this issue of accountability.

**UPDATE:** There seems to be some concern about the unit record system. Can you explain why you think that is?

**Dr. Nunley:** Yes. I think the concerns are worthy. Privacy is a concern. There is absolutely no way the unit record system should go forward if we can't have absolute assurance of privacy. I have heard [NCES](#) talk about ways to address that issue. Some are concerned that the database could be used inappropriately. Again, I think we must have protections to prevent that from occurring. In Maryland the data have only been used for the intended purpose. Other states have unit record systems. Florida has one of the best and most elaborate. In the public colleges and universities I know there hasn't been any indication that people would use the data inappropriately. On the other hand, my colleagues in private higher education have a different view. Private to them does mean private! They have reservations about the unit record system. I understand their concerns. I think those concerns deserve very thoughtful consideration. But, I think if we work together we can find ways to address all the concerns. We need to do this in the interest of producing better results for students and colleges.

**UPDATE:** Issues of affordability always seem to come back to student aid, college tuition, and the cost of higher education. What response would you give to community college leaders who are looking for guidance on these issues from the final report of the Commission?

**Dr. Nunley:** First of all, I think the most important recommendation in the *Spellings Report* is that Pell Grant funding be restored to levels that support 70% of the average 4-year public college tuition in America. At one time 70% was the standard. Now, it is closer to 40%. My advice to community college leaders is to support the legislation in Congress raising the maximum Pell Grant award. Support the President's budget that calls for increasing Pell Grant maximums. We also need to be very careful that added dollars to Pell Grants don't come at the expense of other important financial aid programs. We need to advocate for financial aid systems that support the students in college today. Financial aid needs to address issues of part time students. Community college transfer students need special consideration because they are disadvantaged in the aid race at their transfer institution. Universities tend to use their financial aid dollars to attract students consistent with a target profile. By the time transfer students arrive little money remains to support their transition. Unfortunately, these students tend to be the least financially able.

I think we also need to be very responsible about doing all we can do to manage our expenses in a way that will keep tuition as affordable as possible. Education can't always be about more money. It also has to be about responsibility and fiscal accountability. To this comment, however, I do want to add that in conversations with people on the Commission there is a sense

that community colleges really try hard to make the most of their resources. Our faculty are in the classroom a lot. Our facilities are used all day, all evening, often times on weekends. We are adding classes earlier in the morning and later at night. I didn't get the feeling that there is any fundamental concern about community college efficiency. We need to stay focused and keep letting people know we are doing everything we can to be careful in the use of public resources. People need to know that in community colleges they get a lot of bang for the buck.

**UPDATE:** What are some of the most critical ideas that the Spellings Commission offers surrounding quality and the community college?

**Dr. Nunley:** As a community college president I have learned to defend what we do. When people say too few students have graduated or only this many students are completing a particular program, I can explain why. There are many reasons for the pattern of student progression in community colleges. Our students work. They face family challenges. They leave the system; they come back. But all the reasons can't explain all the loss. What's more, I am convinced that we can find some interventions that will help more students progress and complete. One of the clear messages from the [Community College Survey of Student Engagement](#) is the importance of relationships in determining student persistence higher education. Students need to feel connected to a faculty member. They need to feel somebody cares about them. They need someone to call them on the telephone if they miss class, and someone to offer support when things get tough. I think there is more we can do to improve progress to degree. I also think we need to help people understand that degree achievement is not the sole and perhaps not even the most important quality measurement for community colleges. Many of our students come for workforce development. Many don't intend to get a degree; they come for skill enhancement. Quality for community colleges can also be measured by the response to labor force needs. It can be measured by how quickly we act when a local industry goes under and people are out of work. Quality is about providing English language education to immigrants who need fundamental language skills to get even the most basic kind of employment. That is why I am so excited that AACC is trying to define what quality means for community colleges. Narrowing the focus to degree achievement will not even come close to telling the community college story.

**UPDATE:** You have demonstrated an interest in issues of quality and student preparedness for college and have spearheaded public school partnerships during your tenure. What do you see as the biggest hurdle in the establishment of a "seamless pathway" through a PK-16 system as recommended by the *Spellings Report*?

**Dr. Nunley:** The broad-based statement on access in the *Spellings Report* identifies college readiness as a key factor in access. Access without preparation is an empty promise. The State

of Maryland started releasing data on the rates of remediation in community colleges by county. Montgomery County has a premier school system, but people were really upset about the data that was picked up by the media and publicized. They got very angry at the college. So the local school board and the Montgomery College board got together. We had some heated conversations, but at the end of the conversation we agreed that this is really about the students. If we focus on the students, we can find ways to work together and make things better. The *Spellings Report* calls for college readiness to be assessed in grade 11. I think that is a good idea. In Montgomery County we administer the 10<sup>th</sup> grade PSAT to every student. It is a relatively good diagnostic tool. Montgomery College cooperates by helping identify students who need to be in more challenging courses based on their PSAT scores. Some students move into honors and AP courses. We also intervene with students who are falling behind in college preparation. More partnerships like this are needed.

The other really important dynamic involves bringing faculty together. For example, the mathematics faculty at the university, the community college, and the public schools need to have conversations about expectations for basic college mathematics preparation. We have had some of those conversations in Montgomery County. When we brought the faculty together, it was amazing to find that the public schools didn't quite understand what the colleges expected in terms of student preparation. The colleges didn't quite understand what the public schools were teaching. Faculty to faculty conversations have the power to align course content. As a result the students are able to progress more readily. We need to do a better job coordinating the school systems. In the future 80 or 90% of jobs will require at least some college preparation. It is hard to get 90% of the young people coming out of high school ready for college. We are laying a big challenge on our public schools. Our colleges and universities have experts that can help. We just need to step up and do it.

**UPDATE:** Commenting on the future of higher education post-Spellings (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 1, 2007), commission member and former governor of North Carolina, James B. Hunt Jr. noted that the final report from the Spellings Commission is "one of the most important reports in the educational and economic history of our country, if we act on it." What do you feel is the next step in implementing the recommendations of the report?

**Dr. Nunley:** There is an on-going an effort to move forward. For example, Secretary Spellings convened accreditation organizations and asked them to take an active look at accountability and assessment of learning outcomes. There is a lot of apprehension about that, but Secretary Spellings has people listening. She asked Sarah Martinez Tucker who headed the Hispanic Scholarship Fund to be Undersecretary. Sarah's assignment is to see that the recommendations from the *Spellings Report* are implemented. Secretary Spellings has convened a



summit in Washington to identify top priorities for going forward. In preparation for the summit, she organized five working groups and asked them each to name four or five possible priorities. I am chairing the group on adult and nontraditional students. Another group will address accountability and transparency. Another will deal with affordability and so on.

The fact that there is legislation in Congress to improve funding for the Pell Grant is certainly related to recommendations from the *Spellings Report*. The process of applying for federal financial aid is so complex. The FAFSA form is more complicated than the income tax form. The plan is to simplify the FAFSA process and get the word out earlier about eligibility. Students and their parents need to know the amount of financial aid and be confident with the level of support. Things that can move forward without legislation or regulatory change are already carrying forward. I am encouraged by what I see and look forward to the summit and subsequent initiatives.

**UPDATE:** As you think about the next five years, what should be highest on the agenda of community college leaders?

**Dr. Nunley:** Protecting the open access mission is the most important thing we can do. We need to continue to widen the base of people in community colleges. American community colleges transformed the concept of who goes to college. We've got to do that again. We need to reach out to underrepresented groups. We've got to do more to help students complete. I am talking about doing everything we can to help students stay in college until they achieve their educational goal. We need to create connections that facilitate degree or program completion. The future of the economy is absolutely dependent on it. I don't think I am overstating either the issues or the challenges. I see community colleges continuing with the same fundamental mission, but I see it expanding. The job of community colleges is to change the lives of people for the better. Our job is to offer opportunity where it wouldn't otherwise exist. ♦

**Editor's Note:** Additional information about the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, members of the Commission, or the report, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, may be obtained through the [U.S. Department of Education](#).

### [Who's Who at the Spellings Summit](#)

Readers who would like to know more may be interested in Doug Lederman's (2007) report "Who's Who at the Spellings Summit" in the 20 March 2007 edition of the free online "Inside Higher Ed."

# Right of Entry, College Access, and Controversy: Implications of the Spellings Report

by Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher

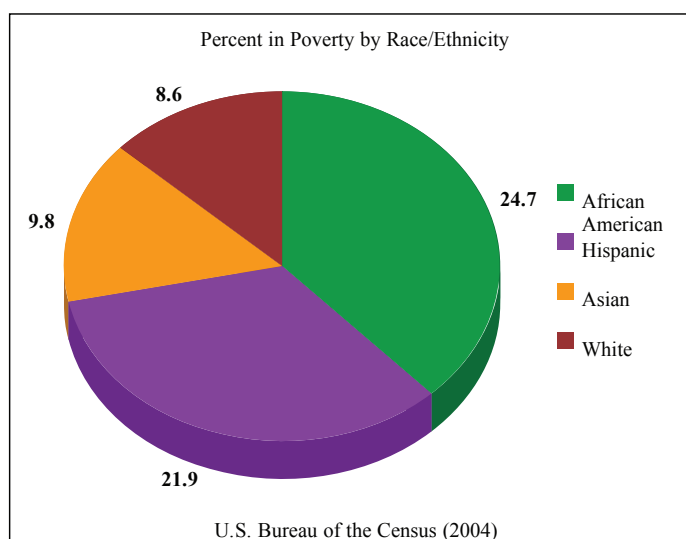
In September 2006, the Department of Education released a commissioned report entitled *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education* also commonly referred to as the *Spellings Report*. U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings appointed 18 professionals across public and private sectors (i.e., former university presidents, elected officials, Fortune 500 executives, etc.) to synthesize the major challenges facing institutions of higher learning as well as set forth recommendations for revitalizing higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The findings cited in the *Spellings Report* illustrate four emerging themes: (1) Issues of Access, (2) Costs and Affordability, (3) The Quality of Learning Outcomes, and (4) Accountability Measures. While each area is key to American higher education, the central aim of this article is to comment on and further problematize the Commission's suggestions regarding college access.

## Is College for Everyone?

Given the divergent institutions that comprise the higher education community, it is arguable whether there could be agreement regarding the optimal capacity of colleges, which programs should be delivered, and who should be served. In the early history of American higher education, college was for the elite, not the masses. Less than one-fifth of high school graduates entered college prior to World War II (National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good, 2004). With the passage of the GI Bill of Rights, enrollment in higher education began to expand. However, the increased college-going rates were primarily among White males (Gumport, Iannozzi, Shaman, & Zemsky, 1997). Fast forward to the millennium and changing demographics coupled with a knowledge economy make it imperative that barriers to postsecondary access be remedied for the U.S. to be globally competitive. For instance, the Spellings Commission asserts that "too few Americans prepare for, participate in, and complete higher education – especially those underserved and nontraditional groups who make up an ever-greater proportion of the population" (U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, 2006, p.8). Given the Commission's concern with the demography of U.S. citizens in relationship to the country's educational future, it is important to consider how the representation among the population has shifted.

Today, one in every three people is a person of color, over half of the populace is female and 12.5 percent of Americans live in poverty (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2004). Demographers project that by 2050 racial/ethnic minorities will become the new majority. Therefore, it is critical to note that certain group memberships further exacerbate issues of social class. The

evidence of this is found in the higher proportions of racial/ethnic minorities living in poverty. Subsequently, the *Spellings Report* characterizes the gaps by race/ethnicity apart from socioeconomic factors and attends more pointedly to disparities by income. Pervasive hindrances to higher learning involve determinants of lower socioeconomic status and college costs in conjunction with the consequences of having memberships in disenfranchised groups.



The figure above elucidates the poverty rate among African Americans. It is nearly twice the national average. Similarly, figures for the Hispanic population also greatly exceed the national poverty rate. Because people with low incomes are most affected by spiraling costs, African American students are hurt more by the increasing cost of college than their White peers. Kane asserts that "because a higher percentage of blacks are from low-income families and, therefore, had been heavily subsidized by the federal government...Cuts in federal grants to them in the early eighties substantially raised their costs of a college education" (as cited in Becker, 2002, p.1).

While lower socioeconomic status intensifies with race and ethnicity, gender added to the pile of personal characteristics also amplifies social class inequities. According to the National Poverty Center at the University of Michigan (2006), the poverty rate for households headed by single women is substantially higher than the overall poverty rate. For example, 28.4 percent of all single female heads of household live in poverty. In contrast 13.5 percent of male heads of household live in poverty. To further illuminate the interaction between race/ethnicity, gender and income, it is only necessary to look at the disproportionately higher

percentage of single households headed by African American and Hispanic women. Nearly two-fifths of single African American and Hispanic women heads of household are poor. As the number of single-headed households has risen, it comes as no surprise that the poverty rate among children has risen to the highest level in 10 years (U.S. Bureau of the Census Bureau, 2004).

The unfortunate reality is that the poverty rate for children has exceeded the national poverty rate. The *Spellings Report* noted that much of the inaccessibility to postsecondary study is due financial hurdles, a lack of information about collegiate opportunities, and academic ill-preparedness. More often than not, those who are considered the least prepared for college-level work are first-generation students who do not know how to navigate the routes to college. Quite frequently those in need of remediation are coming from low-income and/or racially/ethnically diverse families. It is interesting when considering issues of access to note that opportunities appear to be thwarted for many students from the onset due to the nexus between race/ethnicity, gender and social class. The Spellings Commission did not adequately address the intersectionality of socioeconomic status with gender and race/ethnicity that often accompanies if not creates the gap in educational achievement for students from marginalized groups. Although the Commission cogently conveys the gaps in college access by race/ethnicity and income as troublesome, the report did not substantially move beyond problem identification. The *Spellings Report* was short on feasible solutions, concrete actions and strategic approaches to take in rectifying uneven entry to academia.

## Higher Education and Investing in Human Capital

St. John and Chung (2005) contend that a “balanced access model” (p. 126) speaks to how the actual availability of financial aid and the expectation of aid shape students’ decisions about whether college is a feasible or lofty goal. Years ago a first-generation African American female student I was mentoring shared that she would not be returning to college for her sophomore year. This student was very bright, capable and eager to learn. However, she could not reconcile that she would need to take out additional student loans to make up the difference in college costs. I explained to her that while she was indebted \$3,000 for her freshman year, if she were to persist to degree completion, there would be an individual and a social rate of return realized. I shared that the investment that she would make in herself would pay off over a life time of earnings. In short, despite the subsidized student loan rates being at an all time low during this period (i.e., finance charges hovering around three percent) her pervasive belief was that college was not affordable. A *Pygmalion effect* produced a self-fulfilling prophecy making it improbable she would earn a baccalaureate degree because she considered the costs to be prohibitive.

Concerns addressed in the *Spellings Report* are justified if one considers higher education as an investment that tangibly increases

the talents, skill set, knowledge, and dispositions of attendees which in turn increase our overall human capital as a nation. However, in weighing the personal and societal benefits of American higher education, suggestions from the report run counter to the exchange of teaching and learning at the collegiate level. For example, employment of standardized “Collegiate Learning Assessments” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p.23) across institutional types to determine learning outcomes would not be an effective practice. The Spellings Commission proposal to apply uniform assessments for the purposes of contrasting students irrespective of institutional type (public or private colleges, two- or four-year institutions, vocational versus liberal arts majors) stifles academic freedom relative to pedagogy and is part of the onslaught to increase federal regulation of higher education. One size does not fit all. The reform model proposed by the Commission parallels Secretary Spellings other educational reform in K-12, otherwise known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB has advocates and critics but by design it has homogenized K-12 curricular offerings and falls short of creating more seamless pathways to college. The recommendations in the *Spellings Report* call for data on student performance to be tied to matching federal dollars that would augment existing performance based funding formulas in state systems. On the other hand, there is ample commentary in the report on increasing access for those in the lowest economic quartile without any commitment to increase the range of federal aid.

One of the greatest strengths of American higher education is that the system is not monolithic but quite diverse reflecting the variation of learners from all walks of life. Understandably, as college costs continue climbing, there is additional scrutiny of higher education and growing calls for greater accountability. In theory, a managed learning system may allay concerns regarding the lack of data made available to the public. It is more difficult for colleges and universities to exemplify the strengths and weaknesses of postsecondary education without providing greater public access to institutional data. Nonetheless, federal data management of individual student progress is not necessarily the best vehicle for addressing eroding support for American higher education.

*Measuring Up 2006*, the national report card on higher education predicts that it is likely young Americans will continue falling behind their peers in other countries relative to college attendance and degree completion. It is crucial to consider the market forces (i.e., depressed economies, reduced opportunities in the labor force, coupled with the expense of postsecondary education) in the U.S. that have eroded the confidence of students and their parents about the feasibility of accessing higher learning. There has also been recent retrenchment on access policies, programs and practices (e.g., decreasing federal funding for TRIO programs, abolition of affirmative action at the state level [Proposal 2 referendum passage in Michigan November 2006], cuts in employment assistance to veterans, and so forth). The following table is a list of select educational and social service-related programs that were slated for termination last year.

<b>Program (2005 BA in millions)</b>	
Alcohol Abuse Reduction in Secondary Schools	\$32.7
Arts in Education	35.6
Byrd Honors Scholarships (merit-based academic excellence award)	40.7
Close Up Fellowships (fellowships to low-income students and teachers)	1.5
Community Technology Centers (centers that offer disadvantaged residents of economically distressed areas access to computers and training)	5.0
Comprehensive School Reform	205.3
Demonstration Projects for Students with Disabilities	6.9
Educational Technology State Grants (provides funding to States and school districts to support the integration of educational technology into classroom instruction)	496.0
Elementary and Secondary School Counseling	34.7
Even Start (improve educational opportunities for children and their parents in low-income through family literacy programs)	225.1
Excellence in Economic Education (promote economic and financial literacy for K-12 students)	1.5
Federal Perkins Loans Cancellations	66.1
Foreign Language Assistance (promote improvement and expansion of foreign language instruction)	17.9
Foundations for Learning (services to children and their families to enhance young children's development so that they become ready for school)	1.0
Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP)	306.5
Interest Subsidy Grants (finances interest subsidy costs of a portfolio of higher education facilities loans guaranteed under Federal agreements with participating institutions of higher education)	1.5
Javits Gifted and Talented Education	11.0
Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnerships	65.6
Literacy Programs for Prisoners	5.0
Mental Health Integration in Schools	5.0
National Writing Project	20.3
Occupational and Employment Information (career guidance and counseling program)	9.3
Parental Information and Resource Centers	41.9
Projects With Industry (help individuals with disabilities obtain employment in the competitive labor market)	21.6
Ready to Teach (grants to nonprofit telecommunications entities to carry out programs to improve teaching in core curriculum areas, and to develop, produce, and distribute innovative educational and instructional video programming)	14.3
Recreational Programs (provide recreation and related activities for individuals with disabilities to aid in their employment, mobility, independence, socialization, and community integration)	2.5
Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities State Grants	437.4
School Dropout Prevention	4.9
School Leadership (supports recruiting, training, and retaining principals and assistant principals)	14.9
Smaller Learning Communities	94.5
Star Schools (supports distance education projects to improve instruction)	20.8
State Grants for Incarcerated Youth Offenders (grants to State correctional agencies assist and encourage incarcerated youth to acquire functional literacy skills and life and job skills)	21.8
Supported Employment State Grants (goal of developing collaborative programs with appropriate public and private nonprofit organizations to provide supported employment services for individuals with the most significant disabilities)	37.4
Teacher Quality Enhancement	68.3
Tech-Prep Demonstration (establish secondary technical education programs on community college campuses)	4.9
Tech-Prep Education State Grants (develop structural links between secondary and postsecondary institutions that integrate academic and vocational education)	105.8
Thurgood Marshall Legal Educational Opportunity Program	3.0
TRIO Talent Search	144.9
TRIO Upward Bound	312.6
Underground Railroad Program	2.2
Vocational Education National Programs	11.8
Vocational Education State Grants	1,194.3
Women's Educational Equity (Activities promoting educational equity for girls and women)	3.0



## Fault Lines: Systemic Pipeline Issues and Challenges to Educational Access

An unnamed lobbyist for a specialized association stated, “When the higher education community is fractured, lawmakers do whatever they choose” (as cited in Cook, 1998, P.115). To date, the strategies for reforming higher education scheduled in the *Spellings Report* are not entirely comprehensive and are quite contradictory in terms of efforts to transform higher education. The practice of cutting funding continues for many postsecondary initiatives that facilitate access. It is unsatisfactory that many programs/policies that seek to increase entrée to higher education are not consistently considered high-priority activities.

Although it is laudable that the Spellings Commission has called attention to the future of higher education, the practicality of performance-based ratings will not usurp the elitism among its players or flatten the stratification of its participants. Most would agree that the pathways to postsecondary education should be seamless, yet the curricular alignment called for in the *Spellings Report* includes expanding dual enrollment and AP course offerings which are not ground-breaking in the educational community. What would be pioneering and transformative is not continued promotion of the Federal politics of paradox but authentic advancement of innovation in higher education with the backing of actual resources that reinforce college preparation. Instead, the Spellings Commission offers new sets of unfunded mandates. Programs such as the Perkins Act, the Workforce Investment Act, GEAR-UP, Upward Bound and Talent Search demonstrate recognition of the value of college readiness and access to achieving educational goals/career objectives for learners across the spectrum of differences. These programs are similar to the GI Bill which was one of the first forms of affirmative action. Each of the aforementioned programs is a call for strategic action affirming the presence of underrepresented and underserved populations in higher education.

In summary, examples of initiatives that could be revisited, revamped, and strengthened to reflect an integrated and not disjointed set of access policy objectives would encompass but not be limited to: Career Pathways, Tech Prep, Mentoring Programs, and Learning Communities. In addition to each educational tier stepping up outreach efforts through middle, high school and college collaborations, other strategies to increase access to underrepresented groups could include:

- Reducing fees associated with development education
- Tightening articulation initiatives between two- and four-year institutions of higher learning
- Offering scholarships and textbook awards for first-generation collegians
- Creating new pathways to earning college credit, offering flexible scheduling and alternate modes of instructional delivery

The overall scheme of the Spellings Commission was to brainstorm a plan for restructuring American higher education. The committee included highly talented individuals from a diverse group of colleges, but given this impressive effort, it is unsettling that logistical issues relating to increasing access to higher education were not more adequately addressed. What is the social contract between America’s community colleges and the ‘ivory towers’? This very well may be the million dollar question. The work of the Spellings Commission is indicative of continued interest in the American system of higher education, but concrete, activist solutions are needed for grappling with the best way to meet the needs of all those who aspire to receive a higher education. That answer remains elusive. ♦

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## Accountability in Community Colleges

by Jeff Julian and Ryan Smith

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If the report by the U.S. Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, is any indication, higher education is undergoing a significant transformation in terms of what it means to be accountable. Historically, community colleges demonstrated accountability by meeting government regulations and complying with data requests (Roueche, Baker, & Brownell, 1971). Today, colleges are expected to be transparent and demonstrate through results how responsive they are to taxpayer, student, and other stakeholder needs (Ewell & Jones, 2006).

Accountability rests on the notion of "answerability" to society's needs (Burke, 2005), and if there is any institution that prides itself in being "answerable," it is the community college. Contemporary notions of accountability, however, "tend to discount the importance of open access and the comprehensive mission" (Harbour, 2003, p. 300) of the public community college and fail to take into account obstacles to performance like "depressed labor markets and lack of organizational resources" (Dougherty & Hong, 2005, p. 1). From this perspective, accountability has been problematic in the community college for two reasons. First, community colleges and policy makers operate under different assumptions of learning, quality, efficiency, and productivity. Second, governments design policy and fiscal structures that conflict with the accountability measures they advocate.

### Cultural Assumptions about Accountability

Schein (2004) defines culture as the "pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solve(s) its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, has worked well enough in the past to be considered valid, and (is assumed to be) the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (p. 17). Researchers have noted there are two cultures operating in the higher education accountability context: the academic and the political (Bogue & Hall, 2003; Burke, 2005).

Student learning is an example of how cultural assumptions drive notions about what it means to be accountable. For years, college leaders have tried to convince policy makers they are in the best position to evaluate education quality, a notion that has lost credibility in state houses operating in the political culture because policy makers are no longer willing to accept the idea that the self-regulatory and autonomous nature of higher education is effective (Alexander, 2000; Burke & Minassians, 2002). As a result, policy makers offer an array of learning and engagement evaluation tools, as shown in *A Test of Leadership*. While many community college leaders, operating in the academic culture, see the value of these instruments for improve-

ment, faculty generally feel these instruments are disengaged from the teaching and learning process and, since they usually focus on the institution as a whole instead of the classroom, place little value on them.

Research suggests college leaders translate the "hard" accountability mandates designed in a political culture and handed down from external agencies into "softer" measures that function more effectively in an academic environment (Huisman & Currie, 2004). And since the departmental nature of colleges and universities tends to focus more on classroom and program goals over institutional ones, it should come as no surprise that, despite policy makers' best intentions and community colleges' hard work, accountability measures are often met with benign indifference.

### Accountability and Policy Environments

Yet, culture alone does not explain why *A Test of Leadership* is problematic for community colleges. Despite all the promises of change, accountability initiatives have had little impact on the organizational structure, mission, and philosophy of the community college. There is also little evidence that accountability initiatives alone are the reason for better performance (Dougherty & Hong, 2006). Accountability initiatives are often built on premises that are at odds with the policy environment in which community colleges operate. It is like trying to fit square pegs into round holes.

For instance, *A Test of Leadership* states that "parents and students have no solid evidence, comparable across institutions, of how much students learn or whether they learn more at one college than another. Similarly, policymakers need more comprehensive data to help them decide whether the investment in higher education is paying off and how taxpayer dollars could be used more effectively" (p. 13). In response, the Commission recommended the creation of a "consumer-friendly information database on higher education, with useful, reliable information, coupled with a search engine to enable students, parents, policymakers, and others to weigh and rank comparative institutional performance" (p. 20).

This recommendation is well-intentioned, but at odds with a policy environment and governance structure that encourages and provides incentives for institutions to differentiate themselves in the market. Because the U.S. does not have a federal department of higher education with authority to directly regulate institutions, quality assurance is achieved by a patchwork of regional and departmental accreditation agencies, state coordinating boards, ranking systems, professional standards,

and the marketplace. Many assert that this varied and diverse landscape is the strength of the American higher education system (Lombardi, 2006). It should come as no surprise, then, that institutions attempt to differentiate themselves not only in the market, but also in the competition for public funding.

An examination of three “typical” community college students shows how some accountability measures are not consistent with the reality of current policy and governance structures by which community colleges operate. A student enrolls in a short-term computer training course, while another enrolls for 18 months in general education courses and then transfers to an upper-level institution. Yet another first-generation adult student takes eight years to complete her degree. Each of these scenarios is a success story – the first student’s employer receives a skilled employee, the second student moves ahead to receive a bachelor’s degree at a discounted price, and the third student gains economic security while contributing to economic and labor market growth. Yet, within the parameters of most accountability measures, all three are failures – the first student is not retained, the second one is considered a drop-out, and the last one won’t be included in traditional methods that capture graduation rates.

Add in the dangers of mission restriction, inconsistency with the open-door philosophy, high compliance costs, and the pressure to compromise academic standards and quality to accommodate accountability measures (Dougherty & Hong, 2006), and it becomes evident there is a clear mismatch between the reality of the community college environment and the accountability measures designed to ensure that educational quality.

### **Making Accountability Work**

Government concerns and frustration about accountability are the result of two factors. First, governments and colleges are operating under different assumptions about what it means to be accountable. This is because little effort has been put into developing a consensus arising out of two cultures, political and academic, operating under different assumptions about what it means to be accountable. The result is a perceived lack of understanding on the part of accountability agencies and a perceived lack of commitment by community colleges. Second, accountability initiatives are often discussed and framed without regard to policy environments and governance structures policy makers create and support through funding.

Recent reports have outlined several methods for ensuring that accountability is effective and serves the needs of students, stakeholders, and colleges. The recommendations of these reports revolve around several themes, including creating consensus, eliminating fear and punitive measures, focusing on improvement rather than results, establishing clear goals aligned with public priorities that respect the diversity of American colleges and universities, and encouraging transparency.

First, there needs to be a consensus on what it means to be accountable. Zumeta (2007) recommends a *performance compact*, where colleges, elementary and secondary schools, workforce development boards, and other public agencies and stakeholders construct a compact on expectations and goals.

Second, the organizing principle of accountability should be pride, not compliance or fear (State Higher Education Executive Officers, [SHEEO], 2005). Policy makers should resist the urge to criticize and blame and rather focus on creating a supportive environment (Braskamp & Schomberg, 2006). Only in an atmosphere absent from criticism and blame can constructive conflict and consensus emerge.

Third, accountability should focus on improvement as much as, if not more than, results (SHEEO, 2005). Shavelson (2007) points out that “any large-scale assessment can, at best, signal where a problem may exist, but it will not pinpoint the problem and generate solutions. A campus needs to place any external assessment in the context of its own rich array of assessments” (p. 33). Placing more emphasis on improvement and how results will be used toward improvement removes unnecessary criticism from the discussion and provides incentives for faculty, staff, and Boards to share best practices across institutions and hold each other accountable for student learning and success (Hrabowski, 2006).

Fourth, accountability goals should be simple and clear, align with public priorities for economic development, consider variability in regional and local economies and labor markets, and demonstrate sensitivity to indicators colleges can influence (Dougherty & Hong, 2005, p. 11). While policy makers should appreciate the diversity and decentralization of higher education in the U.S., accountability systems need to acknowledge that students from a variety of different institutions must still interact in a variety of settings after college (American Council on Education, 2004).

Fifth, community colleges should be more transparent about their activities. An Association of American Colleges and Universities (2004) report notes that “in the absence of consistent and broad-based leadership on accountability from the academy, a politically popular accountability ideology has swept statehouses across the country and is capturing the allegiance of lawmakers” (p. 1). This void could easily be filled if colleges were more open and transparent about what they do. Electronic portfolios, discipline-based capstones, culminating experience documents, and milestone assessments hold significant promise in this area because they allow institutions to tailor their own learning outcomes and provide a level of transparency and openness due to their on-line availability (Adelman, 2006; AACU, 2004).



## Conclusion

Contemporary accountability efforts like those articulated in *A Test of Leadership* are driven by the notion that, now more than ever, governments are looking to colleges and universities as vital components of economic development and growth. As Margaret Spellings, the Commission chair, stated: “it is time to examine how we can get the most out of our national investment” (Lederman, 2005). This is a legitimate concern and several recommendations from *A Test of Leadership* are welcome and should be taken seriously. As policy makers increasingly view higher education as something too important to be left alone, the historical independence of colleges will likely evolve into an engaged interdependence with other sectors of the economy (Burke & Minassians, 2002; Kearns, 1998).

This trend is not something community colleges should fear, but embrace and view as an opportunity to engage communities and stakeholders, based on the notion that stakeholders will be more willing to support them if trust has been established. It is also an opportunity for community colleges to design an accountability system with measures that focus on what Dowd (2003) calls the “democratizing role” of community colleges.

The role of quality institutional leadership is essential in this process. The nature of higher education institutions is to avoid change at all costs (Diamond, 2006) and if leaders do not have the support to initiate and follow through on change initiatives, community colleges will perpetuate a culture marked by complacency and could find their role in society eclipsed by new providers. Policy makers should gather the political courage to restructure governance structures and policy environments to ensure consistency with accountability requirements and suspend cultural assumptions about colleges and universities. By working together, they might be pleasantly surprised. ♦

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## The Zero-Sum of Higher Education Affordability

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by Jackie Davis

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The Commission appointed by U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings found that “Our higher education financing system is increasingly dysfunctional” (U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2006, p. 10). Moreover, the Commission’s findings regarding student financial aid state, “The entire financial aid system—including federal, state, institutional, and private programs—is confusing, complex, inefficient, duplicative, and frequently does not direct aid to students who truly need it” (p. 3).

Robert Zemsky (2007), acknowledged as one of America’s top higher education policy researchers and a member of Spellings’ Commission, was quoted as saying, “I suppose that I should have known, but I had never focused on how much federal aid was being awarded using criteria other than financial need” (¶. 35). This admission is very important to the issue of affordability because if an eminent researcher like Zemsky was not aware of the amount of non-need-based federal aid, perhaps there are many others in our federal and state governments who also are not knowledgeable of the increasing amount of federal student financial aid that is being awarded using criteria other than financial need. Higher education affordability is a very complex issue and, to their credit, the Commission did a good job of portraying its current condition in the United States.

The most noteworthy recommendation on affordability that the Commission (DOE, 2006) made was that “Public providers of student financial aid should commit to meeting the needs of students from low-income families” (p. 19). Forty-two years ago, Lyndon B. Johnson (1965) conveyed virtually the same message when he said, “Every child must be encouraged to get as much education as he has the ability to take. We want this not only for his sake—but for the nation’s sake. Nothing matters more to the future of our country: not military preparedness—for armed might is worthless if we lack the brain power to build a world of peace; not our productive economy—for we cannot sustain growth without trained manpower; not our democratic system of government—for freedom is fragile if citizens are ignorant” (p. 26).

What is most surprising is not what was included in the Commission’s report but rather what was conspicuously absent from the report. The Commission, for whatever reason, did not address what likely is the primary cause of the low rate of higher education participation from students from low-income families—a major philosophical shift in funding American higher education that has been occurring since approximately 1985. The federal and many state governments have been slowly shifting responsibility for funding higher education away from legislative bodies to students and their families (Alexander, 1996, 1998; Breneman & Finney, 1997; Callan & Finney, 1997; Gladieux & Hauptman, 1995; Higham, 1997).

According to The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2006), students from low-income families are find-

ing it increasingly more difficult to pay for a college education simply because an ever increasing portion of federal tax appropriations for higher education has been focused on helping students from middle- to upper-income families. Moreover, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2002) found that federal financial aid programs for students from low-income families have seen major reductions in appropriations while aid programs for students without demonstrated need have multiplied.

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2006), in current dollars, show that from fiscal year 1985 to fiscal year 2004, federal Pell grant expenditures increased 60% whereas tax expenditures for higher education increased by 83%. During this same period of time, Perkins Loans increased by 154% and Federal Family Education Loans (FFEL) increased by 460%. Clearly, higher education students are taking out more loans because Pell and other federal and state grant programs have not kept pace with students’ needs.

Adam Smith, perhaps the first to categorize education as an investment in human capital, pointed out some 230 years ago that one can compare the time and energy expended on acquiring an education to an expensive machine one might purchase (Woodhall, 1987). Smith was making the analogy that expenditures on education could be regarded as a form of investment because the promise of a monetary return on the investment. Nobel prize-winning economists Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964) asserted that education provides future benefits for both the individual and society as a whole.

Because low-income families have few assets with which to invest in their own human capital, it is, therefore, incumbent upon governments to see that such investments are made (Psacharopoulos, 1996). Consequently, when federal and state reductions in higher education investments force families to assume greater responsibility for investment in their own family members’ higher education, many students from low-income families may simply decide that a college education is too financially risky.

Trends in financing a college education present serious problems for low- and moderate-income families (The College Board, 2001). Unfortunately, these changes in funding responsibility likely are creating a self-fulfilling prophecy because, according to Geske (1996), “Studies show that persons are more likely to complete a given level of education if their parents are (or were) highly educated” (p. 33). Thus, if parents do not participate in higher education, then it is less likely that their children will participate in higher education.

If low-income students continue to be denied access to higher education, the nation’s investment in human capital will likely continue to decrease and social stratification in America will increase correspondingly. Unfortunately, current trends sug-

gest that an increased stratification of American higher education is already underway ("How Do Costs Affect Institutional Choice?", 1998). However, one way to reverse the existing stratification of American higher education is for federal and state governments to do as recommended by the Commission (DOE, 2006)—put increasingly larger shares of postsecondary student financial aid dollars into need-based grant programs. Although the recommendation of the Commission that public providers of higher education should commit themselves to improving affordability by meeting the needs of students from low-income families is laudable, it is important to remember that funding in the "real" world is a zero-sum proposition.

If the federal government were to put more funds into need-based student financial aid grant programs for higher education, absent a national income tax increase, it would first have to take the money from other programs. Perhaps significant revisions to federal legislation which created the Hope Scholarship Tax Credit program, Lifetime Learning Tax Credit program, and other tax expenditures would be a place to start. Federal tax expenditures for 2004 totaled \$730 billion dollars—approximately \$45 billion of federal tax expenditures in 2004 were for non-need-based higher education support (United States Governmental Accountability Office, 2006).

Now that the problem of higher education affordability is known on a national scale, it is up to the federal government, state governments, and higher education to muster the fortitude to implement the Commission's recommendations on affordability and significantly increase federal and state need-based student financial aid. Because funding tax-based higher education programs will likely continue to be a zero-sum proposition, reality dictates that federal and state legislative bodies, as well as private tax-paying citizens, eventually ask the difficult questions: (1) are we prepared to give up some other tax-funded program to better support higher education or (2) are we prepared to be taxed more heavily in order to better support higher education?

In summary, American higher education does need to change several things to become more efficient and responsive to multiple customers. However, American higher education itself is not the problem. The deterioration of our nation's human capital happened because of the shift made by our federal and state governments during the past fifteen years where they have clearly favored choice over affordability of higher education.

At the federal as well as at state levels, funding of budgets is based upon complicated priorities established by elected officials with input from their staffs, constituents, and lobbyists. Because low-income families have little political clout with the federal and state legislatures, their needs are often overlooked because of the louder voice of those with money. It is critically important that elected officials in the federal and state legislatures come to realize that increased affordability of higher education is crucial to growing the human capital necessary for America to remain economically secure. Unless the federal and state governments make higher education affordability for all Americans a top priority, our nation's human capital will surely continue to dwindle and our economic security will remain threatened. ♦

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# The Community College Response to Quality Issues and Recommendations from the Spellings Report

by Marguerite E. Boyd and Elizabeth Roeger

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Community colleges are particularly well positioned to address the quality and innovation recommendations from the *Spellings Report*. In particular, community colleges are engaged in creating a “robust culture of accountability and transparency.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p.20)

As with most culture change initiatives, leadership must come from the top, but be part of a shared governance philosophy that permeates the institution and builds support among all employees. [Truman College](#), one of the [City Colleges of Chicago](#), has addressed this need with the creation of an all college council, with elected representation from all areas of the college’s workforce. This council acts as a sounding board and a policy-making body for the college. Representatives report what happens at College Council to their respective counterparts and in turn bring feedback from their workgroups to the council, providing the college with a transparent and accountable culture that facilitates buy-in and support of all college constituencies. Examples of College Council projects include, re-crafting the college mission statement to one now infused with a quality improvement philosophy and approving general education curriculum criteria for instruction.

Truman’s assessment committee and plan are based upon a grassroots, bottom-up philosophy which demands that faculty and students share the responsibility in determining the definition and methodology of the college assessment plan. Representatives of all departments serve on the assessment committee and meet biweekly with its faculty chair and with the dean of instruction. Each department is now in the process of creating its own set of mission specific goals which align with the college’s larger goals and in creating rubrics specific to departments. These are shared among departmental faculty and with the college as a whole. As with the college council, this methodology has fostered buy-in, recognition, and voice for stakeholders as well as increased accountability and transparency.

However, we do not mean to imply that assessment and assessment buy-in are without challenges. In our own collective professional experience, each of the community colleges where we have been employed has had active assessment committees and assessment plans. But, assessment doesn’t always come easily for us in education. Just today, we had an extended conversation with our college’s director of assessment about our upcoming assessment goals and activities. We discussed planning a pre-fall workshop in August which would ask each department to examine a specific assignment. It sounds simple enough, yet each of us also knows that we will face at least a few small struggles from our faculty about why there is a need to assess, and what assessment really is. The point is that community col-

leges employ faculty who are content and theory experts in their disciplines. They are not all previously trained in curriculum design, or in measurement and assessment. What we must do, and what was discussed with this director is the need to offer faculty further training in measurement and just as importantly, provide a rationale for seeing value in measurement. We must use the data and show its worth.

The [Studio Classroom model of instruction](#), the Undergraduate Research Collaborative, and the [college-wide retention initiative](#) are all results of Truman College’s recognition of the need for further accountability and the need to offer students active and diverse learning strategies

Studio classrooms blend the creative methods of the visual arts with the technology and the analytical rigor of a science lab. In contrast to a traditional classroom, a typical studio classroom is set up so that students sit in small groups, work together with laptop computers on problems and projects, discuss strategies with the teacher, access data from the Internet, and present their resulting work with multimedia software. The instructor uses the foundational knowledge of the content and extends it during class time so that students have the opportunity to build upon that knowledge, using it as scaffolding for deeper, more meaningful, and long-lasting learning. The tools and curriculum of the Studio Classroom place responsibility for learning with the student, with the instructor utilized as a content expert and guide. Learning is conceptual and contextual rather than simply content-oriented.

Recognizing the need for all aspects of learning support to be addressed in experiential learning, the structure of the studio classroom is built around a teaching team. It is composed of an on-site technology consultant, the *technology liaison*, and an academic support specialist, the *student services liaison*. The technology liaison works with the teacher as a consultant to take best advantage of the computing and network tools available in the studio classroom. Similarly, the student services liaison works with the teacher to identify students who need additional support, guides them to the appropriate college services, and ensures that student’s needs have been met.

A second example of innovation in active learning is the Undergraduate Research Collaborative (URC), funded by the National Science Foundation. This 2.7 million dollar initiative which partners City Colleges of Chicago with William Rainey Harper College, Oakton Community College, College of DuPage, Illinois State University, Youngstown State University (OH), and Hope College (MI) expands resources and opportunities for students pursuing science degrees and undergraduate research in



sciences. Students are offered the opportunity to do science research using the facilities and resources of the collaborative institutions and to share their research projects with faculty and students from each of the grant-funded institutions. It creates participatory learning for students and offers them valuable experience in research on an undergraduate level. Students from City Colleges of Chicago can create projects and spend research time during the summer at a participating four year partnering school.

Truman's college-wide retention initiative's goal is a 5% increase in retention. To help meet this goal, the College has established a retention task force which meets biweekly, examining how Truman can increase its retention. Currently, the College is in the process of holding focus groups with underrepresented groups at Truman, asking questions about how students relate to Truman, to its faculty, and examining the challenges these students face in completing their educational goals and even what these educational goals are. These results will provide Truman with the information to create strategies for stronger student completion rates.

In an effort to gauge student satisfaction, Wilbur Wright College, another one of the City Colleges of Chicago, administers the [Community College Survey of Student Engagement](#) (CCSSE) in odd numbered years and the [Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency](#) (CAAP) in even numbered years. The results of both are made available to the public. More importantly, the College uses the results for continuous quality improvement. The most recent CCSSE results indicated the need to improve service in financial aid and tutoring. Quality improvement measures have included the development of additional financial aid seminars coupled with individual financial aid counseling. In order to increase retention, the College added additional tutors and reinstated a writing lab.

These college level efforts are enhanced by the City Colleges of Chicago's district wide Annual Program and Service Analysis (APSA) process. APSA is a process for collecting, reporting and analyzing program and service information on a yearly basis. APSA builds upon existing program reviews required by the Illinois Community College Board every five years and upon the college and district strategic planning initiatives. The purpose of APSA is to assist the college community in the improvement of college programs and services through an evaluation process that encourages systematic reviews of effectiveness. It is a tool for planning continuous quality improvement based on data collection, review and analysis. It is also a participatory process that involves the collaboration of faculty, college staff and administrators.

This collegial process aims to assist faculty and college staff in highlighting program strengths, as well as identifying opportunities for strategic change and areas of improvement. Program enhancement recommendations are linked to the strategic plan, annual plan and annual budget. Strengthens and opportunities

for enhancement from the APSA report provide simple benchmarking and act as a dashboard for each department's goals for the upcoming academic year. A specific example of this is in Truman's criminal justice department. Results from the 2006 APSA have led the social science chair and criminal justice department to work towards the creation of a full A.A. degree in criminal justice.

Other Midwest community colleges have taken up the continuous improvement challenge by choosing [Academic Quality Improvement Program](#) (AQIP) over the [Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality](#) (PEAQ) for the accreditation process conducted by the Higher Learning Commission. In 1999 with assistance from the [Pew Charitable Trust](#), the Higher Learning Commission launched an alternative accreditation process that's based upon a continuous quality improvement model and the [Malcolm Baldrige Award Process](#) AQIP. Each AQIP institution has a portfolio of Action Projects determined by the institution that it works to complete in short-term cycles. Action Projects have measurable goals and objectives and rely heavily on data analysis to determine direction. Currently, there are thirteen community college districts are accredited using AQIP in Illinois alone. The advantage of AQIP is twofold. It has created a learning environment and training ground for higher education institutions as to what continuous quality improvement is, and it forces institutions to make continuous quality improvement the focus and impetus for progress.

Additionally, state quality improvement award programs, like the [Lincoln Foundation for Performance Excellence](#) in Illinois are increasingly involving higher education institutions. Blackhawk College, Waubensee College, and Kaskaskia College are all past winners of the Bronze level award for Performance Quality Excellence from the Lincoln Foundation. And while winning the award is laudable, what is more valuable is the feedback report from the judges at the Lincoln Foundation which defines the band for each of the seven Baldrige criteria for the institution along with opportunities for improvement. Along with the award application process is a clearly defined and managed process for training judges for the Lincoln Foundation. In the summer of 2006, judges were trained for four of Illinois' thirty eight community colleges. These judges bring back knowledge and experience as quality improvement experts to their respective campuses and education of quality improvement planning and techniques is further fostered.

One of the largest drawbacks for community colleges in terms of quality improvement has been the lack of benchmarked data with like peers on more than a state level. The inception of the [Community College Benchmarking Project](#) in 2003 has begun to address that issue. Conferences like the one at Johnson County Community College in June 2006, The National Community College Benchmarking Conference addressed these needs. Sessions on peer review analysis, benchmarking and scorecards, demonstrated that indeed community colleges are striving to extend quality at their campuses.



Illinois Central College in Peoria adopted [Six Sigma](#), a process improvement methodology utilized by its neighbor, Caterpillar, to assure high quality in their products. In an educational setting, Six Sigma can vastly improve the quality of products and services by removing non-value added steps, listening to the voice of the customer, and using other quality enhancement techniques. Currently, the college is using Six Sigma to improve such processes as advisement, reporting of time for payroll purposes, processing of financial aid, and reporting of student performance. To implement the Six Sigma process, special quality improvement projects are conducted under the direction of Six Sigma “black belts”. And Black Belts are assisted by “yellow belts”, and “green belts”, employees trained in Six Sigma techniques. The college has provided 512 employees with Yellow Belt training, an introductory 3-hour course on Six Sigma, and 21 employees have participated in Green Belt training, a more in-depth program that prepares employees to participate on teams. The college president hopes to provide additional Black Belt training to senior members of the administration. Educational leadership is increasingly turning to the problem-solving and efficiency methodologies first employed by business and industry to meet the demands of higher education.

Numerous colleges, like Wilbur Wright, are making the results of their performance transparent. Grand Rapids Community College presents performance on selected key indicators on

its web site [DASHBOARD](#), another tool borrowed from business and industry. Under the Learners, Programs and Services, People, Community, and Financial categories related to strategic outcomes and priorities, data is presented in gauge format related to retention, course success, workforce placement rates, and graduation rates.

Community college leaders need to continue to seek innovative practices, frequently through the use of technology, to define, measure, and document learning outcomes. And, in the pursuit of that goal, leaders must be willing to make those measures available to the public. This is not to suggest that any of the institutions or models mentioned constitutes a panacea for the Spellings recommendations. Yet, it is clear that community colleges recognize the need for continuous quality improvement in teaching and learning excellence. We are the beyond the awareness stage and clearly recognize the challenges ahead. ♦

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## Book Review: *Defending the Community College Equity Agenda* by T. Bailey and V.S. Morest (eds.) Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. 305 pp

by Melba M Schneider

*Defending the Community College Equity Agenda* (2006) promotes educational equity for students attending two year community colleges. The book is based on findings from a multi-site study of 15 community colleges in 6 states consisting of California, Florida, Illinois, New York, Texas, and Washington. The authors provide an analysis of contemporary challenges and reforms facing community colleges consisting of, but not limited to curriculum and instruction, vocational training, and accountability. The framework expands the concept of equity beyond access to incorporate equity in college preparation, access to college, and success on reaching college goals. Editors Thomas Bailey and Vanessa Smith Morest articulate that while community colleges may promote equity through open access, they can also serve to exacerbate inequity through educational outcomes. “Access through an open-admission policy is...only one step toward educational equity, which is achieved when low-income students have the same chance of graduation as more privileged students” (Perin & Charron, p. 155-156). The author’s examine challenges and features of community college through this educational equity framework.

The book is based on findings from a national field study of data collected from 2000 to 2002 conducted under the auspices of the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University (CCRC). In collaboration with various researchers, the study implements a multiple case study design spanning across six states. The criterion used to select the sample consists of states with large community college enrollment and a balance of colleges governed by state or local control. The sample was designed to purposefully include a representation of geographic communities (urban, rural, and suburban). The authors utilize literature, national statistics, statistics

Access through an open-admission policy is, however, only one step toward educational equity, which is achieved when low-income students have the same chance of graduation as more privileged students.

(Perin & Charron)

focused on the sample, and interviews. Group and individual interviews from 658 key stakeholders included administrators, faculty and counselors, and students and clients. The authors weave literature, statistics, research findings, and rich case studies throughout the book.

The book focuses on eight topics which are seen in chapters 2-9, consisting of the community college dual vision, accountability, for-profit institutions, distance education, training, certification, remediation, dual enrollment, and student services. The table to the right provides the title of each chapter and lists the author/s. These topics were selected because they may be perceived as a challenge to educational equity, or are viewed as an integral feature of conserving and enhancing the equity agenda. The book is organized into two parts. The first section focuses on challenges to the community college equity agenda. The second section focuses on integral features of promoting and enhancing educational equity. All of the eight topics were categorized as challenges or integral features, except for distance education, which can be perceived as a possible challenge or method for increasing equity depending on implementation and context.

### **Possible Challenges to the Equity Agenda Accountability, For-Profit Institutions, Vocationalization, and Certification**

Challenges facing community colleges are characterized by contemporary pressures for accountability measures and transformations in the higher education landscape through for-profit institutions, vocational education, and certification. First, with current federal legislation of No Child Left Behind in American K-12 schools accountability proposals have been aimed at select states. States, such as Tennessee and South Carolina implement versions of accountability measures at the community college level. Second, with the growth of for-profit institutions, competition about attracting students has increased. What does this mean for the community college equity agenda? Bailey found that minorities and younger students are found at for-profit institutions at higher rates. For example, for-profit two year institutions represent a 20% Black and 14% Hispanic student population compared to 13% Black and 13 % Hispanic public two year colleges. While the for-profits represent of 4% of all higher education institutions, they are attracting a significant percentage of minority students at a more expensive cost than community colleges. Third, community colleges are

charged with balancing distinct missions. Community colleges typically offer a variety of courses and programs either as credit or non-credit. “[T]hose involved with community colleges today see the vocational/academic dichotomy as an oversimplification of the programs offered by community colleges” (Smith Morest, p. 46). Throughout their analysis the authors keep in mind the various missions of community colleges in their efforts to promote educational equity. Fourth, with increasing educational standards in the American workforce, how are community colleges providing training? Each chapter seeks to understand these challenges, their impact, and what they translate as for the community college educational equity agenda.

### **Crucial Features of the Equity Agenda Remediation, Dual Enrollment, and Student Services**

Aimed at protecting and enhancing the educational opportunities at the community college level, the authors analyze the importance of remediation, dual enrollment, and student services in promoting equity. First, more often than not, students enter community college with the skills and training from their K-12 education. While some students are well prepared for college-level work, many students are under-prepared. “Today’s community college remedial student is often yesterday’s second-grade ‘struggling reader’” (Perin & Charron, p. 154). As a result, problems in the educational pipeline at an early age intensify at the community college level. Second, a variety of dual enrollment programs have emerged and aimed at increasing access and opportunities at community colleges and high schools. Third, as community colleges enroll a diverse group of students’ community colleges need to assess how they are serving distinct groups within their campus. As opposed to four-year colleges and universities, community colleges enroll greater numbers of first generation, low income, ethnic, and age diverse students. Counseling and programs should increasingly be tailored to the needs of all students. This section of the book seeks to examine issues, such as the status of these features, organizational models, and strategies employed. These chapters provide suggestions for the future based on research findings.

The book’s content and style are written to appeal to multiple audiences, including administrators, practitioners, researchers, policy makers, etc. Administrators and practitioners can utilize this book to learn about best practices, impact of reforms on community colleges across the country, and utilize research to inform practice. Researchers can use this as a reference for

<b>Defending the Community College Equity Agenda</b>		
<b>Chapters</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	
1	<i>Introduction: Defending the Community College Equity Agenda</i>	Thomas Bailey & Vanessa Smith Morest
2	<i>Double Vision: How the Attempt to Balance Multiple Missions is Shaping the Future of Community Colleges</i>	Vanessa Smith Morest
3	<i>Performance Accountability as Imperfect Panacea: The Community College Experience</i>	Kevin J. Dougherty & Esther Hong
4	<i>Increasing Competition and Growth of the For-Profits</i>	Thomas Bailey
5	<i>Virtual Access</i>	Rebecca D. Cox
6	<i>The Limits of “Training for Now”: Lessons from Information Technology Certification</i>	Jim Jacobs & W. Norton Grubb
7	<i>“Lights Just Click on Everyday”</i>	Dolores Perin & Kerry Charron
8	<i>“Like, What Do I Do Now?”: The Dilemmas of Guidance Counseling</i>	W. Norton Grubb
9	<i>Twice the Credit, Half the Time?: The Growth of Dual Credit at Community Colleges and High Schools</i>	Vanessa Smith Morest & Melinda Mechur Karp
10	<i>The Community College Equity Agenda in the Twenty-First Century: Moving from Access to Achievement</i>	Thomas Bailey & Vanessa Smith Morest

contemporary issues facing community colleges. Policy makers can gain a further understanding of the role, which community colleges play in promoting educational equity and how governance and policy affect this agenda. In my opinion, this book serves as a constructive tool for examining current educational reforms and practices through a lens that promotes educational equity for our students. As limited research on community colleges exists in comparison to four year colleges and universities, the book serves a valuable purpose and strengthens

the research agenda on this important segment of the educational pipeline. ♦

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